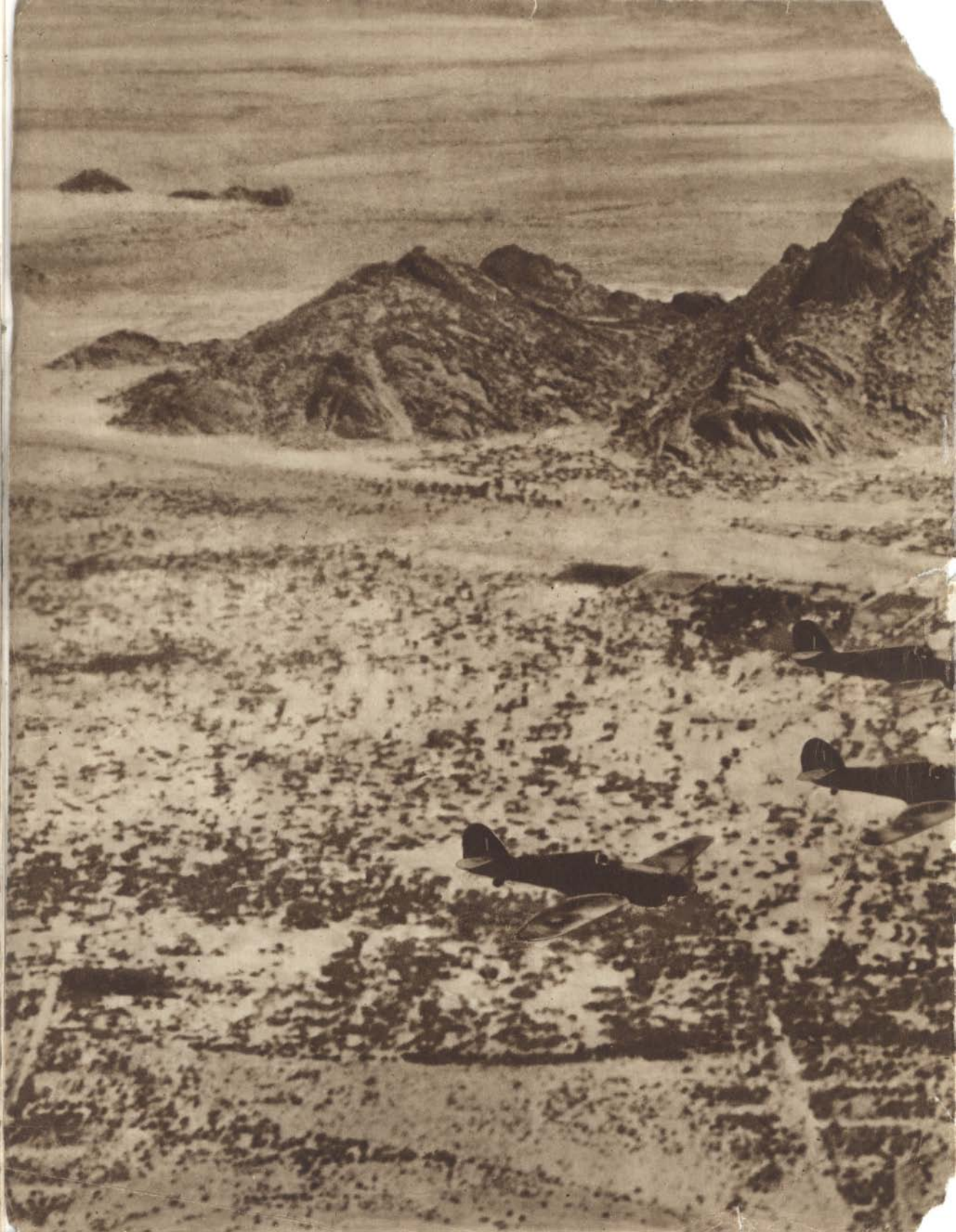


THE
ABYSSINIAN
CAMPAIGNS



THE OFFICIAL STORY OF THE CONQUEST OF ITALIAN EAST AFRICA



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THE ABYSSINIAN




THE OFFICIAL STORY



LONDON

CAMPAIGNS

OF THE CONQUEST OF ITALIAN EAST AFRICA



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ETHIOPIA



EAST AFRICA



WEST AFRICA



SUDAN

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THE PICTURES

The book contains 140 photographs taken during the campaigns, and a reproduction in black and white of a painting by Edward Bawden, War Office Artist. (For the pictures on pp. 43 (left), and 50-53 the editors are indebted to "Time and Life").

The front endpaper shows the Frontier in the North (Kassala) and the title-page the Frontier in the South (The Chalbi Desert).

A Time-table relating the campaigns chronologically is included on pp. 6-7.

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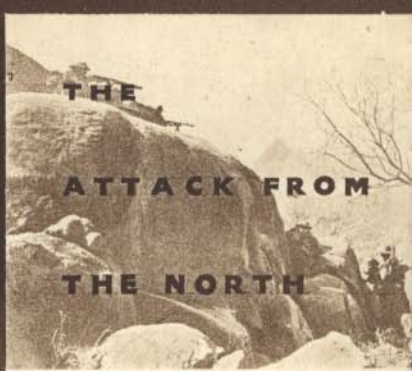
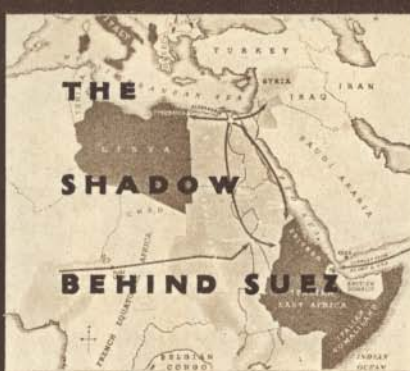
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Rains AUGUST

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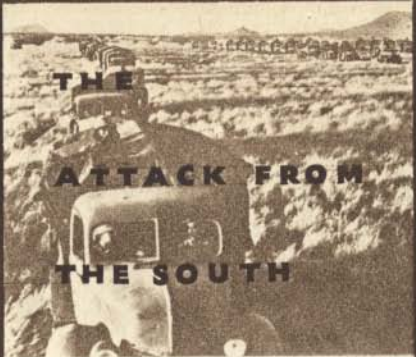
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**THE
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**THE
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SHADOW BEHIND SUEZ

I—The Strength of the Weak

THIS ACCOUNT of the destruction of the Italian power in East Africa is designed to cover only the operations of our Armies. No attempt has been made to describe in any detail the great work of the Navy and of the Air Force, without whose assistance these operations would have been impossible. Naval and Air action is therefore only mentioned incidentally. But even from a purely military point of view, this account must be read in connexion with the campaign in Cyrenaica 2,000 miles to the north. The strategic conduct of the fighting in all African theatres was in the hands of General Sir Archibald Wavell, and the sequence of events cannot be appreciated unless the reader bears in mind what was happening in other African sectors while studying this account of what was happening in some sectors.

The degree of interlocking between the various sectors can best be realised by observing General Wavell's use of his strategic reserve. Part of this reserve—the 4th Indian Division—was switched south after victory at Sidi Barrani to procure victory at Keren. It was switched north again in time to prevent defeat in Cyrenaica becoming defeat at Cairo. The rest—the 5th South African Brigade, followed by other South African formations—was likewise switched from Southern Abyssinia to Egypt early in March 1941.

There were three main bases for the African

campaigns, *Cairo*, *Khartoum* and *Nairobi*. From *Cairo* were set in motion the forces that overran Cyrenaica. From *Khartoum* came those which conquered Eritrea and freed Northern Abyssinia. From *Nairobi* came those which conquered Jubaland and Italian Somaliland, reconquered British Somaliland, and then swept north-west into Addis Ababa. General Wavell had to decide which troops should feed each of these three sectors and when. He had also to help the Greeks in their glorious stand first against the Italian and then against the German onrush. Later still, he had to defend Crete, and to wage the campaigns in Iraq and in Syria. All these things had to be done in a part of the world where our unreadiness for war was even more apparent than at home. None of them could have been done at all unless the Red Sea was a safe supply route. The campaign from Khartoum is one of those (like the Dardanelles campaign) where a colossal land operation was conducted to make a sea route immune from enemy attack. That was its strategical background in which the political feature of the liberation of Abyssinia was a prominent feature, but still only a feature.

The arm-chair critic may well have thought that the strategic lay-out of Italy, when Mussolini revealed his plot with Hitler by declaring war, was most unfavourable. It was only so on the map. For in the four years since Italy had assassinated Abyssinia, the Italians

had built up tremendous self-contained forces in East Africa. They had at least 300,000 men, 400 guns and 200 aircraft at their disposal. About 100,000 men with a powerful artillery were available for use on the Sudan frontier. The Eritrean airfields were within reasonable striking distance of objectives in British territory. The Italians had easy avenues of approach—natural sally-ports along a 1,200-mile frontier at Karora, Kassala, Um Hagar, Metemma, Guba, Kurmuk, and on the Boma plateau.* Our own forces were ludicrously inferior in numbers. There were three British battalions, the 2nd West Yorkshires, the 1st Worcestershires and the 1st Essex, less than 2,500 men in all, to defend Khartoum the capital, Port Sudan the harbour, and Atbara the railway junction from any attack based on Eritrea. On the frontier there was the Sudan Defence Force—much more imposing in title than in numbers. It totalled 4,500 men to defend 1,200 miles of frontier. It was composed of six motor machine-gun companies, the normal establishment of which was seven armoured cars carrying Vickers guns and Boyes anti-tank rifles, eight unarmoured vans carrying Bren guns, and trucks to carry two infantry platoons (60 men). They had no tanks, no mobile artillery, and indeed no guns at all except two fixed 6-inch coastal guns at Port Sudan and four small obsolete howitzers at the Governor-General's palace which were used to fire salutes at the Moslem feast of Ramadan. As for the Air Force, there were exactly seven aircraft of an obsolete type available to help the 7,000 ground troops to maintain our position in a territory as large as Germany. There were, it is true, two bomber squadrons stationed near Port Sudan to help the Navy in keeping open the Red Sea for British convoys and to handle the Italian air

* See the map on page 17.

SUDAN DEFENCE FORCE. An infantry truck of the fast motor machine-gun companies which bluffed and harried the Italians in the early days.





SUDAN DEFENCE FORCE. A camel patrol of the slender guard for 1,200 miles of desert frontier.

force in Eritrea. The machines of one of these squadrons were also venerable; the defence against Italian fighter aircraft had to be improvised by firing Lewis guns through the side windows.

The motor machine-gun companies of the Sudan Defence Force were mostly assembled in the eastern desert facing Kassala. The only task they could possibly perform was to harass any enemy column advancing towards Khartoum, Port Sudan, or Atbara, and for that task they had had several years' training. Their only near reserve were some Sudanese infantry belonging to the Camel Corps, the Western Arab Corps and the Eastern Arab Corps. But these troops were in no sense a free reserve. After the collapse of France, it was by no means certain that the French colonies of Lake Chad and Equatorial Africa would not throw in their

hand, and therefore the British reserve had to be ready to defend the western as well as the eastern frontiers of the Sudan. Our other available forces comprised six infantry companies of the Equatorial Corps in the far South, the nucleus of the Frontier Battalion still in formation, and the provincial police force who (in default of troops) patrolled the long stretch of frontier between Gallabat and the Boma plateau. These gallant policemen were so thin on the ground that enterprising District Commissioners sometimes gave them gym shoes so that they might patrol the softer.

The odds against us in the Sudan sector at the opening of the 1940 campaign were almost 10 to 1, and were likely to remain so for weeks and even for months.

Such were the ponderables on either side; and if there had been no other factors, we should

certainly have lost the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. If the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan had gone, the supply lines to the Middle East up the Red Sea and across Africa from Takoradi to Khartoum would have gone too. Egypt itself would have become untenable. There could have been, in fact, no front in the Middle East. The wasp-waist of the British Empire would have been severed by pincers of which the Northern arm would have been Graziani's armies advancing from Libya, and the Southern arm would have been the Italian armies advancing from East Africa. It is really not surprising that Mussolini, that radically opportunist adventurer, should have thought that the collapse of France gave him the chance to become a new Pharaoh. Italian residents in the Sudan had no doubt whatever that he was right. They were, of course, interned when Italy declared war. But they were amused rather than distressed, and frankly declared that in a few weeks the Sudan would be Italian and the gaoled would become gaolers.

But there were imponderables. Our men were few but good. Their supreme commander, Major-General Platt, was supremely cool and competent. He and his men succeeded in bluffing the Italians into thinking our forces were far stronger than in fact they were. This difficult and vital task fell mainly upon the motor machine-gun companies—incidentally a purely Sudanese force with only two British officers to each company. They deserve in the Battle of Africa the same tribute as the Prime Minister paid to the fighter pilots of the R.A.F. in the Battle of Britain; for rarely has "so much been owed by so many to so few." But it must be made clear that the Italian troops were not such poor stuff. Their forces included many white formations, both regular troops and the Blackshirt battalions formed from the fanatics of the Fascist party. Of their colonial troops, the Eritreans were both brave and loyal. The Abyssinians were of more doubtful loyalty, though it did not follow that just because they were Abyssinians they were aching to desert.

Undoubtedly an important imponderable lay in the fact that the Abyssinian Empire had been overrun by the Italians only four years before; and that the Abyssinians had been terrorised by mustard gas in the field and by massacre after the battle was over. The Italian conquest of Abyssinia was no great feat of arms, and hardly any attempt was made to justify it beyond the desire to avenge the Italian defeat at Aduwa half a century ago. But few people outside Abyssinia ever heard of the savagery which followed the wounding of Marshal Graziani by a bomb in Addis Ababa on 17th February, 1937. Though the bomb was thrown by an Abyssinian who undoubtedly had no connexion with any rebellion or conspiracy, 9,000 Abyssinians



ITALIAN COLONIAL LEVIES. Standard bearers, with an Italian officer, of the Colonial troops massed on the northern frontier. They were to fight bravely.

were murdered in Addis Ababa alone, and surviving ruling families in the neighbouring provinces were exterminated by summary execution. Throughout the province of Gojjam churches were burned down. At the monasteries of Debra Libanos and Mahbera Selassie, batches of monks were dragged out, shot, and their bodies flung into common graves. Every Abyssinian who had received a foreign education was murdered or deported. This fearful massacre brought its own retribution in the shape of a smouldering rebellion, which was never very formidable except in the Gojjam but never extinguished.

It is fair to say that in the two years before the war the new Viceroy, the Duke of Aosta, with his enlightened colleagues, General Nasi and Dr. Franca, made a sincere effort to substitute moderation for massacre. They made some progress with the smaller chieftains, but they had no time to efface among the greater Abyssinian leaders and among the peoples of Abyssinia a mixture of horror, distrust and contempt for all things Italian.

This hatred of the invader was certainly a weakness on the Italian side. But it was not clear how much reliance could be placed upon it. The Abyssinians are not one people but several, and a good deal of nonsense has been written about the character and the relationships of these peoples. There are four main sections—the Amhara, Tigreans, Shoans, the Galla; but during the Italian invasion there were found both submission and resistance in all four. It would therefore have been misleading to think that we could count on a unifying principle in any of them. Nationalism certainly exists among some of the Amhara and the Tigreans, but its effect is circumscribed by their traditional social structure, which is not strictly feudal but results in groups of followers of strong men. The Abyssinian loves to follow a boss—a *tillik sau* (i.e., "big shot") who can order people about and provide his soldiers with food and pay. The boss is not necessarily an aristocrat. Indeed, the tendency to follow a boss, whether

of breeding or not, increased owing to the destruction by the Italians of many of the Abyssinian baronies. But there were enough of old leaders and of new to keep some sort of a revolt simmering all through 1938 and 1939 up to the outbreak of war. These Patriots were bitterly disappointed that Italy kept out of the war for 18 months. They were horror-stricken at the collapse of France, whom they had always considered the first military Power in Europe. Indeed, by June 1940 rebellion was running down. It could, however, be revived, and the attempt was made at once to transmute an imponderable into a ponderable.

On 3rd July, 1940, the Emperor Haile Selassie, his second son (the Duke of Harar), and a very small suite arrived at Khartoum. He found that the British had not been wholly idle. Five depots of arms, food and Maria Theresa dollars (the Abyssinian currency) had been established under the guard of the embryo Frontier Battalion. Major Cheeseman, who was familiar with the Gojjam, had been appointed as a special Intelligence officer in Khartoum. The Emperor was thus able at once to make his presence on the frontier known, though many (until he actually re-entered his country) believed in the Italian story that he had died in exile. The story of the actual campaign conducted by the Patriots and their British helpers will be told in its proper place. But it can be stated here that Italian nervousness about an Abyssinian rising involved a severe drain upon their resources and a severe handicap upon their dispositions. At the crux of the campaign, when the Italians needed every man in the firing lines at Keren and Harar (and when they did indeed transfer the equivalent of 75 battalions to these fronts), the existence or the danger of an Abyssinian rising tied down the equivalent of 56 battalions in the Amhara and Walkait areas. Moreover, they were never certain whether their Abyssinian levies would remain loyal. Many thousands, in fact, deserted. The Patriot movement was therefore a most useful factor on our side from the very first moment to the last—both

3—The Italians Reach

Berbera

ON 4TH AUGUST powerful Italian forces launched a full-scale invasion of British Somaliland with the object of achieving an easy, spectacular, and, from the defensive point of view, a strategically useful victory. Both military and propaganda considerations prompted them to undertake the conquest of this colony.

Though few Europeans visit British Somaliland, those who have travelled by ship through the Red Sea have formed for themselves no inaccurate picture from their glimpses of its red, grim, blistering coastline. It is at once the smallest and the most desolate of our East African possessions. As areas go in this part of the world, the colony is small. It is only 400 miles at its greatest length, while opposite Berbera it is no more than 120 miles in breadth. Its soil is sandy and barren in the extreme, and it is swept by the hot *kharif* wind, which renders the coastline dangerous to ships and increases the discomfort of life in the coastal districts.

Before the war the European population numbered less than 100, nearly all of them officials engaged in administering the affairs of the Somalis. These tall, rather fine-looking nomads graze their flocks on the scanty pasturage of the interior, or drive their caravans to trade over great distances. The traveller, camped at evening near a water-hole, may hear the tinkle of bells and see the great, ghostly shapes of the camels pass endlessly through the limits of the light cast by his camp fire.

With the outbreak of war British Somaliland became a grave threat to the Italians. It adjoined French Somaliland and the Jibuti port and railway, which offered the easiest route to Addis Ababa. The collapse of France, however, turned the tables. All military plans had

been based on close collaboration with the strong French forces just across the border; and so the colony found itself isolated. Berbera was a week by sea from Mombasa. It was farther from Nairobi in a straight line than was Addis Ababa. It could not be quickly or even adequately reinforced. And all except 60 miles of its 600-mile inland frontier was bounded by Italy's East African Empire.

Three courses were open to us. We could reinforce Somaliland at the cost of depleting our scanty Kenya forces; or we could evacuate the colony without a fight; or finally, with the small forces at our disposal, we could offer the maximum resistance to the enemy, inflict the greatest possible losses, and then attempt to withdraw. This was the plan decided upon, and the short campaign should be considered in this light.

The Italians invaded Somaliland with an army of 25,000 men. They advanced in three columns, but their main attack was directed from Jijiga along the road to Berbera. They



THE ITALIANS IN SOMALILAND. An enemy photograph of one of their motorised columns, odds of 15 to 1, crossing the coastal plain to Berbera.



THE ITALIANS AT KASSALA. Italian Officers, "safe but rather nervous," examine a strong-point.

would break through, as he had done before against unarmed Arabs and Abyssinians.

In their usual precautionary way the Italians began to amplify the defences of Kassala against attack from the west, with a series of tank traps and barbed-wire entanglements and artillery strong-points. They kept a standing garrison of at least five battalions with medium tanks and artillery. They felt very safe yet at the same time rather nervous. The British motor machine-gun companies kept a standing patrol to watch them at the distance of only one mile, and day and night the armoured cars buzzed about their communications with Eritrea and their outposts on either flank. So the population were convinced that Great Britain was still the master, still active and cheerful, still, therefore, worth helping with information valuable to the command in

Khartoum. A powerful intelligence system was built up at Kassala.

* * * *

At the end of July the R.A.F. took a holiday from its vigil on the Red Sea and administered a bombing to Kassala that took two days and weighed over 20 tons. In those days and in that place, this was a very heavy attack. By the end of August the motor machine-gun companies, aided by contingents of the British forces (Worcestershire and Essex Regiments), were feeling so strong that they attacked the important Italian outpost north of Kassala at Adardeb. It seemed to them that the Italian was feeling out too far on his right flank, where their own communications lay, and that he needed a blow upon the chin to steady him up.

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THE ITALIANS IN SOMALILAND. An enemy photograph of one of their motorised columns, odds of 15 to 1, crossing the coastal plain to Berbera.

swept across the mountainous backbone of the colony and on towards the government hill station of Hargeisa. An occasional road block, or a demolition, or a bombing, held them up for a few hours, but no serious attempt was made to delay them at this stage. They crossed the border on 4th August. On 6th August Hargeisa fell. By 11th August an army of five colonial brigades, three Blackshirt battalions, three Banda groups, 100 armoured fighting vehicles, including 27 tanks, and at least 20 guns, was pouring down the escarpment towards the plain some 60 miles from Berbera. There, at the Tug Argan gap, our men waited for them.

Our little force was outnumbered, certainly by ten to one, possibly by fifteen to one. It consisted only of the 1st Northern Rhodesia Regiment, 2nd King's African Rifles, the Black Watch, two companies of Punjabis, the Somaliland Camel Corps, and the 1st East African Light Battery. These men held a number of hills which rose steeply from the light bush beside the wide sandy river-bed that is known as the Tug Argan. They were few to cover a front of 8,000 yards, and most of them had never been in action before; but European, Asiatic and African alike were determined that no Italian should force his way unchallenged through the pass between their hills, and the fight they put up was a lesson in determination which the Italians signally failed to emulate when, seven-months later, their time of trial came.

There is no space to describe in detail the days of desperate fighting that followed. The Italian army surged forward like the sea, as though it hoped, by very weight, to wash our men away. The rifle fire of our infantry threw them back, and the artillery fire of the light battery mowed them down. The very first shot this battery fired killed a general, on a white horse, at 2,000 yards; and during the next few days the guns were firing continually, sometimes at point-blank range. In face of heavy losses the Italian army came on, some of the Colonial troops, according

to eye-witnesses, showing a high degree of courage. A Northern Rhodesian, who was in the thick of the fighting, wrote of this grim battle:

From 11th to 15th August, every day and once or twice at night as well, they used all they had got to try and break through the gap and get their mechanised column along the road to Berbera. There were at least ten thousand Italians, and they seldom attacked a company position with less than a brigade of three battalions, complete with tanks and artillery, while we were not more than 700 or 800 strong in the actual gap. It seems incredible, when I think of it now, that in spite of the number of things that were shot at us and dropped on us, our casualties were so light, and certainly negligible in comparison with the Italian casualties. We must have killed thousands.

Inevitably the numbers told. Positions which the Italian waves could not carry away were slowly encircled. As day followed day, our men were compelled to withdraw, first from one hill and then from another.

These days were packed with excitement and marked by many deeds of individual gallantry. There was 2nd Lieut. McCalman of the King's African Rifles, the son of a Kenya farmer, who led a party by nightfall through the Italian lines to rescue his mortars which had been buried during the day. There was 2nd Lieut. Peter Smith, son of another Kenya farmer, who was twice cut off with his platoon, but each time broke through the enemy and brought his men to safety. On the second occasion, by personally manning a Bren gun, he silenced two enemy machine-gun posts and prevented the Italians from flooding down the pass. There was 2nd Lieut. Palmer, whose Lewis gun broke down, when he and Captain Watson were covering a withdrawal. Undaunted, though the advancing enemy were only 100 yards away, he squatted down and repaired it in the text-book manner. It was here, too, that Captain E. T. C. Wilson, of the Somaliland Camel Corps, earned the twelfth Victoria Cross of the war. Though badly wounded in both arms, he carried on for three days at his

machine-gun posts until they were finally overrun by the enemy.

There were occasional humorous incidents. A private, after continuous shelling, rummaged in his haversack for something to eat and pulled out a tin of meat. "Picnic Ham, indeed," he read in an injured tone; "Gawd, do they call this a ruddy picnic?"

One askari dispensed with sleep for the five nights of the battle, and would not stop firing his rifle by day or night. Nothing rattled him, till a burst of machine-gun fire cut off the side of his gas cape, which he had folded up as an elbow pad. Unconcerned at his escape from death, but furiously indignant, he picked up his tattered cape and took it to his officer. "Look, Bwana," he said, "look what they have done to my coat."

The spirit of the native troops was magnificent. An eye-witness writes:

The African soldier was fighting during these five days and five nights under the most unfavourable conditions for him. He is in his natural element when fighting out in the bush, but here he was given a position to hold and, however much stuff the Italians showered on him, he had no opportunity of using his bush tactics. He just had to stay put and take it, and he certainly did this well.

One of the guns of the light battery was in a desperate position. It had been moved right round till it was facing the rear, firing downhill over open sights at less than 900 yards, while all the spare men were blazing away with rifle fire as hard as they could go. "The African ranks," an officer says, "had reached their peak. As soon as they actually saw the enemy their excitement knew no bounds. They thought it was grand. They were absolutely amazing that day."

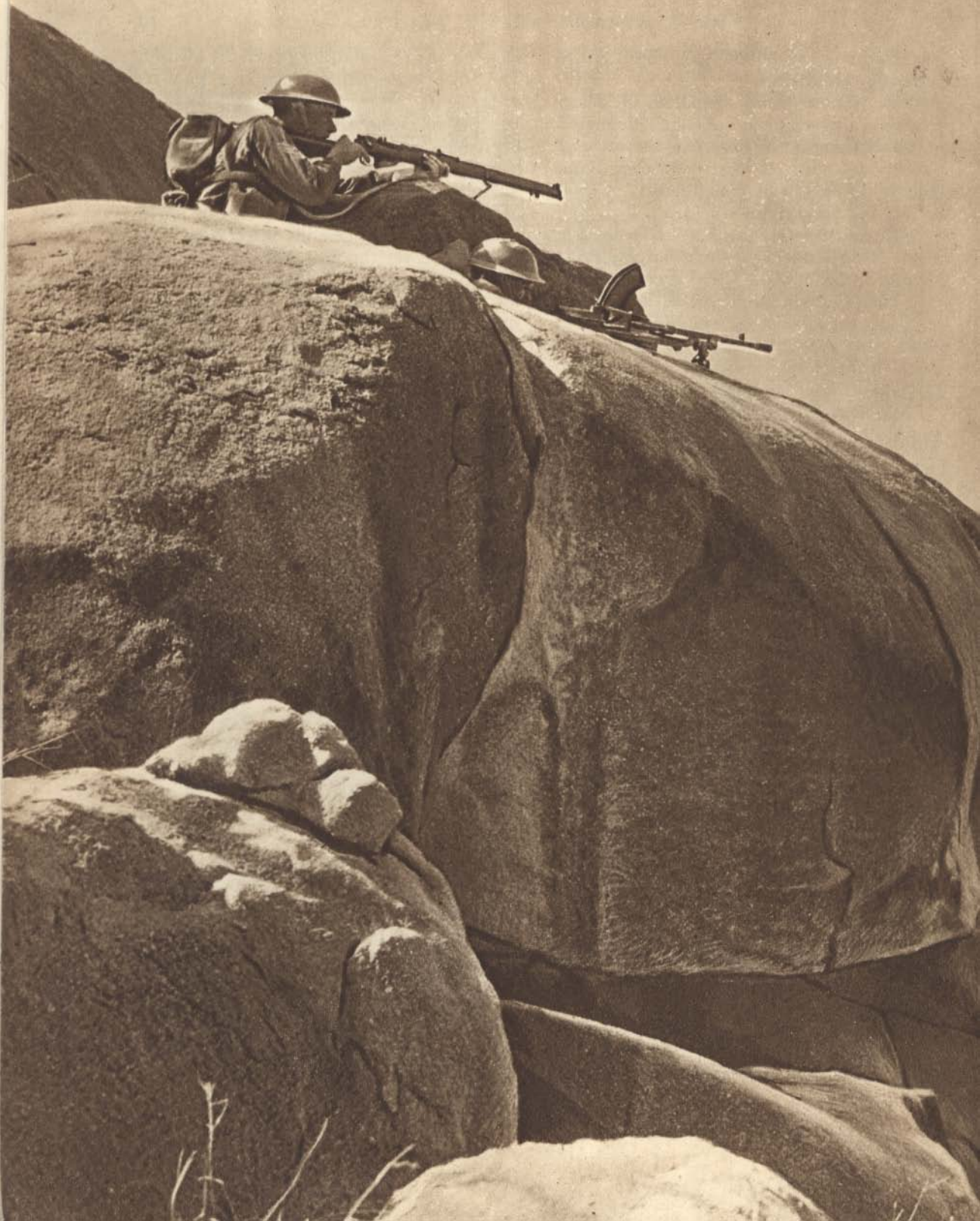
Meanwhile at Berbera the Navy had rigged up an all-tide jetty, and the evacuation was going on. Hundreds of Abyssinians, Arabs, Indians, even many Somalis themselves, with their wives and families, preferred to leave for unknown lands rather than change their rulers. The civilians and administrative officials left first, then the base personnel, in order to make

room for the troops arriving from the interior. The troop embarkation began at 1 p.m. on 16th August. It continued through the night into the following afternoon, unhindered by the Italians, who were licking their wounds and failed utterly to take advantage of the opportunity to harass our forces at the last. They had been dealt with especially roughly at the fight at Barkasan, where the Black Watch, left behind to cover the final stages of our withdrawal, had charged with the bayonet to chase for at least a mile first the native levies and then their Blackshirt masters. Everything was carried out in an orderly manner, and those Somalis who remained behind amid the smoke of burning equipment in Berbera watched the convoys sail away and remembered the promise that the British would soon return.

Seven months later to a day that promise was redeemed. But the story of its redemption must be told later in this book.

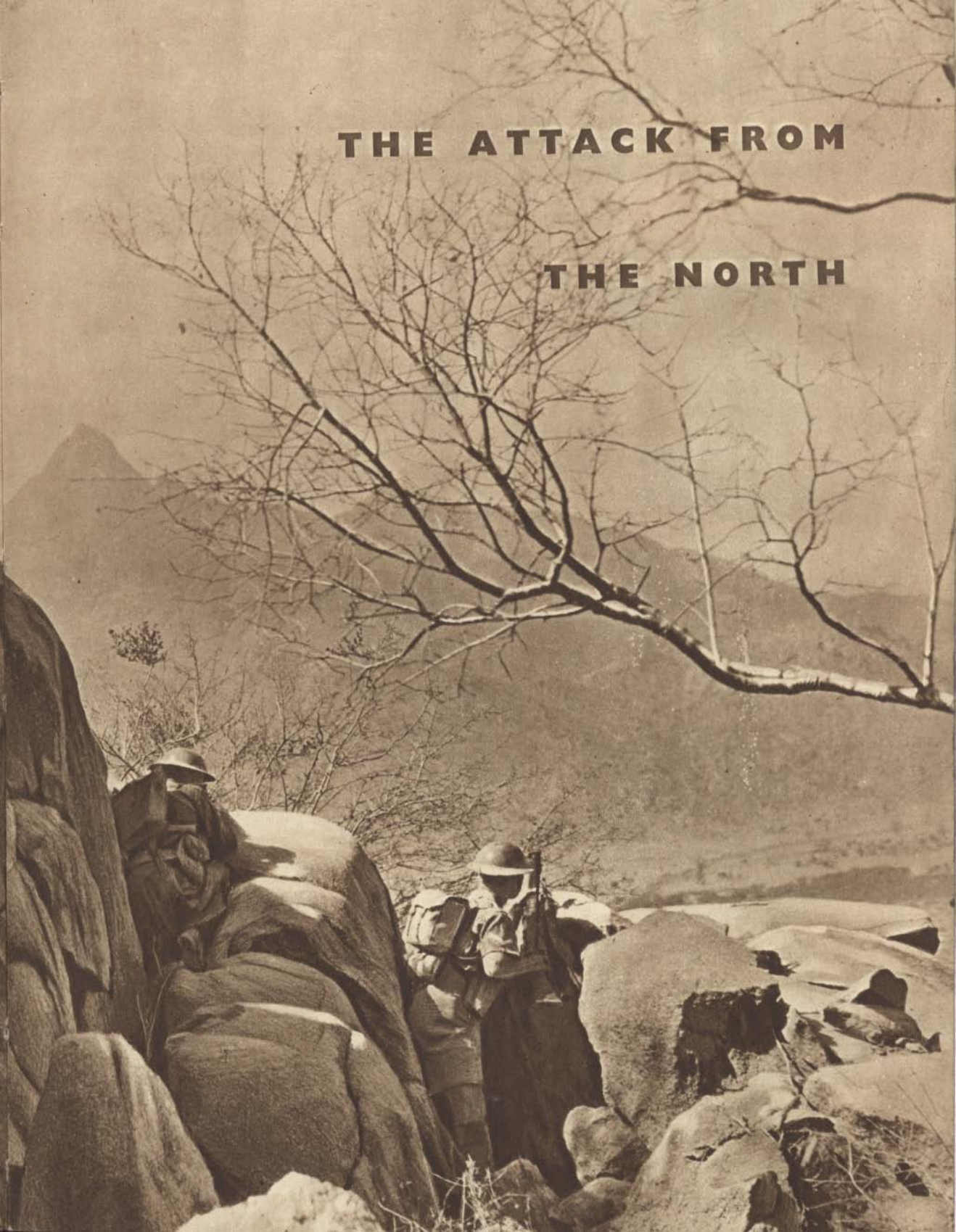


BRIEF AUTHORITY. The Fascist flags unfurled, for seven months, over British Somaliland.



THE ATTACK FROM

THE NORTH



4—The Plan Takes Shape

ITALIAN MILITARY POWER in East Africa was broken by a gigantic pincer movement. The reader may see this pincer on the map opposite. The northern arm consisted of forces based on the Sudan under General Platt; the southern arm of forces based on Kenya under General Cunningham. The northern arm conquered Eritrea and broke the core of all Italian resistance in East Africa at Keren: the southern conquered Italian Somaliland, was the operative factor in the recapture of British Somaliland, and opened Addis Ababa for the return of the Emperor. Simultaneously with the closing of the two arms of the pincer the Emperor entered Abyssinia across the Sudan frontier and finally was received in his capital. His path is also shown on the map. These are the three great primary movements in the East African campaign—the northern attack, the southern attack, the return of the Emperor. After these primary events, there were secondary campaigns. But the great pincer and the return of the Emperor meant the military and political end of the Italian East African Empire.

Yet, at the end of August 1940, the enemy was in a strong position. He controlled the southern entrance to the Red Sea. There was nothing to stop him sweeping up through the Sudan. The southern jaw of *his* pincers was well placed to close, and the northern jaw—Graziani's army from Libya—was touching the skin of the Egyptian plum. Any Italian general who looks back at that time must feel inclined to kick himself for the waste of those precious weeks when, if he had only known it, resolute and co-ordinated attacks might have closed the jaws altogether, and Italy might

have contributed Africa, as Germany was contributing Europe, to the Axis spoils. The British Empire might have been split by a hostile mass stretching from Narvik to Bulawayo. The wave of Italian opportunity swelled, rose, hung, and sank back again with a whisper like "Italy" instead of bursting with a roar like "Rome."

How did it happen? The fundamental reason lies in the decision of the Governments at home and in the Dominions not to be dismayed or terrorised into becoming static and disparate fragments by the fall of France. The saying that the "British win only one battle—the last" is really more of a reproach than a eulogy. It means that we run things very fine. In 1940 we had to run things very fine; but we saved ourselves by the decision to reinforce the Middle East even though we might hourly expect invasion of the British Isles. In North Africa, the result of that decision was the shattering of the northern arm of the Italian pincers in Cyrenaica by (in the order in which they were engaged) the armoured formations from the United Kingdom, the 4th Indian Division, and the Australians. In East Africa, it led to the arrival of the 5th Indian Division at Khartoum; and of the West African elements of the 11th and 12th African Divisions—and of the 1st South African Brigade (followed by the 2nd and 5th South African Brigades) in Kenya. These reinforcements, supplemented as they were by new air squadrons, turned the southern arm of the Italian pincers into the pinched. It was not only the fighting troops and the air forces which were reinforced. Supply was also put on a better footing. For example, the Cape Mechanical Transport companies arrived in time to form part of the life-line of the advance into Eritrea, and their work earned a special message of thanks from General Platt to General Smuts.

Let us take first the story of the northern jaw of the great British pincers.

One by one the brisk battalions of the 5th Indian Division and their artillery trained through Khartoum: the 2/5 and 3/5 Mah-

THE GREAT PINCER



ATTACK FROM THE NORTH

PATH OF THE EMPEROR

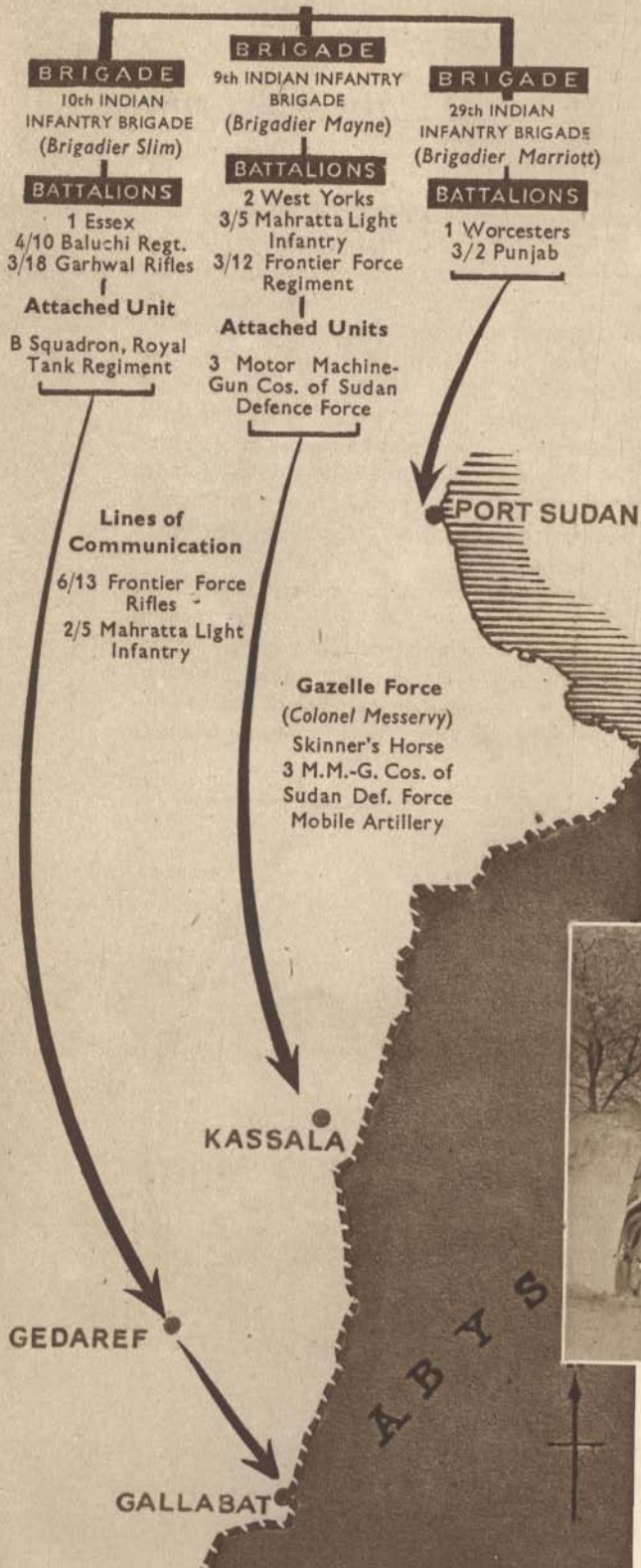
ATTACK FROM THE SOUTH

Leo Vernon

DIVISION

THE FIFTH INDIAN DIVISION

(Major-General Heath)



rattas (i.e. the 2nd and 3rd battalions of the Fifth Mahratta Regiment); the 3/2 Punjabis; the 4/10 Baluch and the 3/18 Garhwal; the 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment, the 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles and Skinner's Horse (motorised Indian cavalry). Part of the artillery was that which had arrived too late to save British Somaliland. The Division mustered only two brigades, but a third was created by absorption of the three British battalions already established in the Sudan, and the Division brought up to normal Indian Army establishment.

Thus were spread out, in the area between Port Sudan and Sennar on the Blue Nile, the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade (1st Worcestershires and 3/2 Punjab) under Brigadier Marriott on the Red Sea coast; the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade (2nd West Yorkshires, 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment and 3/5 Mahrattas) under Brigadier Mayne based south-west of Kassala where the Butana bridge spans the Atbara; the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade (1st Essex, 3/18 Garhwal and 4/10 Baluch) under Brigadier Slim at Gedaref, soon to be sent against Gallabat. The 2/5 Mahrattas and the 6/13

THE EMPIRE FORCES GATHER.
A Bren Gun-Carrier of the Sikh Battalion, Fourth Indian Division, switched from the Western Desert to the Sudan.



Frontier Force Rifles for the moment took over the protection of the enormously long lines of communication made by the single-track railways and the dust tracks of the Sudanese desert. Three of the motor machine-gun companies of the Sudan Defence Force were put under the orders of Brigadier Mayne. The three others formed, with Skinner's Horse and with some mobile artillery, the celebrated Gazelle Force commanded by Colonel Messervy, a fast reconnaissance, pursuit and fighting formation which General Platt now blooded on the Italian posts north of Kassala.

The 5th Indian Division headquarters, under Major-General Heath, were set up at Gedaref, the obvious centre of communications by road and rail for the two offensive possibilities that were to present themselves to General Platt: either against Kassala, the gate of Eritrea, or against Gallabat, the gate of the Abyssinian rebellion and of the important Ethiopian province of Amhara, whose capital is the ancient Ethiopian capital of Gondar.

General Platt wanted to stimulate the Abyssinian rebellion to the utmost. While Indian troops had been picked for this campaign for

their experience in mountain warfare, it was never believed that they would, even at a later date when a second Indian Division arrived, be able to break through the colossal ramparts of the Eritrean and Amharic escarpment and seal their victory on the inner plateau without the closest co-operation with the Patriot forces in the Abyssinian interior.

The danger to the Sudan was over. That was the meaning of the 18-pounder shells fired into Kassala on 10th September, 1940. And during the same month a caravan of arms went off from the Gedaref area to Mangasha and Nagash, the leaders of the revolt in Gojjam, of whom much was expected when the rains dried out in Abyssinia. From Roseires, too, near the gorges where the Blue Nile issues from Abyssinia, more arms were being run past the Italian frontier post of Guba to the same destination.

Partly to face this threat of the reinforcement of the Sudan, partly to deny us the caravan routes past Metemma and Guba to the troublesome Gojjami interior, partly perhaps to suggest to his colonial troops, already salted with our propaganda, that he still meant business

EXERCISE FOR ATTACK. Indian troops on manoeuvre through a village of the tumbled border country.



when he talked about an invasion of the Sudan in the dry weather, and partly because he hoped that Graziani would come even closer to the Nile than Sidi Barrani, the enemy now began to move reinforcements towards the Sudan frontier.

His two reserve colonial brigades, the 16th and 41st, came forward to support the three—8th, 12th and 42nd—already settled in the Kassala - Sabdaret - Tessenei triangle. Two Blackshirt battalions, the 150th and 170th, also came down to Kassala now that the season of fever was over.

The admirable Eritrean 2nd Brigade, fresh under its fiery leader Lorenzini from British Somaliland, was brought to Asmara as a reserve, to be followed later by the 11th Brigade from Shoa.

At Um Hagar, in spite of much illness, the 43rd Brigade remained. Metemma was strengthened by two colonial battalions and some of the heavy machine-guns and anti-tank rifles (taken from us in Somaliland) of the Italian Empire's strategic reserve, the Savoia Grenadiers; another three battalions were on the way, and another Brigade (the 6th) lay in readiness to move behind them. Further to the south there was much movement in Beni Shangul, the sultry goldfield and negro province of Ethiopia, where Colonel Rolle came down from Addis Ababa with a Banda of 1,500 men whom he led straight away, without water, into the crackling raffie bush of the borderlands beyond Roseires.

If this were part of a general offensive movement, it was only Rolle who ever took the plunge; the rest hesitated, then sat back upon a torpid defensive which they did not abandon until it became a retreat and then a rout. Rolle stumbled out into the bush until he nearly reached Roseires. By that time the newly raised Frontier Battalion were ready to meet him, fighter aircraft were nosing down to the baobabs and red *talh* trees to find and panic him, and some of his troops were drinking their own urine. Rolle turned tail for Beni Shangul on 26th October; Italian prestige

never recovered in these frontier territories, where up till now Italian propaganda had progressed. The basis of tribal support was laid for our future penetration of Gojjam from the south.

It was in November, however, that our troops were first tested in serious action against the Italian reinforcements. In this month the two battles of Tehamiyam Wells, in the stone desert north of Kassala, and of Gallabat-Metemma were fought to a standstill. But they served their purposes. Gazelle Force at the Wells, though unable to reduce the Italian colonial battalions in front of it, forced them in the end to withdraw from the Sudan, and, with the other motor machine-gun companies to the south, who were continually plaguing the garrison of Tessenei, established that clear superiority of no-man's-land that gave us the initiative in all future operations.

On 6th November, at 5.30 a.m., the R.A.F. and the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade struck at Gallabat a lightning blow. Within a mile or two of the Italian lines three battalions, a field regiment of artillery and a squadron of the Royal Tank Regiment (six cruiser and six light tanks) had been assembled; and not a breath of his danger had reached the Italian commander of Gallabat-Metemma, Lieut.-Colonel Castagnola. At 5.30 a.m. the R.A.F. blew up the Gallabat wireless station and blasted the fort. The Royal Artillery registered at 5.30 and by 6.15 had ploughed the length and breadth of Gallabat. Captain Traino, commanding the 27th Colonial Battalion here, shouted "To the walls!" and the next moment had nipped across the dry river-bed to the safer ground of Metemma. The barrage lifted, and fell upon Metemma. As at 6.30 the Tank Squadron rattled into the smoke and fire of Gallabat ridge and the cruisers turned about its rocky passages to crush the last courageous Eritrean machine-gunners, Castagnola was calling to Gondar from his sole remaining wireless at Metemma for land reinforcements, for air action, for all that they could give. The steady line of the Garhwalis ascended the ridge at



FIRST THRUST. Smoke rising from Gallabat Fort after heavy shelling by the British artillery.

6.40 through grass snared with land-mines, and within 35 minutes had shattered a counter-attack of the Italians' 25th and 77th Colonial battalions, their only local reserve. At 8 a.m. the success signal shot up from the smouldering field of Gallabat.

But there was very little mechanical equipment left and absolutely none in reserve. To Brigadier Slim, as he came up the hill in a Bren carrier, the officer commanding B Tank Squadron brought the news that five of his cruiser and four of his light tanks were out of action: three to mines and the rest because their track pins had been bent or broken on the rocky ground. Out in front lay the ultimate objective of Metemma—whose wire could be broken only by tanks. Firing had ceased from Metemma; but the fort there was held by white machine-gunners and anti-tank weapons.

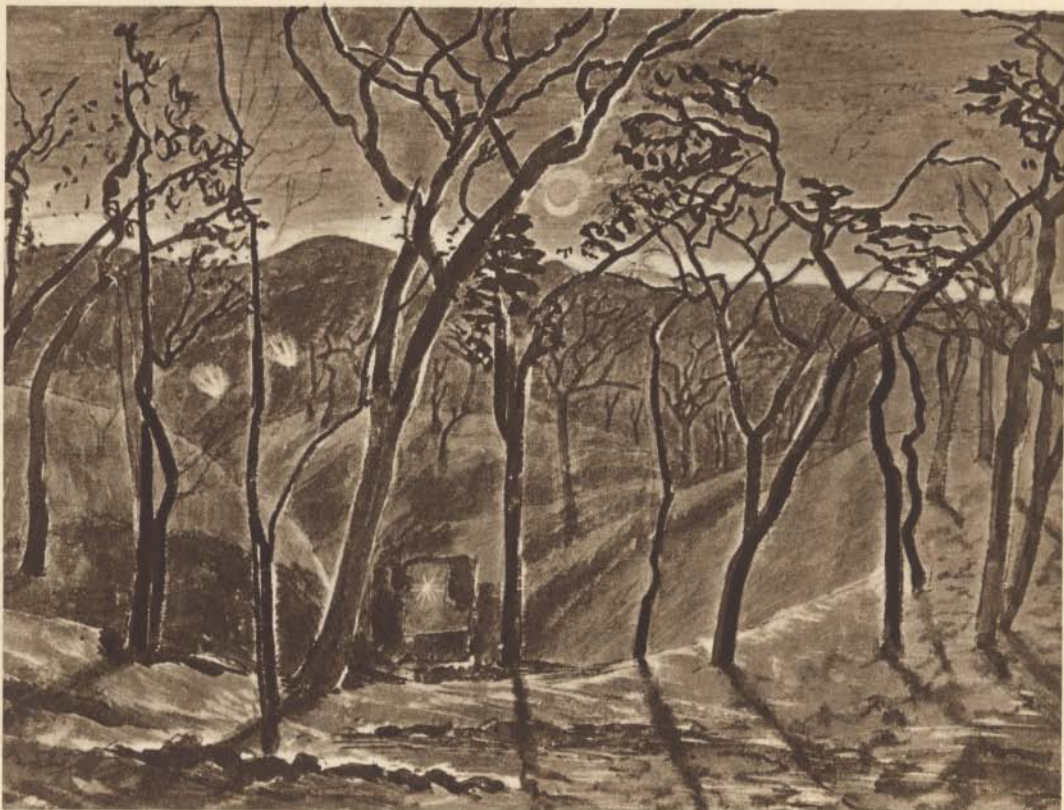
The brittle tanks must first be mended.

As they patched them up on the hard bare ridge, General Martini, commanding Gondar, kept his promise of full air support to Lieut.-Colonel Castagnola. The bombers and the fighters came down to the assault on Gallabat ridge in unstoppable waves throughout the day. They shot down seven British fighters for the

loss of five of their own, and for the second and last time—the first being at Kassala on 4th July—established local superiority in East Africa. They blew up the tank spares. They came again without cessation throughout 7th November, screened by 10 fighters at a time that made our solitary interventions a suicide. After two days the bombardment of the rock could no longer be borne, and Gallabat was abandoned. Though the ridge was reoccupied three days later the operation on Metemma was not continued. The area became for two months a no-man's-land of patrol and skirmish and of nervous Italian reinforcement, when Australian troops were identified by the Italian Intelligence under the Garhwali slouch hat. We had not gained our main objective, the breaking of Metemma and the early support of the Patriot movement along the caravan routes that Metemma controlled. But we had in two hours destroyed one colonial battalion, the 27th, and mauled two others, the 25th and the 77th, and we had concentrated Italian attention on a front where Italy might now waste her reserves. A further and more indirect result was that the Patriot movement throughout Gojjam was immensely encouraged by this proof that we had both the stuff and the will with which to attack.

COUNTER BY AIR. One of the five Italian fighters destroyed in the attacks which gave them local superiority, for the second and last time.





FRONTIER NO-MAN'S LAND. An impression by the War Office artist, Edward Bawden, of the Gallabat-Metemma lines, for two months the scene of artillery duel, patrol and skirmish.

Hardly had Italian offensive hopes on the Sudan frontier been thus daunted when General Wavell struck at Cyrenaica far away on the Mediterranean coast. After his first smashing victory at Sidi Barrani, he carried out the manœuvre which bears all the marks of strategical genius—all the more because General Wavell showed himself a big enough man to defy, for an even greater purpose, his own maxims about relentless pursuit of a flying enemy. The 4th Indian Division, which had done the brunt of the infantry work at Sidi Barrani, was switched off south to the Sudan. This gave General Platt two Indian Divisions ; and in the circumstances twice one were a great deal more than two.

He was also to receive a company of I tanks* and a battery of 6-inch howitzers. He could plan an offensive on a grander scale than the brigade affair at Gallabat. He could put 15,000 of the best infantry of the British Empire into it. He possessed the key to open the door of the sea highway, and thus to achieve the strategical object of his campaign.

Tehamiyam Wells in November had confirmed the enemy's anxiety about the northern flank of his communications with Kassala. Subsequently bringing up yet another colonial brigade, the famous 2nd, he allotted three

* Infantry tanks: heavier types used to precede the infantry in attack.

brigades to man them. These formed the 4th Italian Colonial Division.

There still remained three brigades and many attached troops, forming the 2nd Italian Colonial Division, in the Kassala-Sabdaret-Tessenei area, who, as General Platt saw, might be overwhelmed and trapped by a sudden mechanised rush from the north by 4th Division and Gazelle, and from the south by 5th Division. Then the troops could be switched quickly back to Metemma, break through with the tanks, and get up to Gondar. The Abyssinian revolt, at this moment still being organised under difficult conditions by Colonel Sandford in Gojjam and almost stagnant between Metemma and Gondar, would set the north of Abyssinia alight when our trained troops and irresistible battle armour were seen.

Events were entirely to transform this strategy, and the Patriot movement in Gojjam was in the end to be developed as a separate holding force rather than as an intimate arm of co-operation. But these were the plans evolved by General Platt as the first part of the 4th Indian Division landed at Port Sudan. 8th February was marked in the diary for the sweep on Kassala.

5—The Frontier Falls

THE 4TH INDIAN DIVISION was sent down to the Sudan by two routes, the Red Sea and the Nile Valley. The I tanks and 6-inch howitzers followed them. On 7th January part of the new force had landed at Port Sudan, and on the 14th Major-General Beresford-Pierson with Division Headquarters and one brigade only—the 11th, which also was short of one battalion—were established with Gazelle in the cover of the palms and thick bush of the Gash Delta north of Kassala. But by that date the entire military situation had changed.

General Frusci, one of the Italian divisional commanders in the Spanish Civil War, was general officer commanding the enemy forces on this northern front. Gazelle's action at Tehamiyam Wells and continued sallies by this mobile column had convinced him that the British were going to attack his communica-

INTO ERITREA. Men of the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade cross the Atbara. The Pontoon carries M.T.





THE ATTACK FROM THE NORTH



tions with Kassala from the north. On 31st December, therefore, he withdrew his forces on the northern flank to Keru and Wachai on the sandy track east of Sabdaret, leaving only patrols out at Serobatib and Adardeb, and concentrated a mobile force in Sabdaret itself to face what he believed was a serious threat. He was still determined to stand his ground and fight, but for the first time he admitted to himself that he was on the defensive.

The High Command in Addis Ababa and Rome, however, went further than Frusci.

They felt that the time had come for withdrawal, which they told Frusci to prepare. Since the enormous disaster that had overtaken Italy in Libya, the only role left for the Italian East African Empire was protracted defence, in order to delay as long as possible the transfer of British reinforcements to Egypt. It was vital, then, to resist on the best available line, which ran not on the level borderlands of Kassala and Metemma but on the lip of the high plateau that tilted up from Agordat and Keren past Aduwa to Gondar. Frusci (already committed by a proclamation to his troops that the absurd English would shortly attack Kassala and would be scattered like chaff) argued in vain that the damage to prestige would be too great if so much territory were surrendered freely. He had to obey orders. Kassala and Tessenei were evacuated at night on 17th January. Italian instructions to their forces in the forward zone were to fall back and concentrate in the area Keru-Biscia-Aicota, where the sharp foothills of the plateau begin, supported by the strong-points of Agordat and Barentu, where the brown scenery assumes a grander and more tumbled aspect. The 43rd Brigade at Um Hagar were to "fight to the last man"; for the Italian Command never believed that the British army could follow up with the speed that it showed them.

General Platt put forward zero hour for the operation to 18th January. In the event, the 4th Division, with its only available brigade, had to have another day, and it was on 19th January that Britain marched into Eritrea,



HARVEST OF LAND-MINES. A crop of 40 mines, one of many sown along the Aicota-Barentu road, assembled after "treatment."

recaptured Kassala and entered Sabdaret and Tessenei, from which the birds had flown. It was the role of the 5th Division to tackle the southern approaches, to capture Tessenei and Aicota, and be ready to exploit towards Barentu or Biscia; the 4th Division with Gazelle under its command had to chase through Sabdaret along the northern track towards Keru.

Both roads were sown with land-mines and spikes, and on the southern the Italians had blown up the bridge over the Gash. But the two Divisions did not halt, and by the early hours of 21st January, the third day of the offensive, the 5th had occupied Aicota without opposition and Messervy's cars from the 4th were up against the Keru gorge, manned by five Italian battalions. A sparkle of fire from the mountains held them down in the valley scrub. As the British artillery settled into position a group of Italian native cavalry, led by an officer on a white horse, charged them round the hills on the northern flank. With striking courage the horsemen galloped to within 30 yards of the guns, firing wildly from the saddle and throwing grenades. The gunners wheeled round their guns through 180° and fired point blank; shells slid along the ground without exploding, others pierced the horses' chests; the Royal Regiment had to turn to their small arms before the mad charge was stopped. Up the hills scrambled the 4/11 Sikhs, but they could make only three-

quarters of their objective under fierce frontal fire.

It was then that a brilliant co-operative move of the 5th Indian Division, brilliant also in the rapidity of its execution, broke the Italian resistance at Keru.

Major-General Heath detached the 2nd Highland Light Infantry and the 2nd Motor Machine-gun Group of the Sudan Defence Force from his 10th Brigade (he was operating with only two brigades, the 20th and the 10th) and sent it hot-foot by a sidetrack from Aicota to the roads behind the Keru position. Bayoneting their way through a difficult pass, they were across the Italian rear on the same day, 22nd January, that the 4/11 Sikhs put in their attack. Cut off from Agordat, part of the Italian 41st Brigade that had for so long held the communications behind Kassala escaped across country that night in a disorder that could never be repaired. The brigade commander, General Fongoli, with his staff and guns and 1,200 men alone remained at Keru, and were taken prisoner. Thus one-sixth of the Italian frontier force had been wiped out and the Indian Sappers and Miners, a methodical corps, got down to their work of mine-clearance in a pass that should have held for weeks.

Now Frusci in Asmara saw the extent of his danger.

He ordered the Um Hagar garrison (43rd Brigade) and the four battalions in the Walkait tableland to the south of them to pull out as best they might and run for Barentu. The Eritrean command moved up to Agordat, where resistance was stiffened by their best colonial brigade, the 2nd, which had an unbroken tradition of victory since its formation in the 'nineties.

General Platt, with his single brigade from the 4th and his two from the 5th Indian Divisions, was too fast for Frusci.

Messervy's "tin cavalry," Gazelle, were pounding up the Biscia road behind him. By 9 a.m. on 25th January, unopposed, they had occupied the Sciaglet wells, over 80 miles from the frontier, and by nightfall they were within

five miles of Agordat. The same afternoon detachments had struck south-east across country and cut the communications between Agordat and Barentu, the two Italian strong-points of final resistance that Frusci planned.

In Barentu they cut off the Italian commander of this front, General Baccari, visiting away from his headquarters at Agordat, and with him a company of 12 light tanks sent to help at Barentu. In the same evening at five these detachments turned north and fought off an Italian attack with medium tanks from Agordat that tried to reopen the essential lateral communications with Barentu.

6—The First Battle :

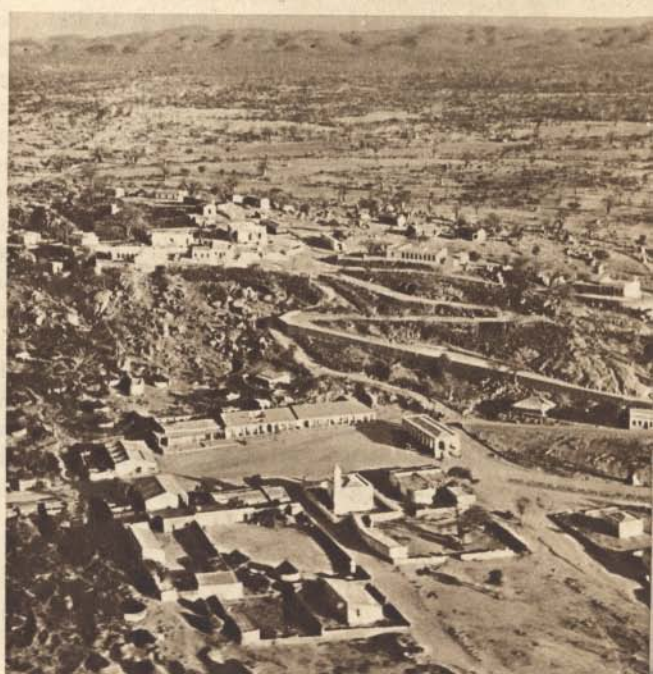
Lorenzini Runs

BEHIND THE HURRYING GAZELLE came plodding on foot through the parched and thorny lowland plains of Eritrea the 2nd Camerons and the 1/6 Rajputana Rifles. Fresh from its bag behind Keru, the 10th Brigade of 5th Indian Division was performing more miracles with its inadequate lorry transport in trackless country, and the next day had cut south-east to the Agordat-Barentu motor road and was advancing on Barentu from the north. Their other brigade was approaching Barentu from the west, against heavy resistance.

Round Agordat now, Gazelle was darting to north and south in mobile reconnaissance. The blond hero Lorenzini, "Lion of the Sahara," was put in command of Agordat, told to hold it to the last man, to restore the faith of Italian and colonial troops in themselves, because (so his orders said) at Agordat



PRIZE OF THE FIRST BATTLE. Agordat (*above*) on the dry bed of the Baraka, defended by at least 12,000 infantry, 76 guns and light and medium tanks, falls to a bold flanking movement. Barentu aerodrome and town (*below*) are taken the next day.



would be fought the battle that would seal the fate of Italy in East Africa. He was promised full air support. The Italians for once did not greatly miscalculate the land forces arrayed against them at Agordat; they took them to be 4,000 men, 150 light trucks, and 8 to 12 tanks. In fact, Major-General Beresford-Pierse had been able to bring up his 5th brigade, just concentrated from Egypt, to aid the 11th; and the first four I tanks had arrived.

As the R.A.F.* calculated later, full air support for Lorenzini would have meant 10 Savoia bombers an hour over our troops at Agordat and might have prejudiced the battle. But now we had Hurricanes, which Air Commodore Slatter, A.O.C. Sudan, launched like lightning against the landing-grounds within range of Asmara and Gura, the two chief Italian aerodromes in Eritrea. They went over twice running at dawn and drilled each a fair 200 holes into each of the 50 enemy aircraft grounded near the capital. So in a trice air superiority and comparative comfort for the army were snatched from the Italians: they never recovered either.

The dirty, whitewashed town of Agordat lay hid amid the palms growing thickly in the dry river-bed of the Baraka. North of this a tumble of hills had already barred the way to Gazelle; to the south the road to Barentu ran between the ridge of Laquatat on the west, protected by a strong concrete wall, wire and two terminal forts, and on the east the thick mass of the Cochen mountains that rise 2,000 feet from the plain and are invariably covered with mists until 9 o'clock each morning.

On this southern approach Major-General Beresford-Pierse deployed his troops, the 11th Brigade to the right and 5th Brigade to the left. The ultimate argument, the I tanks, was kept in reserve.

Lorenzini's four brigades in Agordat num-

bered at least 12,000 infantry, supported by no less than nineteen troops of artillery (76 guns) and a company each of medium and light tanks.

Against these odds the British commander decided to risk the bulk of his forces in a manœuvre to which the enemy had already shown himself susceptible—a flanking move that threatened his rearward communications. Italian tactics had already been sized up; and the risk was fully justified, as events proved. Leaving their left flank and their communications with the Sudan bare except for a thin screen of the now static Gazelle, the lesser British army went boldly up the southern hills into battle.

By the evening of the 28th the 3/14 Punjab were up on Cochen. They found the summit very wide and covered with scrub. Next day they were followed by the 1/6 Rajputana Rifles, for the enemy had also formed five colonial battalions on Cochen, with mountain artillery. On the 30th he counter-attacked; the Indians were driven back by immensely superior numbers, for each of their battalions was fighting one company short. On this rugged battlefield the only possible transport is the mule, and they had none. One company in each battalion, aided by the indefatigable Indian Sappers and Miners, spent the whole day toting boxes of ammunition, sacks of food, tins of incredibly desirable water up the torrid rocks. There came a moment when the sappers themselves threw their water buckets away, fixed bayonets and charged to fill a nearly fatal gap in the toiling British line. So they had the power to hang grimly on, and next morning themselves to counter-attack and recover the lost ground. Their endurance enabled the main attack on that day to succeed, for they fixed and secured our right wing on which it was designed to swivel—and they also absorbed Lorenzini's whole attention.

That morning, at first light, the Camerons mastered the western lower ridges of Cochen. The 1st Royal Fusiliers followed through at once to the left, in the plain between Cochen and Laquatat. Before them went the four

* N.B.—From now onwards, the expression "R.A.F." in this narrative includes squadrons from the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia. It is not always possible to distinguish the part which each played.



THE R.A.F. STRIKES. Agordat aerodrome bombed, its hangar burnt out and three Capronis destroyed



THE HAUL OF A FORTNIGHT GROWS. Light tanks (*above*), heavy field artillery (*below*), taken at Agordat.



new, terrifying shapes of the I tanks, that cleaned the level spaces in a matter of minutes. The Camerons again went forward round the mountain base, and by midday their Bren carriers and three of the I tanks were in the very middle of an enemy concentration of tanks and artillery, shooting right and left. Within a few minutes six medium and five light Italian tanks (several of which were manned by German crews taken from the fugitive shipping in Massawa) were annihilated. Next the 3/1 Punjab passed through the Royal Fusiliers with another couple of I tanks; once more they were the decisive element in the battle; before nightfall they had cut the enemy's road to Keren and from their squat steel shoulders were shooting up the Italians flying in panic in the gorge. That night the rest of the Agordat garrison fled across country, leaving behind them nearly 1,000 prisoners, 43 guns, 14 shattered tanks, and a civil population turned to loot. Lorenzini had not made the most of his resources and had completely failed to appreciate his opportunity. He had kept his 42nd Brigade the whole time north of the Baraka and had never attempted to turn the slight English left. He seemed, like all Italian commanders, to be hypnotised at every turn of the battle by British speed and initiative.

Agordat was occupied in the morning of 1st February, and Barentu fell to 5th Indian Division next day. Barentu itself had been stiffly defended by at least 8,000 infantry and 32 guns behind a gigantic cliff demolition on the northern road and a tangle of hills to the west, covered with massive boulders and laced with a tough resistant scrub. Co-operation between the two brigades of the division in their separate attacks was extraordinarily difficult—and they had no I tanks. But in the end the broken enemy, cut off from Agordat and the main road, fled east along mountain tracks towards Adi Ugri and the Asmara-Aduwa highway. There, as he climbed to safety up the wall of the escarpment, he was obliged to jettison the guns, tanks and

complete motor transport not only of the two beaten brigades of Barentu but of the other two now struggling north-east for home from Um Hagar and the Walkait.

Thus the haul of a fortnight in Eritrea grew, with the full flow of deserters, to 6,000 men, 80 guns, 26 tanks and 400 trucks. The bulk of the Eritrean army was demoralised and paralysed. Eritrea was facing immediate collapse; only hasty reinforcements from the south, deployed behind the demolition of a bridge, gave her two months' lease of life.

7—Italian Fortress :

The Cliffs of Keren

AS GAZELLE TURNED the corner to cross the dry bed of the Baraka, they saw that the sides of the steel Mussolini Bridge had been blown apart. They nosed forward. The sand between the banks was peppered with mines. They set to work through the heat of the day. No men could have done more, or done it faster, but it took them eight hours to clear the Baraka, and those hours meant that we had to fight the battle of Keren.

In its despair the Italian Empire had thrown into the Keren mountains its final strategic reserve. The 11th Regiment of the Savoia Grenadiers, followed by the Alpini battalion of the other (the 10th) Regiment of the same division, were rushed into lorries in Addis Ababa and reached Asmara along the magnificent Strada Imperiale in three days' running. They were not allowed to say goodbye to their families, or to stop to sleep on the way. On the very day that Agordat fell they were concentrated in Keren, then deployed upon her precipitous defences to the west while

Gazelle was still clearing the Baraka and the R.A.F. were blasting the weary columns of Lorenzini's army going up the gorge. As their last disciplined formations passed through to the Keren plateau, the Italians blew down 200 yards of cliff where the gorge was no more than a colossal axe-wound in the mountains, and their guns, machine-guns and grenades were ready behind the rocks to defend two other road-blocks on the British side of this obstruction. The I tanks with Gazelle could not break it. Keren was like a great mediæval castle whose portcullis has fallen down and drawbridge has been lugged up at the last moment in the face of the triumphant enemy. Above, the walls were manned by the still panting Savoia Grenadiers.

The 11th Indian Infantry Brigade followed Gazelle up the narrow valley to Keren, the 2nd Camerons and 1/6 Rajputana Rifles in trucks, the 3/14 Punjab on foot. This was the scene that struck them as they filed into the plain below the Italian defensive system. The plain itself two miles broad, with no cover but dry thorn and the *khors*-beds that seamed it; beyond the plain, a sudden wall of razor ridges rising 2,500 feet, pure rock at the top, and ruled by peaks that in the next two months were to be awarded unforgettable soldiers' names like Flat Top, Mole Hill, Hog's Back and Brig's Peak, and by the hard head of Sanchil; then tucked behind Sanchil the gorge with its road-block, and to the south a mass of slightly lower, less sharp, more thickset and

THE MOUNTAINS RISE AHEAD. The advance from Agordat meets the sharp hard core of Eritrea.



wrinkle-topped mountains guarded where they overlooked the gorge by the Fort Dologorodoc and echeloned in depth through Zeban, Falestoh, Sphinx, Zelale, an endless range. Southward at their feet and leading away from our plain of deployment ran the valley cheerfully to be miscalled Happy. This was to give false hopes of a way round the enemy's fortress walls that the British command were to seek for a month, and always to be denied; and Indian troops were to retire down it twice, defeated but undistressed, carrying their heavy casualties and singing through the night.

The enemy had now summoned his 5th and 44th Colonial Brigades (1st Colonial Division: General Carnimeo) from the north; he had on the spot the Savoia battalions and the 11th Colonial Brigade which he had previously taken from his Addis Ababa reserve; the 42nd Brigade had escaped from Agordat almost intact, the 2nd were re-forming, and the 6th were rushing to the rescue from Metemma. He had a ponderable artillery, unbreakable natural defences curving round his base at Keren to give interior lines, superb observation for his guns on to the plain where the British must camp, all the mules that we lacked for supply in mountain warfare—and superior numbers.

Without hesitating, the British commander sent the 2nd Camerons up the mountainside of Sanchil, whose capture would dominate all else. They established themselves below the peak on a narrow secondary ridge which neither they nor their name abandoned; it became Cameron Ridge. Next night, 4th February, the 3/14 Punjab passed through them, through the dead scrub and up the bare rock, to the very crown of Keren, Brig's Peak. They held it for a few hours. Then in a curtain of fire from heavy mortars, of which the Savoia Grenadiers had many, and amid showers of the light percussion grenades that look like Japanese toys but at close range shiver the senses and make the perfect close weapons of mountain war, the 3/14 Punjab were driven into the valley. The Camerons hung on;



KEREN

ZEBAN

FALESTOH

SANCHIL

ROAD
BLOCK

FORT
DOLOGORODOC

PINNACLE

CAMERON RIDGE

THE CLIFFS OF KEREN. "Beyond the plain, a sudden wall of razor ridges, pure rock at the top." The Italians blew down 200 yards of cliff to seal the gorge, and honey-combed the rocks with artillery and machine-gun posts.



THE BATTLE OF KEREN

the 1/6 Rajputana Rifles reinforced their naked ledge. We had failed, but we were still there.

The 5th Brigade of 4th Indian Division now arrived in the wide plain from Agordat. Within two days Major-General Beresford-Pierse had mounted a second offensive from a new angle. The fresh brigade, led by 4/6 Rajputana Rifles, would go up Happy Valley at night, carrying its machine-guns, munitions,

signal equipment and three days' rations, turn left beyond Dologorodoc and capture the Acqua ridge that linked Falestoh with Zelale. Thence it would exploit to the hill, the last before Keren, where the Catholic Mission stood.

And for this attack the Savoia Grenadiers had the same answer.

They waited behind the sharp ridge, as the British shells screamed innocuously over their



heads. Then, when the barrage ended and the troops were near, they came to the crest with their pockets stuffed with light grenades and bounced them in their bursting thousands at the Indians' feet. The 4/6 Rajputana Rifles hung doggedly to a lower ridge; refusing reinforcements, suffering heavily, unable to progress, damned if they would retire until they were shouted back. Indeed, three of them stayed there for three days. "We

received no order," they said, having been too busy to hear it.

On 10th February the Division tried again, this time with a brigade on either side of the gorge, on Sanchil and on Acqua, and with the 29th Brigade of the 5th Indian Division at their back to exploit through Acqua to the Keren-Asmara road if the action looked like going well.

The whole of the divisional artillery except one field regiment was turned on to Brig's Peak and Sanchil, which the 3/1 Punjab stormed on 11th February. But once upon these soaring staircases of rock, grilled by the sun, there were scarcely two platoons to fight Sanchil—the rest were pushing up water, ammunition, food, or hauling down the wounded. Sanchil could not be held. Next day the enemy were infiltrating down the gullies of Brig's Peak, feeling and then sniping the weak points, blowing the rock about the Indians with mortars that outranged our own. Brig's Peak was once more abandoned, and on the same day, 12th February, it was known that the second attack on Acqua had also failed. The 29th Brigade was therefore not engaged. And here, at the moment of failure, when these gallant Indian battalions were reeling back from the rocks of Keren as a quarter of a century before the Gloucesters and New Zealanders reeled back from the summit of Sari Bair, it may be pertinent to cite one of the many exploits which earned for the Indian Divisions Mr. Churchill's special and nobly phrased tribute in the House of Commons.

That afternoon Subadar Richpal Ram, of the 6th Rajputana Rifles, lay dying in the Acqua gap. This was the second time that he had tried to force the passage, and for his gallantry he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. His citation read:

"During an assault on an enemy position in front of Keren on the night of 7th February, Subadar Richpal Ram, who was second in command of the leading company, insisted on accompanying the forward platoon and led an attack on the first objective with great dash. His Company Commander having been

wounded, he assumed command of the company and led the attack on the final objective. In face of withering fire, about 30 men, with this V.C.O. at their head, rushed the objective with bayonets and captured it. Here, although completely isolated, they beat back six enemy attacks between midnight and 4.30 in the morning."

On 12th February the Subadar led another attack on the same position. He pressed on fearlessly and with the greatest determination though met by very heavy and accurate fire. By his personal example he inspired the company with his own resolute spirit, but nearing the objective his right foot was blown off. He then suffered further wounds to which he ultimately succumbed. Even while lying wounded on the battlefield, he had no thought for his own wounds, but waved forward his men. His last words were, "We will capture the objective."

8—Keren: Thinking it Out

BLEEDING but aggressive still, the little British army, much smaller now than its nominal roll would suggest, sat back to think it out again. There was no way round. The escarpment must be pierced frontally. All the strength of the British army in the Sudan must concentrate upon it. There would be casualties. . . . It would take about four weeks of dull and steady work to bring the necessary supplies and material forward for the grand offensive.

Till then Cameron Ridge, that short and lowly window-sill under the very eyes of the Italian guns, must be held unflinchingly by two battalions at a time. It would be held, at the cost of a steady 25 to 30 casualties a day, or 50 per cent. in a month. So through the latter half

of February and the first half of March two battalions hung on by their eyebrows facing an enemy at least three times as strong.

Economies had to be made somewhere, if the lorries needed for forward dumping were to be found. The 5th Indian Division therefore were brought back from Barentu to railhead near Kassala, and many of their trucks were freed for the daily concentration of ammunition and material. Gazelle was disbanded and most of the mobile elements in the Sudan—the motor machine-gun companies, Skinner's Horse—were gradually assembled in front of Arresa and Adi Ugri, there to tie down potential enemy reinforcements to Keren, and convince them that the threat to this front was serious. In fact, constant reconnaissance by 5th Division had shown that there was no way for wheels to Arresa, and as we could only go by wheels, that was that.

The Royal Air Force meanwhile continued their destruction on enemy aerodromes; for three days in succession they burned up his flights at Asmara, Gura and Makalle. As the day of the major offensive drew near they concentrated more and more, and with less and less interference, on the enemy line and his batteries

R.A.F. INCIDENT. This bomber pilot over Keren found one wing of his aircraft blazing. He dived at such speed that the flames were blown out.



at Keren. The pamphlets that they had thrown, under the Lion Seal of the Emperor Haile Selassie, appealing on the one hand to the Abyssinian sentiments of the colonial troops and on the other rubbing in the lesson of British bomb and shell, had drawn over 1,500 deserters to the British lines in the middle of February, of which nearly 1,000 came from the lightly engaged 11th Colonial Brigade. This flow dried up; then, under the impulsion of further leaflets, ran again in the first fortnight of March.

And there was movement from the north. On 9th February the two battalions of the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade, for some time detached from 4th Division and operating under the direct orders of General Platt, grouped with a Free French force, the Chad Battalion and a battalion of the Foreign Legion, crossed the frontier on the Red Sea coast and took Karora. A few days later they had overrun and captured the outpost battalion of the enemy 44th Brigade at Kubkub, and on 1st March they had broken through the Mescelit Pass 15 miles north-east of Keren and were drawing off a considerable part of the Keren garrison.

Organisation both skilful and picturesque

maintained this striking force, under the command of Brigadier Briggs. Some 340 miles of mountain and dust track connected them with their base at Port Sudan; but they short-circuited their difficulties after the capture of the harbour of Mersa Taclai by impressing their own private fleet of Red Sea dhows for the forward haul. This Brigade was thus a simultaneous threat to the northern front of Keren and to Massawa, forcing Frusci to maintain a reserve on the coast that eventually was destroyed in detail.

Two newly arrived Cypriot mule companies were taking part of the burden off the backs of the infantry.

The enemy, too, had been reinforced. He had by now received his 6th Colonial Brigade from Metemma and in addition had called up his best Blackshirt Legion, the 11th. He was about 23,000 strong in rifles. The amphitheatre at Keren was filling up. . . .

The 5th Indian Division completed the period of intensive mountain training for the great contest that was before it. Its 9th Brigade had rejoined it from Gallabat after chasing the enemy up to Wahni and Chelga. Both the Divisions, six brigades or 13,000 infantry strong,

"THE VERY CROWN OF KEREN." Sanchil, Brig's Peak and Cameron Ridge, the soaring staircases of rock on which the bitterest fighting of the northern campaign took place.

"HAPPY VALLEY." Twice the Indian troops fought their way up this valley; twice they were held on the ridge beyond.



with a splendid array of British guns, 6-inch and 3.7-inch howitzers and 25-pounders, were to be assembled by General Platt for a last gruelling assault on the mountain chain.

The Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Archibald Wavell, came to witness for a few hours the final stage of this victory over as stubborn an enemy and as forbidding a position as had ever faced a British army.

9—Keren: Assault and Victory

MARTIAL MUSIC of a grandiose kind precluded the 15th March, the first day of the final battle of Keren. On the eve, Wellesleys of the Royal Air Force blew up, on the railway between Keren and Asmara, a train carrying over 30,000 shells in 40 trucks. Next day the British guns deafened and clouded the Italian positions with the same number of their own.

The hottest, most still and sultry day of the campaign opened. As the great guns blazed off in the oppressive valley, they were answered by the crash of thunderstorms in the highlands above.

Sweating in their khaki shirts, both Divisions were standing-to.

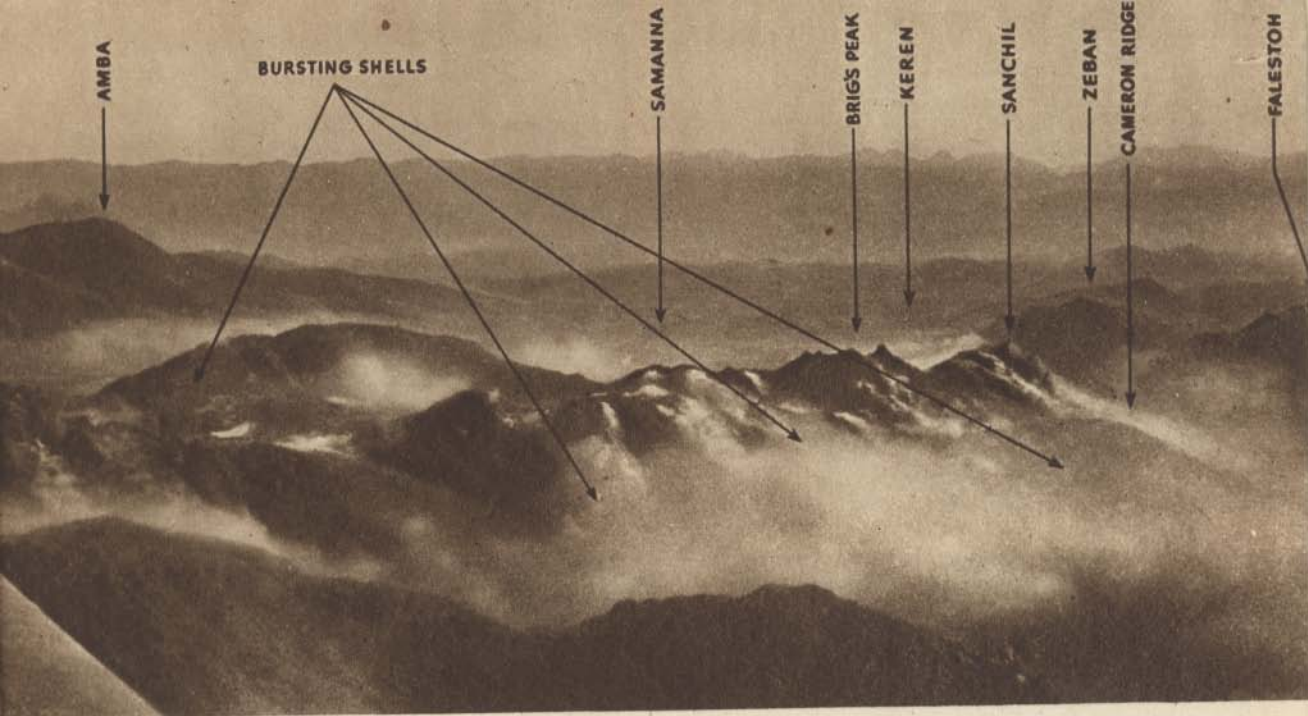
At 7 a.m. the 4th went once more up the steeples of Sanchil and Samanna to the north. A part of Samanna was soon theirs; but at the end of the day they could not yet master Sanchil. Behind Cameron Ridge 5th Division were lined up and waiting to cross the fierce fire-belt which the enemy laid across the road from his positions on Sanchil, but unable yet to move. The whole area was laced with automatic fire. Their role was the scaling and conquest of Fort Dologorodoc. They waited

there, limp and exhausted in the growing heat and the electric storm that refused to burst. The Highland Light Infantry could not cross the open ground.

Only, as cooler evening approached, the 3/5 Mahrattas were able to gain a footing on the other side and seized an important outpost below the Fort, called Pinnacle.

In the early hours of the 16th, under the moon, the 9th Brigade of the 5th Indian Division, led by the stubborn north-countrymen of the 2nd West Yorkshires, were ordered up Dologorodoc, from the west. The surprise overwhelmed the Italians. At dawn the West Yorkshires were in the fort and had taken some 400 Grenadier and Eritrean prisoners. Next morning the 29th Brigade of 5th Division were through them and under the forward slopes of Falestoh and Zeban. For the ten more days that the battle lasted, exposed on three sides to the Italian artillery and mortars, the 5th Division stood an immovable and decisive wedge in the hostile line.

They ran out of ammunition and food; it had to be dropped on the rocks from old Vincent and Wellesley aircraft. They were bitterly counter-attacked eight times; by yet another newly arrived brigade (the 61st Colonial) from Gondar, by battalions newly rushed from the Adi Ugri sector, by the Alpini, by the Tipo model battalion and by the staunchest of the Eritrean units, the Gold Medal 2nd Battalion; by medium tanks. Every one was driven back. There came a moment when the 29th Indian Infantry Brigade had to huddle closer to the Fort, but their fire was still hot enough to keep the enemy at a distance. Counter-attacks were broken up by artillery and close air support before they started. On one occasion the command hit on the ingenious device of switching every gun in the artillery of both divisions on to a single hostile concentration and ordering one simultaneous round from each at a given minute. Lorenzini's own head was blown off in one of these destructive barrages, which were directed by young gunner observers on the rocks with the forward sections of both



THE FINAL ASSAULT. *Above*, the smoke of battle on the peaks as the British guns open fire. *Below*, the 4th Division hold Samanna while the 3rd Mahrattas rush Pinnacle, the outpost to Fort Dologorodoc. The whole area is laced with automatic fire.



Divisions. Fort Dologorodoc remained firmly in our hands.

The 4th Division had tried once more to capture the razor ridge and peaks of Sanchil. Here the 3/18 Garhwal suffered terrible casualties. Their commander was killed and all British officers except one were killed or wounded. Once more the troops were pulled off Sanchil. But the Division clung to its gains in the north, on Flat-Top Hill, which remained to them because the Adjutant of the 2/5 Mahrattas had led out the office clerks in a bayonet charge that saved a wavering situation.

General Platt laid a new plan for the final phase. A short rest for the mangled 4th Indian Division. No more infantry attempts on Sanchil. Intolerable bombing and howitzer strafing on Sanchil. A final thrust with all available fresh infantry up the pass itself to clear the road-block. His plan was to shoulder his way through, keeping the enemy on the flanking hills quiet by fire and not by infantry.

Enemy morale was known to be terribly shaken. Frusci had already noted in his diary the "torment" caused by British aviation and artillery. Later it was found that in five days' fighting he had lost 1,135 killed and 2,300 wounded; our prisoners and deserters took another 1,000 off his total; deserters elsewhere than to our lines had further reduced some of his units to between 30 and 40 per cent. of their normal strength. The Eritreans were mutinous and he was on his last legs. If we were bloody, he was bowed.

0445 hours on 25th March was final zero.

The 10th Indian Infantry Brigade poured from the railway tunnel lying north of the road that led into the gorge. By midday they had cleared everything in front of them, captured Lieut.-Colonel Fabiani commanding the Bersaglieri battalion of the Savoia Grenadiers, with his staff, mortars and most of his men, and beaten off every counter-attack. They were past the road-block on the north side.

Simultaneously 9th Indian Infantry Brigade advanced down the western slopes of Dologorodoc and with a murderous fire cleared the

defences of the road-block to the south. Under the Italian artillery from Falestoh they could not hold all their gains, but they held enough for the engineers.

In that 24 hours the Italians lost 600 more men. They put their last Savoia Grenadiers into the counter-attack on the 26th, but this forlorn hope also failed.

Between the walls of rock passed the I tanks, carrying explosives, for the road-block was still under the Italian guns. After them came the indefatigable Sappers and Miners. The charges were inserted that were to blow the locked door to Keren.

By the evening of the 26th the door was open. Frusci's game was finished. He ordered withdrawal during the night, and found spiritual compensation by writing in his report ". . . among the three thousand dead whom we leave behind are a general and five senior officers who will guard Keren until we return."

At dawn white flags were seen forlornly flapping on the impregnable Sanchil and Brig's Peak. Three dead Cameron Highlanders were lying on the highest point. The I tanks and Bren carriers were in Keren, and beyond. The 7th Brigade were through the last northern pass, and the Foreign Legion, after an arduous march across the mountains to the east of Keren, were cutting in on the Keren-Asmara road. Four thousand prisoners dribbled back to our lines unguarded. The colonial troops were deserting in enormous groups, leaving their white officers sitting on the dusty roadside to rest. In this most bloody and decisive battle of the East African war, where success was measured not by miles of pursuit on the level but by a dozen yards gained in the vertical rock, the two Indian divisions had lost between 4,000 and 5,000 men. The 4th was particularly hard hit, losing nearly 3,000, including several battalion commanders. But these numerically inferior forces, aggressively led by General Platt and his divisional commanders and supported by a splendid aviation and artillery, had by sheer hard fighting and determination achieved the incredible and shattered the enemy's strategic reserve.



THE FORTRESS FALLS. *Above*, Yorkshiremen and Indians rest in Dologorodoc ; smiling sappers, Sanchil and Brig's Peak behind them, help transport past the road block. *Below*, the town of Keren, bombed by the R.A.F., lies open to the Empire forces.



10—The Bent Sword of

Admiral Bonnetti

ON OCCASION unfortunate in the timing of his telegrams (it will be remembered how he sent at an inappropriate moment in the battle of Guadalajara cordial congratulations to his legionaries in Spain), the Duce wired to the Duke of Aosta the full measure of his pride in the heroic resistance of Keren, which was writing a page of blood, etc., in Italian history. That page had already been turned when the telegram passed the counter in Addis Ababa. The Viceroy could only reply that the defenders had withdrawn eastwards to a new line which they would hold.

This position, behind three road-blocks on the Keren-Asmara highway and in front of the orchards of Ad Teclesan, where the road descends into the indefensible Asmara plain, had already been spotted by the Royal Air Force, who were shattering and gunning the refugee columns of Frusci's northern army all the way to Asmara and beyond.

As a last resort, the two remaining battalions of the 10th Regiment of Savoia Grenadiers had been driven up the Strada Imperiale from Addis Ababa, leaving the capital bare of its best troops. With the 80th Colonial Battalion freshly arrived in final reinforcement from Gondar, and with the best surviving artillery from the Keren positions, 67 pieces, including the only Italian 6-inch guns in East Africa, these Grenadiers were deployed before Ad Teclesan.

The place was naturally strong—stronger even than Keren, for the approach wound through an even narrower valley and there was no room for the deployment of the British artillery which played so important a part in the

Keren battle. But the heart of the defence had turned to water. Keren was an experience that the Italian army did not wish to enjoy a second time. The measure of British confidence was the liberation of the 4th Indian Division (except its 7th Brigade, now on the coastal road to Massawa) from further participation in the Eritrean campaign. The 4th Division was soon to be hurried back to the north, serve as a decisive reserve in the blocking of the German counter-attack in Cyrenaica, and then to take part in the advance into Syria. Sidi Barrani, Keren, Damascus—all these and the saving of the sea highway, too, were the major triumphs which our communications down the Nile and the Red Sea enabled our strategic reserve to cram into six months' campaigning.

To return to Eritrea, 5th Division came down the road to Asmara, led by its I tanks and the Central India Horse.

Enemy artillery put up some resistance on the road-blocks and broke some of the armoured cars of the Sudan Defence Force—the same that had held the enemy at arm's length in the disarmed days of the previous August. Major-General Heath frightened the enemy by a feint attack down the railway line which ran parallel to the road on the west; the tunnels were clear for movement, he knew, for his Lysanders on reconnaissance had dived into their mouths to see daylight at the other end. Before dawn on 31st March his leading brigade came with the bayonet into the Italian line. The shaving mirrors of the Savoia Grenadiers were deployed upon the rocks as the rude north-countrymen of the West Yorkshires and the bearded Punjabis delivered their assaults. There was little fighting. All that was left of the central division of Italian East Africa except the machine-gun battalion lately at Gondar was taken prisoner or destroyed. So with the 80th, and with the rest of the composite opposition before Asmara.

Next morning, the 1st April, a small car came running out of Asmara with a huge white flag above it. In the bad light it was misinterpreted, fired upon, and its crew obliged for

some time to harbour in a ditch. But as day came up they were seen and emerged to settle the terms for the surrender of the city, where two battalions of Italian colonial troops were already rioting.

General Platt was standing no nonsense. He gave orders to occupy Asmara and to bomb and strafe all movement on the roads running east of Asmara to Massawa and south to the Tigre province of Ethiopia, where Frusci thought that he could still resist.

The signal sent to headquarters in Khartoum announcing the surrender of Asmara ended with the assurance that this was NOT repeat NOT an April fool. We were there before midday, and in a very few minutes the I tanks had taught Asmara the first lesson of a British occupation, that traffic must keep to the left. Another 5,000 prisoners laid down their arms. The entire reserve of equipment and clothing for the Italian East African armies, 1,500,000 shells and 3,000,000 rounds of small-arms ammunition were captured. *Mrs. Clutterbuck*, General Platt's plane, came up from Khartoum with tins of milk for the children of Asmara. British political officers appeared. General Platt sacked the Italian palace servants for slackness and inefficiency.

A mobile force, called Flit after the foe of tropical insects, followed the devastated track of the bombers down the two roads to Abyssinia, to Adigrat and Aduwa. Reconnaissance aircraft saw all in flames. At Adi Ugri the prisoner-of-war camp was opened, a liberated officer hauled up the mast the Union Jack home-made of bedsheet and coloured ink, the zealous Kikuyus captured in the early frontier fights with Kenya shouted "Three cheers for Kinky George and British Empire!" At Adigrat the two brother battalions of the 80th Colonial taken at Ad Teclesan, the rest of the troops that Gondar had sent too late for Keren, were caught as they were jumping into their trucks. Ras Seyum, the old ruler of Tigre, came in from Aduwa and made his act of formal, and contented, submission. Haile Selassie Gugsu explained how much he regretted walk-

ing over to the Italians from Makalle in October 1935.

Only Frusci and a handful escaped to the south to muster the last forces of Dessie and Quoram on the great peak Amba Alagi. All the rest that had not deserted were locked up in Massawa under Rear-Admiral Bonnetti, commanding the Italian squadron in the Red Sea, and General Tessitore, the officer commanding troops in Eritrea. Their forces: seven destroyers, 10,000 men including the survivors of Keren, over 70 guns and some tanks.

The destroyers were ordered out to sea on desperate missions which the Italians love to design and sometimes fulfil. One was sunk by the Royal Navy just outside Massawa. Four



ADI UGRI: THE TUNNELLERS.
British prisoners were making escape tunnels when "Flit" opened the camp.

were sent to Port Sudan to attack the fuel tanks, and of these two were sunk by the Fleet Air Arm on 3rd April and the other pair ran aground near Jedda, the wrong side of the Red Sea. Two others were ordered to attack Suez, and were similarly accounted for.

A telephone line still stood between Asmara and Massawa. Bonnetti was told that if he scuttled the 19 ships lying there or damaged the installations of the port the British would not be responsible for the feeding of the 40,000 Italian civilians in Asmara, mainly women and children, who imported nearly everything by this channel.

Bonnetti referred the matter to Rome, who told him to go on and smash the port.

The 5th Division led by its I tanks broke through the road-blocks at Nefasit and stepped down the 7,000 feet between Asmara and the sullen sea. The 7th Indian Infantry Brigade and the Free French, fighting back a counter-attack with tanks, tightened the circle along the coast from the north. The troops were in contact with the main perimeter of enemy forts, wire and minefields four miles outside Massawa.

A white flag hung out. Admiral wanted to talk about terms of surrender. Or perhaps he wanted longer time to sink the dry-dock and the ships and set fire to the dozen points from which our troops now saw smoke streaming into a sky already hot enough. Rome intervened again. The white flag went down. At four in the morning of 8th April the Allied army went in to the attack, the Highland Light Infantry first on the left, the Foreign Legion later on the right. At a sticky moment the I tanks were thrown into battle on the extreme left, drove across the front behind the enemy line to issue before the Free French, loosened up the action and opened Massawa to the infantry. The 7th Brigade were now on the northern outskirts of the town. Admiral Bonnetti was found sitting rather moodily in a deck-chair at the side of the harbour. He had tried to break his sword across his knee but it only bent, so he threw it into the water. It was



DOWN TO ASMARA. A road block cleared on the highway from Keren as the 5th Division press the retreating Italians eastwards to the Eritrean capital.



THE CAPITAL TAKEN. General Platt's forces enter the town. Beneath the Cathedral tower and in the blocks of offices life flows on. But the traffic keeps to the left.





LAST LAP IN ERITREA. Asmara taken, the British forces cross the last mountains between Keren and the Massawa plain. The highway steps down 7,000 feet.



REACHING TO THE SEA. Above, a Free French post "spotting" for the bombardment of Massawa's outer defences. Below, Italian naval guns, silenced.



fished out, bent back to normal, and now hangs as a trophy at Headquarters at Khartoum. All the cranes had been blown into the harbour, but the scuttling had been unintelligent and it was found that ships could be brought in one at a time. So the last acre of Eritrean soil, except for the sandy port of Assab in the far south, fell into British hands.

The battle of annihilation whose most concentrated hours were counted at Keren was now over. The whole of the Eritrean army, in whose ranks were found the best of Italy's colonial troops, and some, at least, of the garrison of Addis Ababa and Shoa had been destroyed. The Savoia Grenadier Division, eight Blackshirt battalions, and 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Divisions of colonial infantry, altogether 65 battalions, existed no longer. Over 40,000 prisoners and 300 guns were in our hands. Tens of thousands of askaris, deserting to their homes, already ploughed the fields in uniforms thinly disguised. The Royal Air Force had shot to pieces its opponent—one squadron alone during the march between Kassaala and Keren had destroyed 70 aircraft. The main dumps of the Italian Empire had been captured and her Red Sea fleet driven out to disaster. Only on the forlorn hope of Amba Alagi Frusci was left gesticulating for help, while to the south-west General Nasi, a cooler customer with a greater hold than any Italian on the Abyssinian population, kept some 20,000 troops round him in the fortress of Gondar.

The Italian Empire, declared with such pomp on 9th May, 1936, had shrunk to a circle of Galla provinces in the south-west and a defensive triangle in the northern mountains of the Amhara, pointed at Gondar, Amba Alagi and Dessie.

By the reduction of Massawa and her fleet the Red Sea ceased to be dangerous to shipping, and the President of the United States of America was able to free this route for American bottoms travelling with war material to Middle East. The reinforcement of British forces in Egypt thus received an incalculable impetus at the hour when the triple test in Crete, in Syria



PATROL IN MASSAWA. The Italian Red Sea base has fallen ; ten thousand prisoners have been taken.

and in the Western Desert was drawing near.

A threat to our main route of aerial reinforcement to Egypt, which now came from West Africa through the Nile Valley, was removed. The Mohawks and Tomahawks, the Glenn Martins and Liberators could roar to Cairo through aerodromes unaffected by the war.

It is not, of course, true to say that the whole of these results were achieved by the Sudan Army alone. As we shall see, the operations of the Kenya Army were just as hard, miraculous, and important.

General Cunningham would have found far greater difficulty in reaching Addis Ababa if General Platt had not reached Keren ; but General Platt could not have fought his way so swiftly to Keren and might not have won his decisive victory there, if General Cunningham had not been fighting his way to Addis Ababa. For in spite of the drain on the garrison of the capital to defend Keren, General Cunningham found between 10,000 and 15,000 armed enemies in Addis Ababa alone ; with seven further enemy divisions to the south of it—some within easy reach. The victories in the North and in the South were a joint victory, of which it is hardly possible to exaggerate

either the local or the distant repercussions. This joint victory removed most of a continent and a whole ocean from the strategical map. These victories made available in other theatres of war forces which kept alive the hope of victory in the Middle East and therefore the hope of victory in the war as a whole. General Wavell has taken upon himself the blame for his miscalculations which lost the ground but not by any means all the fruits of his conquest of Cyrenaica. All the more reason for giving him the credit for his calculations. If he enumerates the bricks he dropped, others must enumerate the bricks he made—with so little straw. Not a man, nor a gun, nor an aeroplane, nor a tank was left one moment too long on any one battlefield.

So now, after Keren, only one division and a few guns and aeroplanes were left to drive the northern attack through to its end at Amba Alagi. The South Africans were already racing up the road to Dessie to complete their job and be released for service in Egypt. There were still forbidding positions to take and fine exploits to perform. But all the rest of the campaign was essentially "mopping-up" operations.



ITALIAN SHIPS LIE SCUTTLED in Massawa harbour.
The scuttling was bungled and the ships were recovered.



**THE PATH OF THE
EMPEROR**





PATRIOT FORCES GATHER IN THE SUDAN. THE CROWN PRINCE LEADS, THE EMPEROR TAKES THE SALUTE.

II—Mission 101

Preparing the Way

A DOZEN identical letters, printed in Amharic script on stout linen and sealed by General Platt in the name of the United Kingdom Government, had been sent to the District Commissioner at Gedaref shortly before the Italian declaration of war. They were held in a secret envelope until the night of 10th June. Then they were opened and despatched to eleven of the Ethiopian Patriot chiefs of Gojjam, Armachaho, Walkait and Bagemdir. They contained a few simple sentences announcing war between Britain and Italy, and offering arms, munitions, money and food to those chiefs who would send mules to the Sudan frontier to fetch them.

The runners were ready at Gedaref to take them in their forked sticks to the high plateaux of Ethiopia.

There were already certain chiefs on the frontier at Gallabat, asking for weapons and for news of the Emperor Haile Selassie. The first single-loader Martini rifles were issued to them—not wonderful firearms, but this was a time when part of the British Army in England was training with sticks. They were invited to co-operate in attacks on the Italian post at Metemma, and did take part in two attacks. But these Armachaho chieftains were a fissiparous lot, each jealous of the others' authority, and they hated this lowland bush with its fevers and its heats. When the Italians took Gallabat, one by one they went up country. The first to use his weapons there was one-eyed Gerasmatch Werku of Kwarā, who beat up an Italian patrol from the fort on that magnificent lonely tableland.

On 25th June a Short Sunderland flying boat of the Coastal Command alighted in Alexandria harbour. Its passengers stayed aboard

till dusk. Then the Emperor Haile Selassie stepped ashore. He had left for Wadi Halfa next morning before sunrise, and was *incognito* in the Khartoum house of one of the Holy Men of the Sudan, Sherif Yusef, on 3rd July. Here for the rest of the year his loyal chiefs from Western Abyssinia visited him and he initiated Amharic propaganda, while slowly Ethiopian refugees were gathered from the whole of the Middle East to be trained into his battalions and to fight under the lion seal on his flag of green, yellow and red.

He met in the Sudan an old friend, Colonel (now Brigadier) Sandford, who had been chosen to lead the British military mission (for secrecy styled 101 and operating under the scheme *Planex*) into the Gojjam, where it was known that the most lively and accessible centre of the Abyssinian revolt lay. On 12th August the small mule convoy crossed the frontier. The Colonel (now called *Fiki Mariam*, or the Love of Mary) was accompanied by a captain and a doctor, with wireless equipment, stores for a month, money, medicines, letters from the Emperor, and the Emperor's representative. Another officer of the Mission was caught by an Italian patrol in the border

bush, his caravan scattered and he himself never heard of again. The main party, however, made their way through hard foodless country, fording rivers naked and losing more than half their transport to horse sickness, up to the Gojjam. The doctor had to be left three-quarters-way for lack of mules, the other officer went off to reconnoitre Kwara. On a day in mid-September the wireless silence imposed on the Love of Mary was broken. He was safe on Mt. Zibist, near the headquarters of the loyal chief Dejasmatch Mangasha, with whom he now began to plan attacks on Italian communications.

Mangasha had already received General Platt's messenger with a *feu de joie* from all muskets, and with Dejasmatch Nagash, the other leading Gojjami Patriot, he rapidly beat the drums in the country villages around the Italian forts, levying hundreds of mules and men for the great convoy that would go down to the bad lands on the Sudan border. They had met Sandford on his way in and had fought with a strong Italian patrol a few days earlier. For a time the Italians believed that they had broken them up, but on a day late in August a dozen of them swam across the River Atbara and

FIGHTING SPEARHEAD. Fine men, modern weapons. Ethiopian and Sudanese troops ready on the frontier.

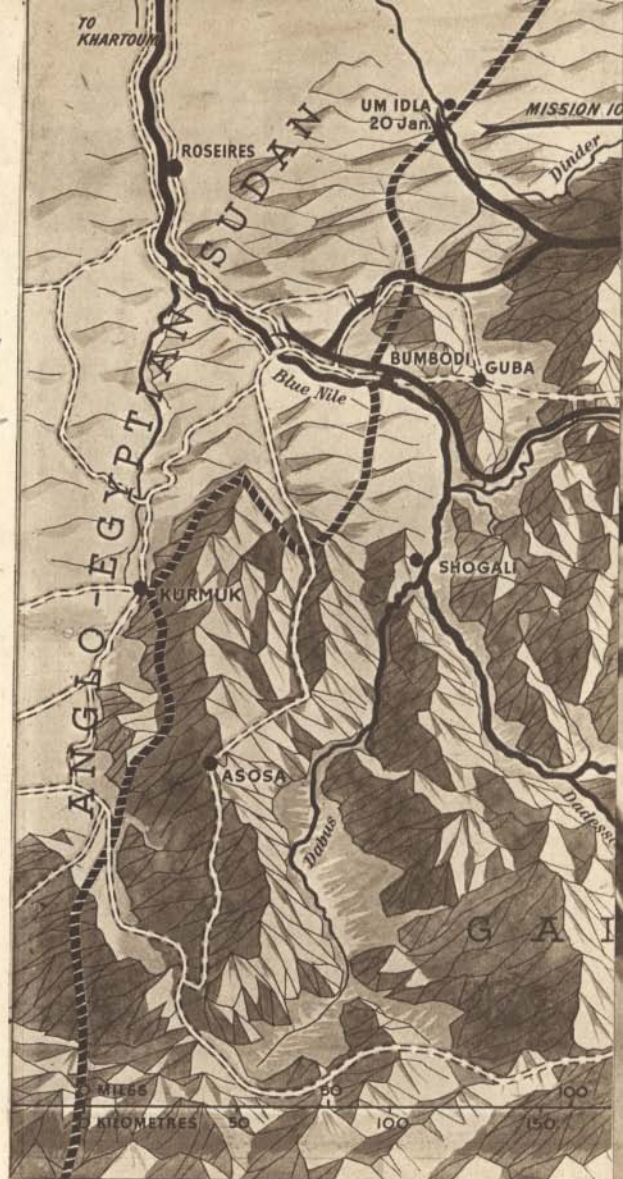


saw the young English District Commissioner on the other side. Given food, the starving men ate and vomited. But in a few days they were recovered enough to visit Gedaref on the same day as the Emperor and to leap before his rich tent on the aerodrome in the wild bragging battle-dance known as *fugera*, while watchful West Yorkshiremen pointed Bren guns skywards in the tall green grass on either side.

These men were back in the Gojjam in October carrying in their hands photographs of the Emperor and the aircraft that he stepped from. His proclamation was read in their market-places. Gradually a people who after four years of the Italians had come to disbelieve every printed word, who had seen nothing but Italian aeroplanes, armoured cars and guns, and knew nothing for certain except that Kassala, Gallabat and Kurmuk (and probably Somaliland) had been taken by Italy from Britain; very gradually this people, tired by the hopeless tussle with the Italians, began to see that the opportunity for independence and the despoiling of the invader was at hand.

Colonel Torelli, commanding the colonial brigade in Dangila on the edge of Mangasha's country, was the first to see the red light. In September and October he made a vigorous attempt to stamp Mangasha and his flat. There came a time when Sandford himself was running down a cliff, at the age of 58, sweating into his spectacles while machine-gun bullets whistled round him at 400 yards range. But the Banda passed over the cave where he hid and he lived to bring the two patriotic but jealous barons of Gojjam together and get from them a document that they would co-operate in battle and cease to attract into the feudal service of the other the soldiers of each. Through October and November they were staging light attacks on the roads of Gojjam and making life difficult for those Abyssinians who lived on the periphery of the Italian forts.

The R.A.F. began a series of deep raids on the Italian brigade centres at Dangila, Burye and Debra Markos, bringing for the first time



to the Abyssinian evidence of the growing aerial might of Britain. Italian anxiety increased. General Nasi, by far the most able of the Italians in his dealings with the Abyssinian, whom he treated as a fellow-being to whom one extended one's hand, offered one's table and kept one's word, was detached from his



THE PATH OF THE EMPEROR

post of Vice-Governor-General of the Empire and sent to Gondar in charge of a special military command, which included the major rebel areas of Gojjam and Armachaho, the province north of the Gondar-Metemma road where two other Britishers, Major Bentinck and an Irish engineer with land-mines, fomented revolt.

The disappointing results of the action at Gallabat in November enabled Nasi to open violent propaganda, aided by Ras Hailu, the former overlord of Gojjam who had long intrigued against the Emperor Haile Selassie and had been heavily subsidised by the conquerors since 1936. (Ras Hailu and his

grandson, Dejasmatch Mamu, who controlled the Italian Native Banda at Burye, were under the Italian regime among the few Abyssinians who were allowed to enter Italian hotels, bars and cinemas; and the old man ranked as first Abyssinian of the realm.)

Such was the counter-activity to which the Italians had been driven by a British colonel and four other British officers with two wireless sets, who had run out of European food and drink since September, and who were so penniless by November that they were obliged to borrow 6,000 Maria Theresa dollars from Nagash. It was not material means (which there were no mules available to import from the storehouses on the Sudan frontier) but it was simply the confidence given by the presence of a few cheerful, uncapturable Englishmen in contact by wireless with the Ethiopian Emperor and General Platt that kept the queer, unvigorous, but always menacing rebellion of the Gojjam going and persuaded the Italians to expend some of their best brains on its suppression. The Abyssinians had been ordered not to attack Italian posts; the Italians would not march off the roads to fight. There simply existed a tension, an incalculable popular hostility, that

paralysed four Italian brigades in Gojjam. That was the work of the Emperor and 101. In November the Wellesleys of 47th Squadron began to probe the Gojjam interior under the sun and the moon, and to launch attacks on Bahrdar Giyorgis and Dangila. A final element was needed, the presence of trained troops, to bring about the dissolution of Italian rule in one of the most important provinces of Ethiopia.

* * * *

On 20th November an old Vincent aircraft by a miracle of navigation and judgment landed on a rough ground at Sakkala in Mangasha's country and nearly crashed in a hole. The staff officer, Major Wingate, got out to give 101 the welcome news of a forward policy in Gojjam. A mixed Sudanese and Ethiopian force under British command would shortly enter. Enormous convoys of camels would be driven from the frontier near Roseires to the massif of Belaya in western Gojjam, carrying enough arms, munitions and food to break the Italians in Dangila, Burye and Debra Markos. The first troops would occupy Belaya—already held by the Patriot chief Taffere Zalleka—in a few weeks' time and set to work at once on an aerodrome for the reception of the Emperor.

So the pioneer work of the Mission was over. At Roseires and near Um Idla, on the dry hot frontier of the Sudan to the north, thousands of camels were gathered from all parts of the Sudan, and hundreds of thousands of great silver dollars glistening from the mint at Bombay. Down the White Nile in the old river steamers came the 2nd Ethiopian Battalion formed in Kenya from the Galla troops that had escaped from Maji in 1936. Up the Blue Nile went No. 4 Patrol Company of the Sudanese Frontier Battalion, to be the fighting spearhead of the Gojjam campaign. It took them a fortnight across the dry, dead-bushed lava levels to hack their way with their machetes to the foot of Belaya, and more than six weeks,



MISSION 101. Colonel Sandford, "Love of Mary," leader of the "few cheerful, uncapturable Englishmen," who prepared the way for the Emperor.

once established there, to hew and flatten an aerodrome from the loose cotton soil and tufted scrub. They, too, ran out of food. They were followed by Ethiopian Intelligence and Operational Centre 1, an organisation consisting of a British officer, several British N.C.O.s, and about 100 Ethiopian refugees, which was the prototype of several more preparing in Khartoum for a determined guerrilla war against Italian fixed positions.

There were no roads and there was scarcely any water in the great tract 90 miles wide that separated Belaya from the Sudan frontier. Reconnaissances for motor transport failed repeatedly in this appalling broken country. But by 20th January, 1941, the day after the Kassala offensive, the Emperor was ready to



NO ROADS, NO BRIDGES. Attempts to break through the bush failed repeatedly in the appalling broken country between the frontier and Belaya.



THE LION OF JUDAH, raised, after five years of exile, in its own land.

go in and mount Belaya, his first foothold for five years in his own land.

The Ethiopian flag was broken in the dry bed of the River Dinder as a Sudanese guard of honour bade farewell and an Ethiopian received him, and a speech from General Platt was read that wished him Godspeed. He issued a decree pardoning all his Ethiopian enemies. All around, hidden in bush from aircraft, were the thousands of camels of the Sudan plains about to be driven without mercy into the hard and unattempted mountains, to accomplish the strangest restoration of modern times. They would have to be sacrificed; no other transport could carry the supplies into Gojjam to garrison her for the coming rains.



FIFTEEN THOUSAND CAMELS LEFT THE FRONTIER, CARRYING ARMS AND FOOD TO SUPPORT THE

12—The Great Camel Trek

THOUGH the Emperor crossed the frontier on 20th January, it was not until 6th February that he arrived on horseback below his 9,000-foot headquarters, the rock Belaya; and that with a suite reduced to three British and three Ethiopian officers. All attempts to break through the bush with motor transport failed. The lorry carrying the Emperor itself rolled over at one point, and on several occasions he and all his lords had to turn out to build stone or bush tracks over the almost impassable dry river beds. Days were passed without water, and the heat was very great. The 2nd Ethiopian Battalion followed behind, while on a converging and better route from the south the rest of the Sudanese Frontier Battalion made for Belaya. Among the paraphernalia of this great camel trek was an Amharic printing press to publish the Emperor's propaganda and decrees in many coloured inks,

and megaphonists to "oyez" the enemy in battle. Those who beat their way to Belaya through this hard country declare that a compass was not needed; one could orient the column by the stink of dead camels, of which on one day the Emperor's suite counted 57. A fine black hot dust hung over the tenuous track. Not a human being was seen until they came to the mountain.

Here a cave was ready for the Emperor, and chiefs and retainers began to make ant-like for Belaya to kiss his feet. Italian aircraft came over, but bombed only the unfinished aerodrome. The Banda—uniformed Ethiopian irregulars—who had hitherto held the further escarpment east of Belaya for the Italians and were their watchdogs of the plateau, began now to crumble as a system at the Emperor's presence. Zalleka Birru, the important chief of the green land of Matakal where the track winds up the scarp to Central Gojjam, submitted with all his men. The Frontier and 2nd Ethiopian Battalions moved into his country, and by 23rd February the bulk of these two units with a mortar platoon of four pieces (their nearest and most effective approach to artillery) were in Enjabara, an Italian fortress under a great sugar-loaf mountain in the very



EMPEROR'S ADVANCE.

middle of Gojjam, astride the Italian-made axial road of the province which runs southward from Bahrdar Giyorgis on Lake Tana to Dangila, Enjabara, Burye, Dembacha, Debra Markos and Addis Ababa. Italy had abandoned Enjabara a few days before.

The brigade that had held Dangila, bombed by the R.A.F. and harassed by Patriots, had also marched out to Bahrdar Giyorgis and left the whole of Mangasha's country clean of Italians. The strain on these garrisons imposed by a hostile countryside and by rumours of a great enemy column, and the clamant need of Nasi in Gondar for reserves, had led to the abandonment of Northern Gojjam.

Gideon Force, as this part of the Frontier and 2nd Ethiopian battalions, the mortar platoon and the propaganda unit were now called, therefore turned south.

They marched at night, for they had no close air support; in single file, with 700 camels and 200 horses and mules, they went down the road to Burye through wakening Ethiopian villages. The column was four miles long, and was followed by the Emperor and his personal guard. Report flew, and gathered momentum in flying. The approach of an enormous force was announced to Colonel Natale, commanding

the Italian brigade group at Burye, where there were 5,000 troops encamped in well-sited forts with artillery, cavalry, and a mass of light and heavy automatics. The Colonel could not know that the fighting men against him counted 450, with four mortars, a few anti-tank rifles, and a sprinkling of Vickers and Bren guns.

On the afternoon of 27th February Wingate engaged the enemy in one of the outer Burye forts with two platoons and the mortars, which small handful also repulsed a counter-attack by cavalry. The first blows in a memorable guerrilla campaign had been struck. One platoon continued to harass the fort all night. The Italians replied by firing a phenomenal number of shells and bullets at imaginary targets until dawn, and in two days they had abandoned the position.

On the 1st March platoons of the Frontier Battalion began to worry in their terrier style the easternmost fort of Burye, Mankusa, on the direct line of retreat for Burye garrison to Debra Markos. The fort buildings were burned by mortar bombs and drilled by a Vickers gun, while propagandists yelled at the troops through megaphones in intervals of fire.

THE TREK BEGINS. Four legs go where four wheels cannot; but the hard country took its toll.





PATRIOT GUERRILLA FIGHTERS pick at the Italian defences before the forts of Debra Markos.

There were many desertions. The Eritrean N.C.O.s had to tie up a lot of the enemy troops. At a crucial moment two old Ethiopian ladies were mobilised to creep into the fort cowfold, unlock the door, and drive out the entire cattle herd into the arms of the waiting Patriots. These bizarre tactics of a ubiquitous aggressor were too much for Natale, and on 4th March, screened by low-flying aircraft and girdled by cavalry, his army came swarming out along the road to Debra Markos. They nearly overran Gideon Force, who stepped aside in the nick of time. Wingate himself had to run miles. Then Boustead's Frontier Battalion—at this point only 300 strong—closed behind the Italian retreat and tickled up their tail.

Here was a moment when, if aircraft from our meagre resources could have been spared, the Italian army in Gojjam might have been blotted out. Chased by 300 Sudanese experts, with a population out to strip them of their rifles and their clothes panting on either flank like African hunting dogs, they were marching straight on the 2nd Ethiopian Battalion which lay across the road on a river-bed just west of Dembacha. As it was, the 2nd Ethiopians had to take the blow of this great body without the final demoralising influence of the air to aid them. Individual platoons put up a very stiff resistance. One Ethiopian ran out into the road in front of the armoured cars that led the

advancing horde, carefully laid his anti-tank rifle on the open ground and at short range knocked out two of the cars. He then removed the breech and ran away. The place was strewn with Italian dead, of whom 120 were later counted. But so small a force could not indefinitely stop Natale, who in the end flooded over and round them, breaking up their baggage train on the way. Indeed, the force was so small that the greater part of it was able to hide in bushes and water-pools, and to survive.

Very shaken, Natale abandoned Dembacha on the 8th, and Fort Emanuel on the 10th, taking all the garrisons with him to Debra Markos.

13—The Emperor Comes Home

THE ENTIRE Italian army of the Gojjam, except for a battalion at Mota and the forces of Torelli now invested by other sections of the Frontier Battalion in the far north at Bahrdar Giyorgis, was now concentrated at Debra Markos and in the powerful positions in the Gulit hills a few miles west of Debra Markos on the Burye road. They numbered more than 12,000 men, with the usual Italian proportion of mountain artillery. The 2nd Ethiopian Battalion, after their harrowing experience, could no longer be accounted a combatant force; the fighting for Debra Markos fell upon the shoulders of 300 Sudanese of the Frontier Battalion, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Boustead. It was now that they developed a new technique in organised guerrilla warfare.

Following the enemy down the road, they

had sniped his camp fires every night from close range with light automatics, but now in front of Debra Markos they took to bombardiering on a grand scale.

They would lay off their camel transport at a respectable distance from the enemy cavalry, using mules and horses only for close carrying. The fighting men camped very near the enemy under cover, and rested during the daytime—except for the officers, who reconnoitred new approaches to the enemy positions. At night parties, rarely more than 100 and often only 50 strong, went off quietly on an approach march well marked out. No talking was allowed above a whisper, and no reply allowed to the searching fire of an apprehensive enemy. The arms were rifle and bayonet, and two grenades a man, with Bren guns in support. After midnight the Sudanese crept up the hills in line, and came

within 10 yards of the enemy positions before they threw their bombs. There would be an attack with the bayonet; the position taken; the counter-attack beaten off, a silent withdrawal. In this way different positions were tackled every night, the Abina fort cleared, and the Gult line made intolerable. The enemy was forced on to his inner ring at Debra Markos, from which he was withdrawn across the Blue Nile by the High Command in Addis Ababa on the 3rd/4th April, shedding deserters by the thousand, two days before Lieut.-General Cunningham's troops, as is soon to be told, entered the capital.

And so on the 6th April the Emperor was able to raise the Ethiopian flag over the forts of Debra Markos. Ras Hailu, a diplomat of no mean order, had stayed behind with his Banda to stop looting, and now bowed to the ground

ALL GOJJAM REJOICES. Inside the forts of Debra Markos the Patriots hear the Emperor speak.



before his old suzerain with surprising measured grace for a man of his seventy years, dyed hair and ambiguous past. His chest was a jewel-box of Ethiopian and Italian orders. In Debra Markos, as previously in Enjabara, Burye and Dembacha, there was found food enough for a force many times the size of Gideon. Moreover, by a staggering feat of engineering and endurance, new American trucks had been brought from the Sudan across the tousled Belaya foothills, had been dragged by ropes and hundreds of men up the escarpment at Matakal, and were now running on the axial road of Gojjam. So the problem of supply, hitherto moving only at the camel's pace, was solved. South African aircraft brought munitions and dollars.

There remained Mota, seat of the Italian 60th Colonial Battalion, to be cleared up. To tackle this last fort 300 men of the Frontier Battalion marched in their game, resistant, spindle-legged Sudanese style over the Chokey range, 14,000 feet high, in a blizzard, in their tropical outfit with one blanket a man. Recovered from their mountain sickness, the black plainmen invested Mota. An order came from Headquarters to send back all except two platoons (60 men) and the mortar. The remaining handful, under their Colonel, then gave Mota the pasting that they felt it deserved.

The fort was mortared all night at given intervals, which were made more lively still with Bren gun fire. A British lieutenant was dressed up as a major and sent in with a letter ordering the enemy to yield. And yield he did, after a show of resistance. Four hundred troops got a shock when they saw two platoons file into the fort. Thus the whole of Gojjam except Bahrdar Giyorgis in the far north was taken from the Italians; and Nasi soon withdrew the Bahrdar garrison across Lake Tana to strengthen his own position in Gondar.

By the treachery of a Gojjami chief, Colonel Maraventano, commanding the Debra Markos garrison, with the 8,000 troops and Italian government officials who had not deserted him, had been allowed to slip across the Blue Nile unharmed, and to destroy the pontoon in that colossal gorge. Addis had fallen, so he turned north along the east bank of the Blue Nile for Dessie. Dessie fell, so he turned further north, hoping to make Debra Tabor.

Gideon Force were determined not to let him go.

One hundred men of the Frontier Battalion, some 60 of the 2nd Ethiopians (now refitted and re-formed), and 2,000 Patriots under old Ras-Kassa pursued him and pinned him down to fight in Agibar, a high tableland above the Nile. There, by a series of spirited and fierce attacks

THE MACHINES GET THROUGH. Crossing the Matakal escarpment to reach the axial road of Gojjam.



in the open, watched by the old Ras seated on a shooting-stick, and after a little more of the nightly nerve-war in which the regular platoons now specialised, they wore him out. For the loss of less than 200 allied troops killed, Colonel Maraventano on 22nd May put up the white flag over the biggest haul that Gideon made in Gojjam: 7,000 infantry, 120 light machine-guns, 50 heavy machine-guns, 7 mountain guns, 2 mortars, 15,000 mules, 300 horses, 700 Italian civil officials. The whole lot were disarmed under the scowl of three Bren guns, which were all that the British commander could spare for the operation.

He was given the D.S.O.

Gideon had done his work. With the help of the R.A.F. and of a friendly countryside he had smitten the Italians hip and thigh. He had pestered them and cheated them, given them no rest or sleep, he had broken down their nerves, and, a flyweight himself, had knocked the self-styled champion of East Africa into a corner. He had taught the British army new lessons in guerrilla warfare.

It was therefore fitting that, on 5th May, 1941, when, five years to the day after Marshal Badoglio entered Addis Ababa, the Emperor Haile Selassie came down Mount Entoto into his old capital, the 2nd Ethiopian Battalion marched ahead of his car and the turbaned

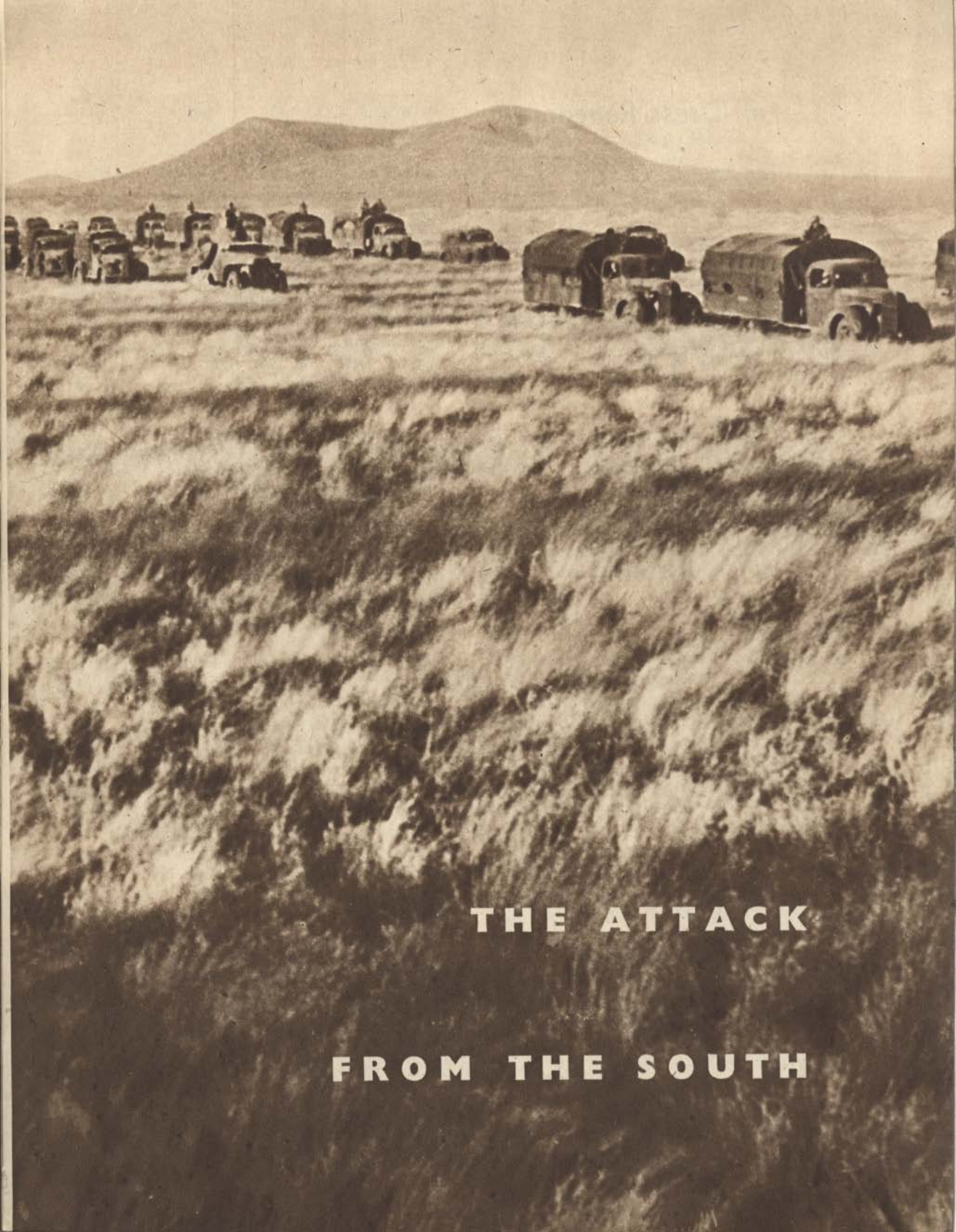
Frontier Battalion behind; and that another car carried the bald head of Mission 101, who in the hard days before arms and regular troops were available had maintained the prestige both of Britain and the Emperor in a tired Gojjam. Two battalions, with a mint of optimism and fearlessness and with the compelling name of the Lion of Judah on their flag, had defeated and largely captured or dispersed four Italian brigades, with all their horse, foot, artillery and aircraft. The total odds in man-power against them were 10 to 1; the odds in fire-power far greater. They had shown how to overcome these obstacles by exploitation of night, of bush, of superior discipline, enthusiasm, silence and cunning. As they marched into Addis Ababa the last 50 faithful camels of their train, past labour, were slaughtered on the hills above; you can find the bones of 15,000 of the rest all the way back to the Sudan.

The entry of the Emperor into Addis Ababa meant something more than the reversal of a four-year-old story discreditable to all except the victim. It meant the close instead of the distant co-ordination of the British forces coming from north and from south. For, before the Emperor entered his capital, British forces had reached it from the south, and were holding open its gates for him. It is time now to relate the amazing story of how they got there.

GIDEON FORCE ENTERS THE CAPITAL. The Ethiopians march ahead as the Emperor comes home.







THE ATTACK

FROM THE SOUTH

14—Full-Dress Rehearsal :

The Raid on El Wak

GENERAL CUNNINGHAM arrived in Kenya on 1st November. His forces crossed the Somaliland border and took Liboi on 24th January. On 6th April they entered Addis Ababa. The story of that 2,000-mile advance is the story of the southern of the two attacks which broke Italian power in East Africa. It is the story to be told in this and the next seven chapters.

Italian aggression in the south against Kenya had petered out by about the end of September. But Kenya had been just as anxious as the Sudan, and with equal reason. Our slender forces had put up an equally good show and had prevented the enemy occupying more than a few water-holes and isolated ports. Their outstanding actions were at Moyale when early in July a company of the King's African Rifles held off the attack of an Italian Brigade for five days and only retired when their water supply was exhausted; the subsequent serious skirmishing between Moyale and Buna; and the fighting in the area west of Lake Rudolf and up to the River Omo conducted by men of the King's African Rifles and a unit of Abyssinian Patriots. The East Africa Reconnaissance Squadron, composed of British settlers using open Ford trucks, emulated the feats of the Sudan motor machine-gun companies. Squadrons of the South African Air Force were also early on the scene and took telling toll of the Italian Air Force. But our first really offensive action was the attack of General Cunningham's troops at El Wak on 15th December. During the intervening months the dominating factor in the war was the heat and vastness of the frontier district

between Kenya on the one hand and Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland on the other.

This remarkable desert differs from the Sahara in all respects save desolation. African landscapes change slowly, but they do change, and the frontier district of Kenya includes six different types of country. The low coastal areas are covered with thick bush. Further west this bush becomes rather thinner, but its featureless interminabilities cover hundreds of thousands of square miles of country round Garissa, Bura, El Wak, Buna and Wajir,* and stretch north and east right to the hills of British Somaliland. Though penetrable on foot or in armoured cars, the scrub renders navigation difficult, since visibility is often only 100 yards, and, bar such occasional hills as Bura, most of the country is flat. The strips of the red murrum roads are often the only vivid colour in a landscape of grey baked earth and grey baked, leafless thorn trees.

Westwards the bush thins again, and the country east of Lake Rudolf is largely treeless, save where occasional illogical miracles like Mount Marsabit rise cool and green above the desert heat. Around Lake Rudolf itself lies fantastic lava country, containing black boulders of every size from cricket balls to billiard tables. South of Marsabit's volcanic slopes stretches the scruffy wilderness of the Khaisoot, while to the north the white sandy Chalbi Desert offers all the Beau Geste effects, except block-houses. In the dry weather the surface of this desert is a speed-track: in the rains it becomes a morass across which not even animals can travel. Through these desolate regions run the Tana and the northern Waso Nyiro rivers, bringing beauty and animal life, tall trees—and fever.

From September until December it seemed as if the British and Italian armies were lost in this great desert, as though the natural barrier between the Empires must defeat any full-scale invasion before it had begun. The fronts did not run close to each other: nor were they truly fronts. The war became an affair of

* See maps on pages 74 and 78-79.

patrols, a struggle for wells and isolated hills, of scouting raids, of swift manœuvres and attempted surprises carried out in a vast no-man's-land that separated the two armies.

During this period the British forces consisted of the 11th and 12th (African) Divisions, each containing one East and one West African Brigade. After its arrival the 1st South African Brigade was attached to the 12th Division. Between them these forces were responsible for the defence of all Kenya from the Sudan to the sea: between them they had to cover a front of 850 miles. The main bodies, naturally, had to be concentrated on roads at points where

water was found; and an important role in establishing control over this no-man's-land was played by irregular companies. For desert warfare the Italians made considerable use of Banda—specially enlisted colonial troops operating near the areas from which they were recruited, and well led by European officers. Two Somali Irregular companies, each about 250 strong, under white officers chosen for their knowledge of the country, proved a valuable counter to these Banda. At later stages other Irregular companies were organised from Abyssinian refugees, and, west of Rudolf, from Turkana tribesmen. These Irregulars

FRONTIER IN THE SOUTH. The sun-drenched Equator country, through which the African Divisions moved to the attack.



THE ONLY TREE FOR 10 MILES IN ANY DIRECTION.



SANDSTORM AT MIDDAY.



THE JUBALAND ROAD; HEAVY TRANSPORT HAS PASSED.



THE BAKED FLOOR OF THE CHALBI DESERT.

proved most useful for protecting exposed flanks and operating against enemy lines of communication in co-operation with attacks carried out by regular troops.

With the arrival of the 2nd and 5th South African Brigades it became possible to place the force on a three-division front. The 1st South African Division was established under the command of Major-General G. E. Brink, C.B., D.S.O.; but elasticity was preserved and one South African brigade was continually employed with one or other of the African divisions; while other South African units, such as the artillery, were attached and detached as required. The contribution made by Southern Rhodesia to this fine army was also of the highest value. Apart from the Rhodesian units, there were Rhodesian officers in many other regiments; and No. 237 Rhodesian Squadron of the R.A.F. operated in Kenya within a week of the Italian declaration of war until early in September, 1940, when it was moved to the Sudan to continue there its invaluable bombing and reconnaissance work.

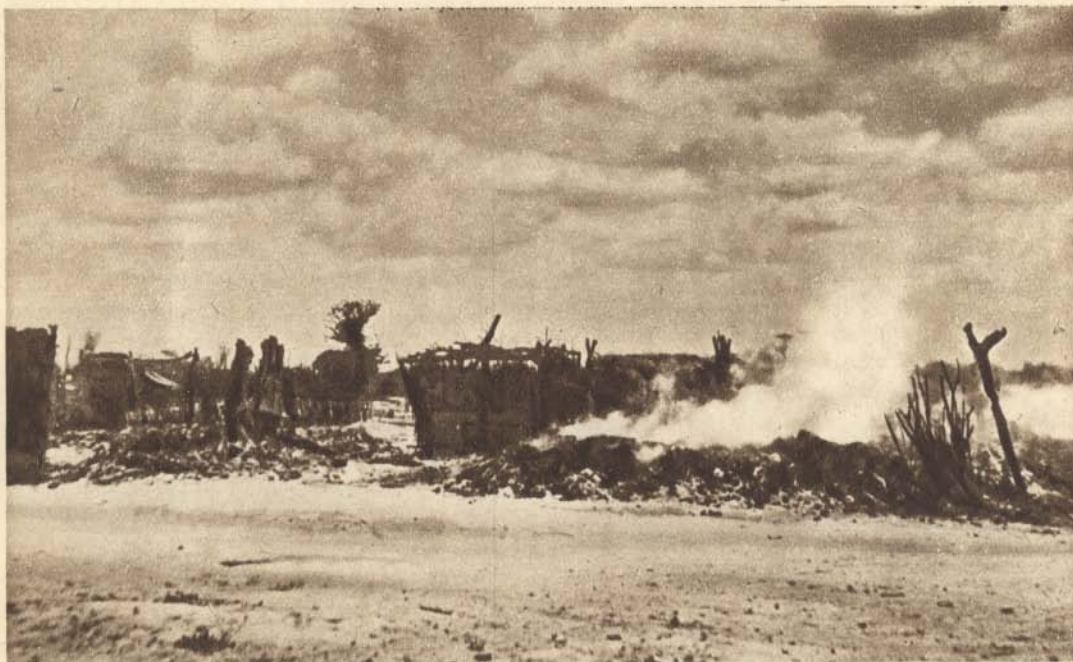
All the plans which General Cunningham made on his arrival in Kenya on 1st November, 1940, were conditioned by the date of the rains, which were due at the end of March. In view of the small force at his disposal and the high morale which at that period the Italian troops were still displaying, he reluctantly decided that any major offensive would have to be postponed until the following June, and that he would have to content himself for the time being with reducing the area of no-man's-land, with developing water in the waterless belts, with improving communications, with establishing moral ascendancy over the Italians by vigorous patrolling, and by cutting out isolated posts. An immediate result of this policy was one of the turning points of the campaign, the sudden and spectacular raid upon El Wak.

It was not surprising that our forces were successful at El Wak. The 1st South African and the 24th Gold Coast Brigades—the latter brilliantly led by Brigadier C. E. M. Richards—were used against one battalion, 16 guns and

some Banda; but the important thing about that minor victory was the manner in which it was won. The raid was the first full-dress show of the campaign: it was also, in the words of a forthright Brigadier, "the first military exercise I have not had to criticise when it was over."

Large bodies of men were moved from Wajir, 110 miles away, by night; they arrived at their destination unseen by hostile aircraft, and unexpected by the Italians. The enemy had not believed it possible for tanks and mechanical transport to travel through the boulder-studded bush—yet tanks and mechanical transport were there. The timing, the co-operation, the work of all the auxiliary units were excellent. And the South Africans and the men from the Gold Coast, who were blooded there, rose to their hour with a fire and fury which made light of a temperature of 106 degrees and of the enemy's defences.

There were dramatic happenings in plenty: when the Pioneers spent a whole night under fire, cutting three miles of track to the forward positions of the Gold Coast Brigade; when the Gold Coast Brigade lay out in the bush at dawn, peppered by machine-guns but refusing to reply in order that the enemy might not know what was coming; when the tanks charged through the bush, flattening everything before them, swung parallel with the defences, and delivered devastating broadsides along the whole quarter-mile of their length, from a range of 20 yards; when one tank was hit directly by a shell yet sustained only a slight crack in its armoured plating; when 2nd Lieut. Ballenden, three weeks out from England, seized a live Bangalore torpedo, which was about to explode, and, running through a hail of fire, placed it beneath the Italian wire—and lived; when the Gold Coast Brigade, their bayonets gleaming, dashed through the gaps in the wire beside the tanks; when the South Africans, who had worked round behind the enemy, charged into El Buro Hachi, shouting Zulu war cries, after advancing so calmly and shooting so well that they had killed 55 of the defenders without the loss of one man; when, after the battle, an



EL WAK RAZED. "There were not four walls standing in any part."

army co-operation plane turned fighter to shoot down a Caproni which was trying to bomb our columns.

The raid was entirely successful. When our forces withdrew there were not four walls standing in any part of El Wak or its adjoining villages. Sixteen guns and much material had been captured and the most important strategic outpost the Italians possessed in this sector had been razed to the ground.

But in its ultimate results El Wak counted for far more. From this moment dates the ascendancy in morale of our forces. From this moment dates the Italian collapse. During the period of their golden opportunity they had signally failed to drive down through the Frontier District. After El Wak their chance to strike had gone. The Italian force withdrew to the Juba line, leaving west of the river only a screen of Banda and some troops and guns at Afmadu in a strongly wired position. All this

had been accomplished at the cost of two South Africans killed and of a few Gold Coast wounded. El Wak had set the fashion for those almost bloodless victories, which were to prove such a feature of the campaign.

Shortly after this raid the whole military aspect was altered by the successes in the Western Desert and the enemy's withdrawal in Eritrea. In view of the condition of Italian morale, it was now apparent that a comparatively small-scale operation against Kismayu would have chances of success. There was sufficient transport available for a force of four brigades, as the finding of limited supplies of water by boring on the two possible invasion routes had considerably eased the situation. There was little time to spare before the rains, and it was decided to begin the operation on 11th February, the first date on which a full moon would enable the initial moves to be carried out at night.



THE ADVANCE ON MEGA

15—Feint to the North: The South Africans at Mega

ALTHOUGH the offensive which ultimately brought our army to Addis Ababa took the 2,000-mile route through Italian Somaliland, the first large-scale attack upon enemy territory

was launched some weeks earlier to the north-east of Lake Rudolf.

This invasion was not intended to strike through to the enemy's capital, although along the direct route the distance from Nairobi is only 900 miles. The arrival of the rains, it was realised, would play havoc with communications, especially in the Abyssinian highlands. There were, however, many strong arguments in favour of a limited invasion. There was, for instance, the possibility that successes in Southern Abyssinia would stimulate a rising in the Galla-Sidamo area. And in any case

Mega, Yavello and Neghelli were in themselves not unworthy objectives.

There was a third, even more cogent, reason. Although of necessity the chapters of this book cover individual actions, it is essential to realise that in the plans of the High Command these actions were in no way isolated. Thus it was considered rightly that previous and simultaneous action in the Galla-Sidamo area would prevent the enemy from sending reinforcements to the defence of Jubaland. In actual fact, as the direct result of the work of the 1st South African Division, not one man was moved from the Galla-Sidamo area, and later on, when the 12th Division had replaced the South Africans in Southern Abyssinia, they likewise constituted a threat which prevented powerful forces from being sent to assist in resisting our advance through Harar and Diredawa.

From Marsabit two roads ran into Abyssinia—one north-east to Moyale and one due north through Dukana. The more easterly was the shorter of the two, but Moyale had been lost in the early days of the war, and had it used this route our army would have been faced with the necessity of storming frontally the precipitous escarpment which juts sharply upward at this, the extreme limit of Kenya's Northern Frontier District. The western road was long, bad and unreliable. It ran in turn down the lava slopes of Marsabit, across the sandy floor of the Chalbi Desert, which was likely to turn into a lake in the rains, and through the blistering volcanic wastes to the east of Lake Rudolf. Finally, near the border, it petered out into miles of desolate bush. This road, however, had one supreme merit: it offered, potentially, a method of turning the Moyale-Mega escarpment.

After preliminary engagements at El Sardu and El Yibo, which cleared the Italians from Kenya territory, on 30th January, some weeks before the Jubaland attack, two strong columns, consisting of the 2nd and 5th South African Brigades, left Dukana, moving in parallel formation a few miles apart. That night they camped on Abyssinian soil in the bush between

Mount Dibbandibba and Mount Murdur. Early next morning they were again on the move. There were no tracks; the armoured cars led the way in their dual capacity of forts and steamrollers, and before them the bush fell flat. After a while they cut the Hobok-Gorai road, which runs parallel to the border some 10 to 15 miles within Italian territory. The Brigades now swung left and right respectively, one west by north against El Gumu and Hobok, the other east by south against Gorai.

Gorai did not look an easy fort to take. It stood on the southern lip of a crater, a mile and a half across, 400 feet in depth, which rose, though not steeply, from the thick scrub of the surrounding plains, and in all directions it commanded an excellent field of fire. It was unapproachable from the south by mechanical transport, because of the broken nature of the country, but the route taken outflanked both natural obstacles and Italian fixed ideas.

Gorai was one of those actions in which fortune favours the efficient. By 4 p.m. some of the armoured cars had worked their way round to the northern side of the crater to block the road to escape, while a company of South African Infantry opened a vigorous fire from the northern lip. The Italians, who had

EL YIBO. An Italian lieutenant's view of the Lak Bulal, from which the final assault was made. He fought bravely until he was killed.



prepared their defences under the delusion that attack must come frontally from the south, now believed that it was coming from the north, whereas actually, at 4.30, after a short, sharp bombardment, it came from the south and west. An armoured car crashed out of the bushes, up the long bare slope, through the wire, and into the fort itself. The infantry charged behind it with fixed bayonets through a furious, but rather inaccurate, fire. Many of the defending Banda fought bravely to the last, and when all was over, it seemed miraculous that so strong a position could have been taken at the cost of only two lives: at that period victories without casualties had not yet come to be regarded as a matter of course.

Meanwhile, a few miles further to the west, the other Brigade was proving equally successful. They had to take an even more roadless route, but they reached El Gumu by 2 p.m. on the day that Gorai was captured. El Gumu was nothing more than a track junction approximately half-way between Hobok and Gorai, and it fell at once after a brisk encounter. Next morning the Brigade advanced on Hobok.



MEGA TAKEN. Some of the 600 prisoners marching from the fort, captured after three unforgettable days of rain, mud and freezing temperatures.

Hobok was rather a spectacular-looking place. It stood on a prominence on the edge of the Lak Bulal, and behind it in the middle distance loomed the blue, cool slopes of the Abyssinian hills. Like Gorai it did not look an easy fort to take, but here the enemy proved less determined and fled before the actual arrival of the armoured cars.

Several interesting points emerged from these actions, which were fought after El Wak, but before Italian incompetence had become apparent. On each occasion, positions, well chosen and passably fortified, were neither resolutely held nor utterly abandoned. The result was a costly and ineffective defence.

After the capture of Hobok and Gorai, the 2nd and 5th South African Brigades combined to launch a joint attack on Mega. As usual, plans were made to cut off the retreat of the garrison and to avoid anything in the nature of a crude frontal assault. While the 5th South African Brigade was preparing to attack from the west, the 2nd South African Brigade embarked on a long detour. It first crossed the Mega-Yavello road, where it detached one company to resist the approach of reinforcements, then swung in a great semicircle through the hills, and finally worked right round to the south and south-east of the town. The company left to block the road was counter-attacked by fifteen tanks from the direction of Yavello, but it held its ground and no help got through to the defenders of Mega.

The action that followed marked the first encounter of the South Africans with a considerable body of Italian white troops, but it was more remarkable for the overcoming of yet another set of East Africa's kaleidoscopic physical conditions. The weather, which had been fine for some weeks, broke up completely at almost the very moment when the attack began, and for three unforgettable days in rain, mud, and temperatures that were little over freezing, troops, tropically equipped and for months acclimatised to 110°, were engaged in attacking a 3,000-foot escarpment. Their transport and supplies were bombed; they had

to sleep without ground-sheets or overcoats; those under observation of the Italians could not be permitted fires or cigarettes. Rations were limited to one tin of bully-beef a day and one biscuit for four men. So terrible did conditions become that tales are told of men who stripped at midnight and beat each other's bodies to restore the circulation. Serious exposure cases were frequent. And, to make everything more difficult still, the scrub was so thick that it was at times necessary to turn round and crawl through it backwards.

It is difficult to envisage a much more trying combination of physical conditions, but on the third day of the actual fighting the artillery, which had been manhandled through the morasses, silenced the enemy guns: precipices that native guides had declared unscalable were climbed, and the infantry charged with fixed bayonets through black rain-clouds and thunder against their invisible objective. After twenty minutes, through a rift in the storm, a white flag could be seen fluttering over the fort.

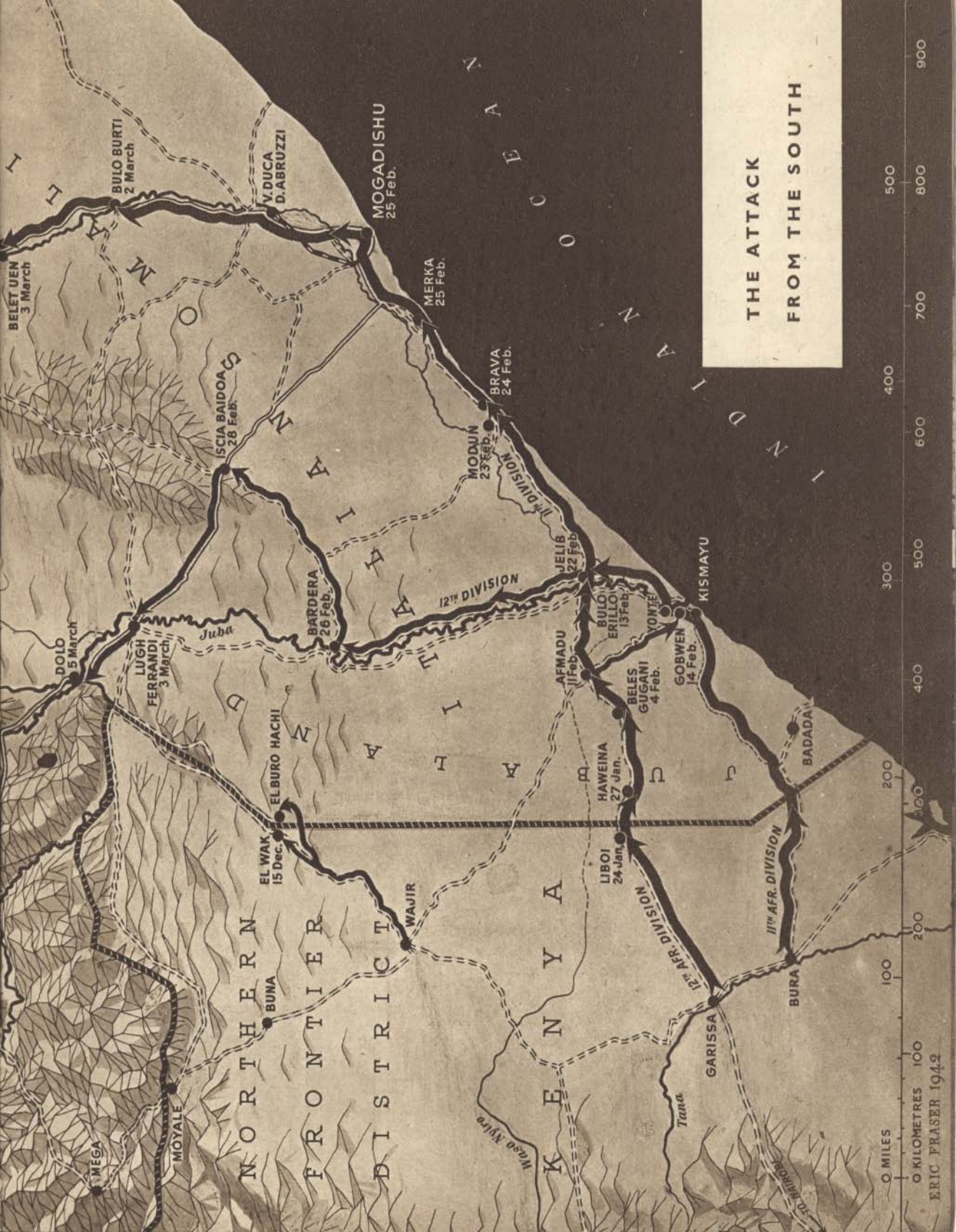
The remaining adventures of the 1st South African Division are quickly told. On 22nd February a patrol of Abyssinian Irregulars, attached to the Division, occupied Moyale without a fight, the Italians deciding to abandon the fruits of their much advertised victory of eight months before on the day that Mega fell: later, the 21st East African Brigade, who at that time were operating under the 1st South African Division, occupied Yavello without encountering resistance and went on to fight a brilliant little action at Soroppa, but from then on the heavy rains made movement and maintenance extremely difficult. The Division was therefore withdrawn from this part of the front, in order that it might be used in Italian Somaliland, but events there moved with such velocity that neither the opportunity nor the necessity arose. The 5th South African Brigade was released for service in Egypt, and the 2nd South African Brigade was sent to back up the Berbera landing and to guard communications in Somaliland. Having done a brief

but difficult and important job extremely well, these Brigades, save for two battalions which were used in the battle of the Lakes, passed out of the East African limelight, and future developments in Southern Abyssinia are concerned with the fortunes of the 11th and 12th (African) Divisions.

16—"The Chance Is Now Before You"

The victories of Imperial troops further north have filled us in East Africa with pride and excitement, though no doubt the ensuing period has been touched with envy and strong desire to emulate these achievements. The chance is now before you to prove what I well know, that the East African Force is no whit behind in dash, courage and endurance. . . Hit them, hit them hard and hit them again.

THESE WORDS used by General Cunningham in his special telegram before the attack on Afmadu were the keynotes of the British offensive against Somaliland, but when the first patrols moved forward from Garissa into the dusty, sun-scorched wilderness which lies between the Tana and the Juba rivers, neither they nor the High Command had any idea that they were starting an offensive that would not end even with the capture of Addis Ababa. Only four motorised Brigade groups were available against the six Italian brigades and six Banda groups which held the Juba, and it seemed a sufficiently ambitious undertaking to extend the 230 miles of communications between railhead and Garissa by another 280 miles of far more difficult country to Kismayu, along tracks which had originally been made by animals and had since been little improved by



man. All advances would have to be made by night, for the Italian Air Force had not yet been grounded, for all its curious, and even now inexplicable, lethargy.

This was the plan. While the attention of the Italians was partially occupied with a sham offensive in the neighbourhood of El Wak, the 12th Division, starting from Garissa, was to take the road junction of Afmadu. Thence one column, the 24th Gold Coast, was to continue straight on, capture Bulu Erillo, and threaten Jelib, which stood on the further bank of the Juba River and was the most important road junction in this part of Italian Somaliland. Meanwhile the 1st South African Brigade was to swing south to capture Gobwen on the Kenya side of the mouth of the Juba, cutting off the retreat of the Kismayu garrison, and to force the river crossing. While the threat to Gobwen developed, the 11th Division was to advance suddenly and secretly, and, in co-operation with the Navy, to attack the Kismayu garrison. Once the offensive began, it had to move swiftly, for if it did not go according to schedule, shortage of supplies would necessitate a withdrawal to the Kenya border.

All went well. The Italians successfully repelled the non-existent attack against Bardera, while the 12th Division, headed by the 22nd East African Brigade, advanced into Italian Somaliland. They took Liboi on 24th January, Haweina on 27th January, and Beles Gugani on 4th February, which brought them to Afmadu. Strong Italian resistance was to be expected here, but it did not materialise. Shell-fire combined with an especially heavy air raid to break the Italians' nerve, and when, on 11th February, the full-scale offensive began, the King's African Rifles entered Afmadu unopposed by 7 a.m. that morning. The garrison had fled into the bush and begun a hopeless, waterless march towards the Juba, which few could hope to reach.

Three days later Lower Jubaland was ours. The Gold Coast Brigade next took Bulu Erillo on 13th February. The South Africans captured Gobwen on 14th February. There was

neither time nor need to bring the 11th Division into action. On 13th February the Italians fled from Kismayu and on 14th February the armoured cars and the King's African Rifles entered the port without having to fight their way.

Although these immense advances were achieved with singularly little bloodshed, the Gold Coast and the South Africans each experienced one stern test. Bulu Erillo was a strong position, heavily wired, protected by tank traps and land-mines, and defended by Italian colonial troops supported by artillery and armoured cars. The approach had to be made on foot through dense bush, through which the Italian armoured cars charged down specially prepared lanes, and the whole of which was alive with machine-gun posts. Ten yards was the normal visibility. But although the leading troops of the 2nd Gold Coast Regiment had practically all their white personnel either killed or wounded, they pushed the attack home with unabated courage, captured the objective and quantities of material, including a 65 mm. battery and five armoured cars, one at the point of the bayonet. The African troops came through this ordeal splendidly. As one Gold Coast native said with a beaming smile, "It was a fine fight. We beaten them."

The South Africans, on the other hand, took Gobwen practically without a fight. The principal resistance came from the thorn bushes, which proved so tangled that recourse was had to linking arms and advancing through them backwards. But the crossing proved to be a different matter. The Juba is 580 feet across, the bridges had been destroyed, and as they approached the banks our men found themselves under heavy fire from across the river. Two thousand shells came over at practically one a second, from a distance of only 3,000 yards. It was for the moment impossible to force a crossing.

Kismayu proved to be a dusty, untidy town, vigorously and pettily, though unscientifically, sabotaged. For instance, though the whole white population had been evacuated and the



CUNNINGHAM STRIKES. S. 79's burning on Gobwen aerodrome.



FEB. 14th: The King's African Rifles enter Kismayu.



DRY JUBA



WET JUBA

ice factory had been destroyed, three of the 49 coast defence guns and 10 of the 16 anti-aircraft guns which were captured had not been damaged beyond repair. The Somalis and Arabs gave our men an enthusiastic reception. A great crowd assembled in the square, and for the first time we encountered the remarkable friendliness which all through the campaign was displayed by the alleged enemy populations.

Three days after the launching of the main offensive, six days before the time-table, objectives had been captured which two months before had seemed unattainable before the rains. Mussolini had lost the most valuable portions of the territory that had been ceded to Italy from Kenya as part payment for her services during the last Great War.

17—The Break-Through on the Juba

THE JUBA is the main river of Italian Somaliland. It flows from the cool, well-watered hills of Southern Abyssinia down to the Indian Ocean just south of the Equator, bringing with

it a touch of colour and even shade. The Juba world is a world of its own, a belt of palms and green luxuriance many hundred miles long and anything from a few hundred yards to a few miles in breadth. North of Jelib this belt forms an almost continuous strip of jungle: south of Jelib it is broken by patches of cultivation, where tropical products such as pawpaws, mangoes and cotton grow. The Juba's floods during the rains are famous. Far upstream, hundreds of miles from the sea, it is capable of drowning the country for miles around, and even in the dry weather it remains a serious obstacle to the passage of an army.

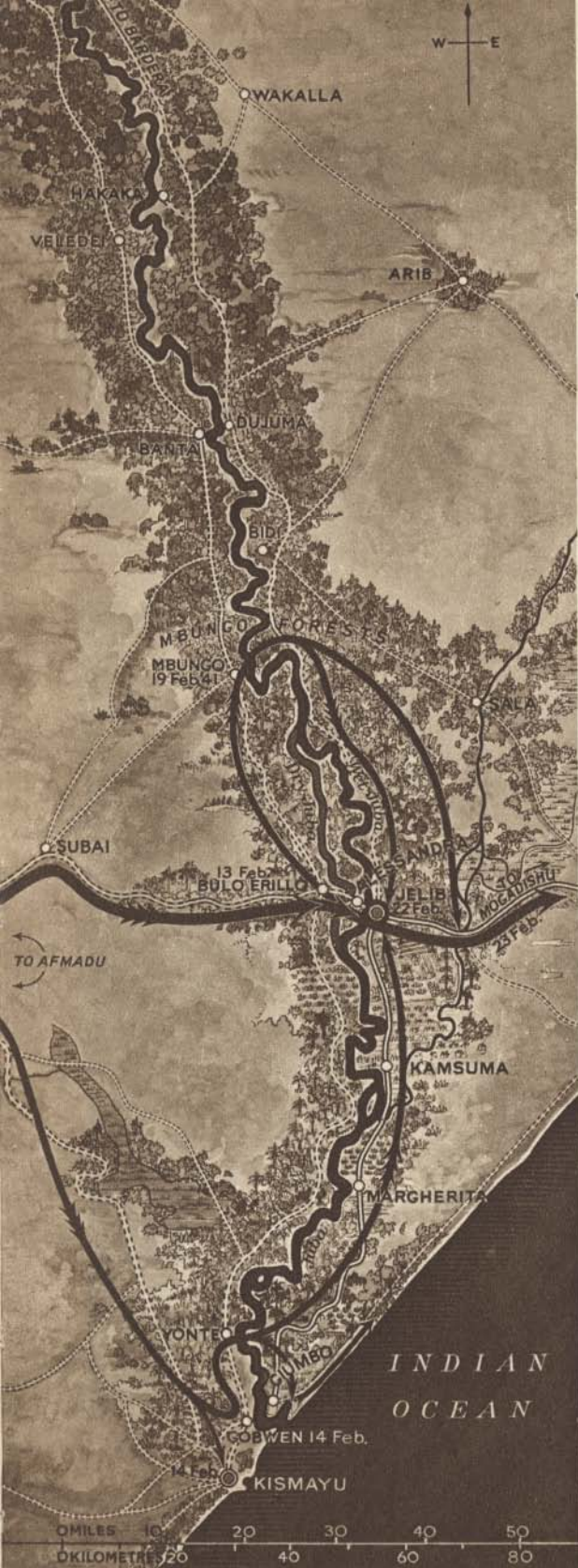
The forcing of the Juba line proved to be the most decisive action not only in the battle for Somaliland but also in the whole campaign fought by the East African Force. The river was the best, if not the only, natural defence which Somaliland possessed. Here the enemy had grouped the greater portion of his forces in Italian Somaliland: here any of the Italians who believed that the British could be held believed that the British would be held. Beyond it the much advertised Italian road system began: the fall of Jelib would open up to our troops not only a rapid route to Mogadishu, but also another line of attack along the river to Lugh Ferrandi, Dolo, Neghelli, and the southern highlands of Abyssinia.

From time immemorial defending armies have held the lines of rivers, but such positions are less impregnable now than they used to be. A mobile attacking force can tap rapidly here

and there until it finds a relatively undefended crossing. Pontoon bridges, mechanically transported, can be rushed up and erected in the course of a night—and even the possession by the defence of motorised reserves cannot entirely counter these considerations. The news that an enemy has passed natural obstacles in which great faith has been placed has an adverse effect on morale, and the belief that these armies are pushing on, “mushrooming” out and cutting the lines of retreat, leads to the rapid abandonment of points along the river bank. In addition the Italians had made the mistake of grouping too many men on the banks of the Juba, rather than holding a sufficient mobile force in readiness for counter-attack. However, for all this, the fact remains that the breaking of the Juba line by numerically inferior forces was no simple task, and its successful and rapid accomplishment in the face of Italian resistance was a magnificent performance.

On 16th February the battle of Jubaland had been won, but the battle for the rest of Somaliland had not yet begun in earnest. The Juba near Jelib has formed two channels, that to the west being known as the Dry Juba, and that to the east as the Wet. Bulo Erillo, which Gold Coast troops had captured on 13th February, was situated west of the Dry Juba; Jelib, which the Italians held in great strength, was 10 miles further east just beyond the Wet. Midway between Bulo Erillo and Jelib, where the road crossed the island formed between the two channels, the village of Alessandra was

THE JUBA CROSSED.





still in Italian hands. Fifty miles south, as the crow flies, the South Africans were at Gobwen on the western bank ; the Italians faced them from Gumbo, beyond the river.

As a frontal attack on Jelib clearly stood poor chances of success, and as the Italian artillery at Gumbo had already demonstrated its power, both the Gold Coast and South African Brigades were ordered to probe for other, less well defended crossings. These were duly found, by the South Africans at Yonte, 14 miles to the north of Gobwen, and by the Gold Coast Brigade in the thick forests of Mbungo, 30 miles to the north of Jelib.

Counter-attacks were to be expected ; and they came. While many of the South Africans were still crossing in their collapsible canoes on the night of 17th-18th February, they were attacked by a patrol which they threw back partly by artillery and partly by fire from

FEB. 25th : MOGADISHU. Italian arch, African triumph. *Below*, life goes on, under new control.





STORES OF A BEATEN ARMY. Checking Italian ammunition at Mogadishu. The haul so far was 250,000 square miles of territory, 30,000 prisoners, 350,000 gallons of petrol, rations to feed 10,000 men for six months, weapons and stores of every kind in perfect condition.

armoured cars, concealed on the western bank. The enemy attacked again at midnight, and yet again, disastrously, at dawn. An officer eye-witness has vividly described this scene :

As they pressed on, silhouetted against the eastern sky, armoured cars on the western bank and infantry with rifles and machine-guns and mortars on the eastern bank literally annihilated them. After the action we buried fifty-six dead, and took twenty-five wounded prisoners. It was afterwards heard that many others died in the bush or dragged themselves off hit. Every man of the whole Italian force of 208 was either killed or wounded, according to evidence secured later.

This proved the end, not only of resistance to the crossing at Yonte, but also to the defence of

Gumbo. The garrison were not prepared to face again the fire-power of the South African infantry and the " rhino " cars, as the armoured fighting vehicles had been christened by the Italian native troops. When their retreat by road had been cut off by an arduous march through the bush, all the defenders surrendered save a very few, who attempted to escape along the coast to Modun.

The men of the Gold Coast had an easier crossing on 19th February. The concentration of artillery against the defences of Jelib persuaded the enemy that a frontal attack was coming, and the counter-attack against the bridge-head at Mbungo was late and lacking in determination. Jelib was now threatened from three sides. Northwards, up the east

bank of the river from Yonte, the South Africans were rushing. Southwards, down the east bank from Mbungo, the West Coast troops were rushing. From Bulo Erillo, across the Dry Juba, other Gold Coast troops had taken Alessandra and were threatening the defenders with a frontal attack from the west. And now the 22nd East African Brigade, starting from Mbungo, plunged into the bush along a track that was little more than a mark upon a map, and after two days of epic struggling along compass courses, came out at last on the Mogadishu road and cut off the only possible retreat of the garrison, 18 miles from Jelib. The Italians attempted to offer resistance, but it was always brushed aside. Bewildered and bamboozled by the fury, the speed and the unexpectedness of the attack, their armies crumbled. The native troops deserted and fled into the bush. And the white troops, unable to face the prospect of fighting it out alone, surrendered in their hundreds. To the South Africans belongs the honour of being the first in Jelib. They took the town at 10.15 a.m. on 22nd February, but the Gold Coast would probably have been there as soon had they not been delayed by minefields.

The break-through on the Juba had been greatly assisted by the collapse of the Italian Air Force. In the earlier stages of the advance it had only been possible to move by night, and, in spite of all precautions, there had been losses from heavy bombings. But the S.A.A.F. had taken action. Fierce attacks on Afmadu and Gobwen aerodromes had combined with the vigorous individual performance of Captain Frost, who single-handed shot down three Italian bombers and one of their two escorting fighters in the space of a few minutes, to cause the Italians to confine their air activities to bombing on moonlight nights. This had enabled our columns to change their methods and move entirely by day.

"Hit them, hit them hard and hit them again" had been General Cunningham's orders, and our forces did not pause for rest or breath before reaping to the full the fruits

of the Juba break. Before the fall of Jelib our advance had been fast enough; it quickened now, and the next few days saw the relentless pursuit of the stricken enemy: a pursuit that for speed and distance has been unequalled in the history of warfare. Italian Somaliland dropped into our lap like a rather dusty and desiccated plum.

Jelib had fallen on 22nd February. Its fall marked a definite stage in the campaign. For on that date General Cunningham made up his mind that he could hope to reach Harar, a thousand miles ahead, and he cabled for General Wavell's permission to try. He knew that he was faced by a demoralised enemy, and that if the enemy could be kept on the run demoralisation would continue. In fact, General de Simone did run for 2,000 miles before he was captured, and during the whole of that Odyssey demoralisation never failed. General Cunningham also knew that the route to Harar remained dry even when heavy rains were falling further north. So he pushed on from Jelib.

By the evening of 23rd February the East African 22nd Brigade were in Modun, 150 miles along the Mogadishu road. On the morning of the 24th they captured Brava, five miles from Modun up a branch road to the coast, while the Nigerians swept through them and on. They entered the port of Merka, 50 miles farther on, on 25th February, and that same evening armoured cars and light forces entered Mogadishu. The Nigerian Brigade, between 6 a.m. on the 23rd February, when they started from Mbungo, and 5 p.m. on 25th February, when they entered Mogadishu, had covered no less than 275 miles.

This advance had not been entirely unresisted. There had been short, sharp fights at such points as Modun and Merka, but 20 miles from Mogadishu opposition ceased. The capital of Italian Somaliland had been declared an open town; it was not shelled or bombed. And so rapidly had the Italians fled that they had little time for sabotage. The great white, stucco, crenelated palaces and government

buildings, the glaring façades of the banks and hotels still shone unshattered amid the native hovels. The dilapidated Arab and Somali houses had crumbled into ruins, not through bombardment but through age and inattention.

Meanwhile the 12th Division had turned off on a line of its own and was striking north along the Juba River. Although there were grave difficulties of transport and supply, all the enemy forces were cleared from this part of Somaliland with astonishing speed. Bardera was occupied on 26th February, Iscia Baidoa on 28th February, Lugh Ferrandi on 3rd March, and Dolo on 5th March.

. . . At last, after weary months of waiting, we are now being given a chance to share in Mr. Winston Churchill's policy of "tearing and continuing to tear Mussolini's much vaunted Roman Empire to tatters." The operations on which you are to be engaged will give you the chance of achieving very decisive results. If relentlessly conducted, there is every likelihood of our starting the complete demoralisation and collapse of the Italian forces in East Africa. . . . I do not disguise from you the fact that in these coming days you will have to fight hard and live hard, but in you I have the highest confidence. . . . Fight fiercely, shoot low, move quickly. If any enemy escape you—and I hope very few will do so—let them be missionaries of terror, whose tales to their comrades will unnerve them for their meeting with you when the time comes.

These words were contained in a special message from Major-General Godwin Austen to the 12th Division before the battle of Jelib. How true they were and how well they were taken to heart, the story of the conquest of Italian Somaliland shows. Six weeks after the first patrols crossed the border at Liboi, a fortnight after the forcing of the Juba line, 250,000 square miles of enemy territory were in our hands, the enemy had lost his last port on the Indian Ocean, and there was barely a coherent enemy force surviving in the colony that the Italians had possessed for almost 50 years. Quantities of petrol, ammunition, weapons and stores of every kind, were abandoned in perfect condition in the headlong rout. The 102nd Division

and nearly the whole of the 101st Division had been destroyed. Up to the fall of Mogadishu alone, more than 30,000 of the Italian forces had been killed or captured, or had fled in panic into the waterless bush, where many died, but whence many more came staggering back to beg to be allowed to surrender.

18—*Racing North :*

Mogadishu to the Marda Pass

IT IS THE AMBITION of most offensives to exert not only powerful but also sustained pressure. This ideal is very seldom realised, owing to difficulties of supply and administration, but unrelenting continuity was as much a feature of the campaign as the speed with which the invasion moved or the distances which it covered. The Italians, routed on the Juba by an enemy whom their propaganda had taught them was decadent, were never given even a few days of respite in which to rally their forces and their morale.

BEHIND THE SPEARHEAD. Advance from Mogadishu depended upon the communications with Kenya. Demolition, evil roads and water shortage were the problems of the auxiliary units.





MARCH 1st: THE FASTEST PURSUIT IN MILITARY HISTORY BEGINS, along the tarmac surface of the

It had been possible to expedite the original advance into Jubaland by creating advance dumps of petrol, ammunition and supplies, but as the invasion progressed such methods ceased to be possible. The new situation was met, partially, by the opening of the Indian Ocean ports of Kismayu, Merka and Mogadishu. Each of these ports had been sabotaged, but neither wholly nor efficiently, and each in turn was rapidly put in commission, thanks to the energetic work of special units. Mogadishu provided unexpected assistance, in the shape of 200 officers and men of the British Mercantile Marine, who, in spite of six months' imprisonment, immediately volunteered to assist in reconditioning Merka; but it also provided an additional problem, for magnetic mines had been dropped in the harbour on February 7th. Once these were cleared, it soon proved possible to land 500 tons of material a day.

Neither shipping nor facilities were available, however, for handling mechanical transport. The old lines of communication with Kenya had therefore to be maintained. They were long enough already, even before the partial collapse of the sand roads between the Tana and

the Juba created the need for small divergences and a major detour round Dif. Now to these 800 miles between railhead and Mogadishu was added a further 50 miles each day as the Nigerians began their spectacular rush inland towards Jijiga.

All through these stages of the campaign the work of the auxiliary units, including the coloured units from South Africa, cannot be too highly praised. To these men, who bulldozed animal tracks into motor-car roads at the rate of a mile an hour behind the very foremost advancing troops, who fought with sand pans that became furrowed like ploughed fields or crumbled into a dry bog of thin, fine particles; to the ingenuity of the mechanics and to the persistence of the drivers; to the men who found the water and to the men who expanded the output of the wells—to all these the success of the invasion was very largely due.

On 1st March the Nigerian mobile column moved out of Mogadishu. They travelled on some of the 350,000 gallons of motor spirit that had been captured in the town, and they took the route that Graziani had followed to the Ogaden Plateau. They drove first of all

30 ft. wide Strada Imperiale.

Every 10 miles a flamboyant kilometre post.

Every three miles an overturned Italian lorry.

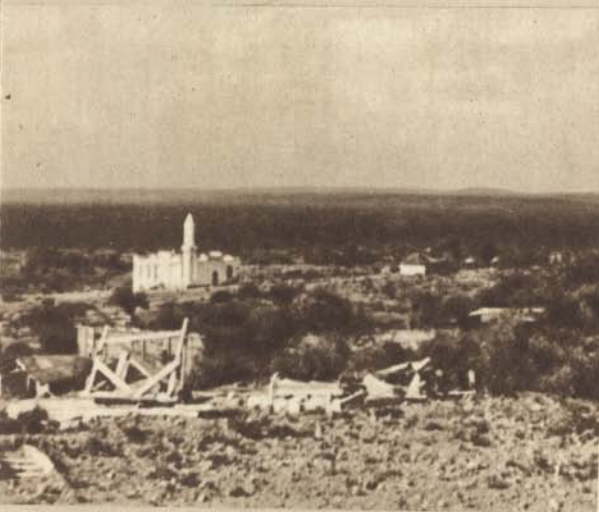
MARCH 2nd, 136 miles. The "rather embarrassed Fascist Eagle."

MARCH 3rd, 208 miles. Strong-point of Chianti bottles.

along the tarmac surface of the 30-foot-wide Strada Imperiale, through the hot, scrub-covered coastal flats. Every 10 miles a flamboyant kilometre post bore the name of some celebrated general who had helped to create the Empire, and every three miles an overturned Italian lorry bore witness to the collapse of his work. After 56 miles the Nigerians came to greener country round the Villagio Duca degli Abruzzi, where the experimental plantations stand and the small-gauge railway from Mogadishu ends. They swept by the rather embarrassed looking Fascist Eagle which stands in the main street in Bullo Burti. They came to the Sahara-like oasis of Belet Uen, where tall palm trees bring shade even at midday. They passed the house at the nearby crossroads where the Italians had improvised defences out of old Chianti bottles; they passed the Scillave wells, where the thousands of goats and camels of the Somali tribesmen gather. The Strada Imperiale had faded out; the roads grew rapidly worse, but the Nigerians never paused. They swept across a waste of featureless white sand, as bare as the Chalbi Desert; past the broken statue of Mussolini which, chinless and



MARCH 6th, 354 miles. The old Somali watches.



MARCH 7th, 426 miles. The mosque at Gabredarre.



MARCH 17th, 744 miles. The entrance to Jijiga plain, from the heights beyond.

bullet-riddled, stands in this desert like the bust of Ozymandias, King of Kings ; past the mosque of Gabredarre beyond the desert and on to the fort of Daghabor ; across the waves of the bush-speckled sand-sea that lies beyond Daghabor, and finally out on to the broad green plain on which Jijiga stands. It is a journey of 744 miles in all, and after the early stages the road is nowhere good ; the Italians had placed land-mines where they considered best, but in spite of all these obstacles the Nigerians completed the fastest pursuit in history.

The strength of the mobile column varied with the ability to supply it. For instance, Daghabor, 590 miles to the north of Mogadishu, was taken by some armoured cars and two companies of the 2nd Nigeria Regiment at a time when the rest of the battalion was 100 miles behind. The last Italian lorries were just leaving Daghabor and the rearmost ones were caught and roughly handled ; but after that it was necessary to pause a day or two while waiting for supplies. At this time the leading troops had averaged 58 miles a day, and below is given a time-table of their extraordinary advance.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Left from</i>	<i>Distance travelled</i>
1st March	Mogadishu	—
2nd March	Bulo Burti	136 miles
3rd March	Belet Uen	208 "
4th March	Ferfer	234 "
6th March	Scillave	354 "
7th March	Gabredarre	426 "
10th March	Daghabur	580 "
17th March	Jijiga	744 "

This is perhaps the most appropriate point at which to tell of the recapture by our forces of British Somaliland. For it was this headlong advance of the Nigerians which caused the Italian High Command to order the evacuation of the colony. The 70th Brigade began to withdraw towards the Abyssinian frontier. On 16th March a force from Aden, admirably organised by Air Vice-Marshal Reid, sailed into Berbera and occupied the town in the face of very little opposition. But things happened too quickly for the 70th Brigade, and they failed to reach the road junction at Jijiga before the Nigerians. Their retreat was cut off, and they found themselves plunged into a series of terrible obscure adventures. A General Bertello, their commanding officer, was reported to have ridden through Diredawa a few hours before the arrival of the British, and months later he was taken prisoner in Western Abyssinia, but nothing more has been heard of his brigade. It simply melted away.

Berbera is only 204 miles from Jijiga as against Mogadishu's 744 miles. For this and for other reasons, it is a far more satisfactory port on which to base an army advancing into Abyssinia. Without delay the port and the route were opened up—no small feat even among the series of great feats accomplished in this campaign. On 20th March a small column of Nigerians occupied Tug Wajale on the British Somaliland border. Two armoured cars, adventurously led by the Chief Engineer of the East African forces, motored through Hargeisa and made contact with the troops that had been landed at Berbera.



INTERVAL AT BERBERA. The flags change over Government House—and the Italian 70th Brigade melts away.



The rest of the story is a happy one. There was great rejoicing in British Somaliland. Said a South African officer who travelled through the colony immediately after the reoccupation :

The thing that struck me most was the very high prestige of the British officials. While I was there, one of the British officers was paying his first visit to many of the villages since his return, and I went with him. All the Somalis knew him personally. They addressed him by name. They all shook hands. They said, "Thank God, you are back again—we knew you'd come." And they said, "Thank God the Italians have gone." I am absolutely certain that this welcome was sincere.

Now let us look west again along Cunningham's road to Addis Ababa.

19—The High Gates to Harar

THE OCCUPATION of Jijiga marked the end of fighting in the flat bush country and the beginning of hill warfare in the Abyssinian highlands. Up to this time it had almost always proved possible to send mechanised columns round the flanks of the enemy, with shattering effect on his morale, but with the entry into the hills the usefulness of the armoured cars was limited, and it was to be expected that the Italians would make a stand.

As the traveller descends towards the level flats on which Jijiga stands, it seems to him that to the front and to the right the plain is as limitless as the prairies of America's Middle West, but on the left an endless line of tall blue hills testifies to the existence of the Abyssinian ranges. Jijiga is only a mile or two from the beginning of these hills ; almost immediately

beyond it the road rises, slowly at first and then more steeply toward the towering Marda Pass. It is a formidable looking proposition. Nothing can move upon the plain unseen by observers on the mountain sides ; the aerodrome is close and in clear view ; surprises are out of the question, and there seems no reason why the Marda Pass should not have held out for weeks had it been guarded by resolute men. The Italians did make a short attempt to defend the pass, and the one day's struggle that developed there was amongst the sternest of the entire campaign.

The Italian defences were four miles broad, though, as was afterwards learned, they had not been constructed in great depth. Their forces occupied the tops of the single line of hills across which, at right angles, runs the road from Jijiga to Harar. These hilltops had been tunnelled, wired and camouflaged, and an elaborate system of land-mines and tank traps opposed the advance of the armoured cars in the few areas where these vehicles could operate.

For several days the Nigerians, with the South African artillery and armoured cars, camped on the Jijiga plain, eyeing the massive ramparts they must soon attempt to force. It was a beautiful and rather uncanny sight to see at sunset the fires of the enemy spring up on the blackly silhouetted mountains and to watch the single big blue Italian searchlight throw its ghostly light on the approaches to the pass.

Attempts to find a route for a flank attack proved unsuccessful, and the date for the assault was eventually fixed for 23rd March, by which time reinforcements were expected. On the morning of the 21st, however, news was received that the Italian army was planning to withdraw, and, since it was desired above all things to bring this force to battle, the order was given to attack at once.

The report of patrols that the pass was still defended was not discredited by the extraordinary adventures of a Signals van. This vehicle took a false turning : before it could be



THE ITALIAN STANDS ON MARDA. Ahead lies Jijiga ; beyond, the road winds up the Marda Pass. Observation Hill is on the left, the Breasts and Camel Saddle on the right.

stopped it was purring confidently up the pass and found itself almost amid the defences of the astonished enemy before the driver realised his mistake. It about-turned and made a hurricane descent, unhurt through a fusillade of fire.

Four hilltops featured prominently in the battle that now developed. These were, as the Nigerians saw them, Observation Hill on the left-hand side of the road, the Left and Right Breasts of Marda, both on the right-hand side of the road, and Camel Saddle Hill, still further to the right. Most of the fighting took place to the right of the road, and the main attack was launched at 12.15 p.m. against Camel Saddle Hill. It was not known certainly whether this hill was defended, but the companies that attacked it were not long left in doubt. The four villages in the foothills simply bristled with machine-guns : armoured cars could be used against only one of them, and the other three had to be taken by infantry action supported by artillery. After that the Nigerians had to struggle on, using whatever cover they

could find, up ever-steepening gradients defended by a series of machine-gun posts. At one time they were counter-attacked strongly and driven back, and the Italian artillery opened up against them, while for their part the South African artillery blasted both the counter-attack and the Italian guns in turn. It was a real soldiers' battle : it took place in the clearest view of all, almost as if it had been a set theatrical piece, and the members of the South African Broadcasting Unit were able to make a unique record of the fight.

Little by little, as the afternoon wore on, the rattle of rifle and machine-gun fire moved towards the peaks. By 4.30 p.m. two platoons of the left company of Nigerians, after being under fire continuously for four hours, had succeeded in establishing themselves at last on the Right Breast of Marda, while further to the right, in spite of stubborn resistance, only nightfall prevented the capture of the whole line of the ridge.

Meanwhile, on the left of the road a curious incident had taken place. The demonstration



MARDA FALLS. A road block on the crest of the Pass. After a real soldiers' battle, fought in clear view from the plain, the Nigerians reached the hill-tops which command the road.

against Observation Hill had, as anticipated, been held up by machine-gun fire, but a singularly lucky shot had set fire to some grass on the summit of the hill. The Nigerian battery which had fired the shot were quick to appreciate their opportunity. The wind was blowing in the right direction and 25 further smoke shells dropped neatly in a ring around the summit, driving the Italians out of their positions as effectively as any costly attack.

The Jijiga plain is chilly enough after sunset, and the men who spent that night among the 7,000-foot hilltops must have found it cold indeed. It was a time of suspense as well, for the action was not yet complete and none could know what the dawn would bring. Lights came and went in the Italian camp—the lights of men who sought their dead with lanterns, the lights of lorries that moved all night up and down the Harar road. In the morning the Nigerians crawled from their beds, from the hollows in the grass and from the crevices in the rocks, shook the cold and the stiffness from their limbs, and prepared for another day. But the enemy had gone: his

heavy losses, particularly the heavy losses among his European personnel, had proved too much for him.

It had been a stern fight. The Italian artillery fire had been accurate, and our men had suffered casualties. It had been an old-style infantry attack against fortified positions and great credit is due to the Nigerians, who, after a day of hard fighting, still found the courage and determination to complete their work by night amid the land-mines and machine-gun posts and wire of the steep, boulder-strewn hilltops. Great credit is also due to the South African gunners who shot so well that day.

The Nigerians did not content themselves with a victory well won. By midday the engineers had cleared the roads, and the pursuit had again begun. As our men passed through the gap at the summit of the pass and looked down upon the broad stretch of lower, flatter country that opens out so unexpectedly beyond this curiously narrow range, they must have felt both pride and amazement that so strong a position had so speedily been carried. All through the rush across Somaliland they

had known that they were coming to the hills, the hills in which the Abyssinians had held out so long in that earlier war, the hills where everything was going to be so very much more difficult. And now, in one day, they had forced the Marda Pass, the first of the gates of Harar. This victory, so rapidly though not so easily achieved, dangled exciting possibilities before the imagination. It was no longer mere wishful thinking to dream of taking Harar and Dire-dawa, even Addis Ababa itself, before the arrival of the dreaded rains should put a stop to all activity in Abyssinia.

Yet no one who has driven over the mountains from Jijiga to Dire-dawa, through the narrow defiles and above the tree-choked gorges, along the magnificent Italian-built road which crosses the 100 miles of these wild and beautiful ranges, can understand how the men who created such an engineering masterpiece can have brought themselves to abandon it in less than 10 days' fighting. The road runs through many natural defensive positions, which look utterly impregnable, where alternative routes and outflanking movements are out of the question, where one would have said that a handful of desperate men could have held up an army for weeks. Yet so badly had the Italian morale been shattered by the flurried 1,000-mile retreat from the banks of the Juba River, and so high had soared the spirits of our men, that these positions were taken one after another in a series of rapid fights.

On 21st March the Marda Pass had fallen, but other gates remained to be forced before we could enter Harar. Two of these were the Babilli Gap and the Bisidimo River.

As one approaches it the Babilli Gap looks even more formidable than the Marda Pass itself. It seems in places less like a pass than a railway cutting through high uncompromising hills. But the walls of the cutting are not man-made or smooth: they consist of precipitous, weathered granite cliffs and a tumbled debris of weathered granite boulders, between which grass and jumbled bushes sprout. The result

is a patchwork of toning browns and greens. There is no similar landscape in England, or, for that matter, in Kenya, but it is easily pictured by the imagination, for it is exactly like the overdrawn setting for an ambush in a melodramatic film.

All through the campaign in East Africa we continually succeeded in springing surprises on the enemy. These were achieved by a variety of methods. Thus Italian Intelligence suffered often from false preconceived notions as to the direction from which an attack would come or believed that our transport could not get through along a certain road, or miscalculated the speed at which demolitions could be repaired. In the case of the Babilli Pass, while the Nigerians attacked along one of the two expected routes, the Royal Natal Carbineers were sent along the old disused road to the north. The going was, as expected, difficult, but they arrived in time to make their presence felt, and the Italians, fearful of the threat to their left flank, surrendered the position on 24th March.

Meanwhile the Nigerians had been seriously engaged. The Italian artillery was always accurate when dealing with registered positions, and as the troops advanced along the southern road they came under heavy fire. This marked the beginning of an unsatisfactory, tiresome two-day battle, in which it proved singularly difficult to come to grips with the enemy.

HIGH ROAD TO HARAR. An East African armoured car on the fine mountain road which runs 100 miles west from Marda.





THE EMPEROR'S SECOND CITY. South African Infantry drop down the slopes which overlook Harar.

The Nigerians, advancing towards the gap, would encounter road-blocks; they would be fired on from the heights to left and right of the road; platoons would be sent to take the heights, engineers to clear the road-blocks. After that another mile or two of progress would bring the foremost units under artillery fire once more. For two whole days this monotonous and dangerous routine was repeated, but on the morning of the third day it was found that the way was clear. As in the case of the Marda Pass, the enemy had withdrawn during the night.

On the morning of 25th March it was reported that Harar had been declared an open town, but nevertheless the Nigerians encountered considerable opposition less than 10 miles before it, at the Bisidimo River. The country was more open here than in the Babilli Pass, and a company of Nigerians were advancing on each side of the road, when they came under fire from Italian artillery based on the high ground above Harar. The two other companies were sent out on either flank and the whole battalion pressed on, fighting its way through unceasing shell-fire and a series of machine-gun posts, where the enemy fought

at times with great courage. The Nigerian Light Battery could not reach the enemy guns, however, and the heavier South African artillery had to be called up to help. They had a very difficult time getting into position: there was little cover, save for occasional bushes, and the Italians rained on them a hail of shells. Even after the South African artillery had opened fire the fight went on for two hours, shells whizzing in each direction over the heads of battalion headquarters. Little by little the South African guns gained the upper hand, and when at last the enemy guns were silenced they lowered their fire to assist the forward troops. These had crossed the river and established themselves in the hills beyond, when an envoy in a truck with a white flag the size of a bedspread was seen approaching along the road from Harar.

It was a dramatic scene which took place in the bush beside the road, 10 miles from Harar, while the cameras of the war correspondents clicked and whirred, and two Africans calmly made tea in a cookhouse improvised in a neighbouring ditch. The surrender of the town was not in dispute, but the Resident hoped to delay the occupation till 7 a.m. next day, which

would have allowed General de Simone's forces enough time to withdraw. He was informed that this possibility did not exist. Major-General Wetherall declared simply: "Either you go back to the town and we continue our attack and fight for the town and take it victoriously, or we will send you in an armoured car with some infantry who will take over the town as surrendered by you." To this ultimatum the military situation permitted only one reply and within a few minutes East African armoured cars, with a white flag on the front car and the Italian delegate in the second, had swung into view of the brown-terraced jumble

of houses on the hillside that make up the native quarter of Harar, and the big European buildings that are set higher up on this and upon other nearby hills.

Here once again were encountered the remarkable friendliness of the native population, the joy of the Italian troops, who sang because for them it was all over, the relief of the women and children that the period of uncertainty was past and that they were now safe from massacre from mutinous native troops. Amongst the multitudinous booty captured were two batteries of 105 mm. guns, the first of this type to be met with in the campaign.

"SURRENDER NOW, OR WE ATTACK." An East African armoured car, flying an Italian white flag as big as a bedspread, takes back the envoy who played for time.



After the capture of Harar the South Africans went ahead. The fall of the second city of Abyssinia marked the end of the period during which the Nigerians, under Brigadier G. R. Smallwood, M.C., had so gloriously led the van of the invasion. General Cunningham has paid this tribute to their work :

In 30 days they had covered 1,054 miles, an average of 35 miles a day. The final 65 miles into Harar entailed an advance through the most difficult country in face of opposition from three strong positions, yet the distance was covered in three and a half days. The Nigerian soldier, unaccustomed to cold and damp, fought his way from the hot and dusty bush to the wet and cold highlands of Abyssinia, where he maintained his cheerfulness and courage in spite of strange conditions and the strenuous climbing operations made necessary by the terrain.

It had been an extraordinary advance, and

it had put out of action another 19,000 of the enemy after leaving Mogadishu, bringing the total up to 50,000 men.

It is 35 miles from Harar to Diredawa. One crosses at first the well-watered, high plateau, where there are many native villages, but the last 15 miles contains some of the craziest scenery in this part of Africa. Here the motor road pours, as it were, between twin peaks, over the edge of the 7,000-foot tableland, and plunges down a 10-mile, 4,000-foot cascade to where Diredawa, hot and mosquito-ridden, stands at the foot of the hills on the Addis Ababa-Jibuti railway. It is a perfect road for demolitions, and the South Africans found that the Italian engineers had made the most of it. They had blown up several bridges at points on the plateau itself, and further on they had blasted the mountain side, creating

REACHING TO THE CAPITAL. The S.A.A.F. bombs Addis Ababa aerodrome, destroys 32 aircraft and finally obliterates the enemy air force, in their most devastating raid of the war.

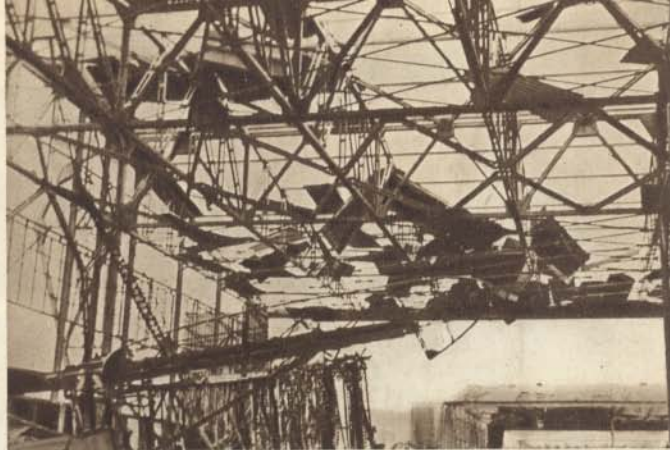


chaos and dizzy drops at five of the steepest places. One of the craters caused by these demolitions was 70 yards long and together they formed such a serious obstacle that it was originally believed it would take eight days to fill them. However, the 1st South African and the 54th East African Field Companies and the Nigeria Regiment, which was moved up to assist them, attacked the task with such vigour that, working day and night, they had cleared the road in only 36 hours.

It is a remarkable fact that the Italians used these demolitions merely as a means of gaining time. They made little effort to defend them except in the case of the first, where two companies of machine-gunners, consisting mostly of officers of the regular army type, whose original units had disintegrated, put up a really gallant resistance from nearby peaks and held up the advance till nightfall. But this was a delaying action rather than a rally, and two companies of the 1st Transvaal Scottish, who set off on foot before the road was open, entered Diredawa unopposed on 29th March.

20—The Dash to the Capital

ADDIS ABABA is 290 miles from Diredawa, as far, in fact, as is London from Carlisle, and our troops were now farther by road from their original bases than is London, in a straight line, from Athens or Bucharest. Such a situation is unparalleled in the history of modern war, yet in many ways it was easier to advance from Diredawa on Addis Ababa than it had been to move against Jijiga from Daghabor. True, the railway line was not immediately serviceable, but it could be rapidly put in commission: true, the port of Jibuti was not ours to use, but the opening of Berbera had cut 550 miles



DIREDAWA VISITED. The airport after two visits by the S.A.A.F. Attacks by Hurricanes crippled the opposition by air to our advance from Jijiga.

off our line of communication. The road ahead was known to be excellent, the worst of the mountains were behind us now, the morale of our men was soaring, and finally the capture of Diredawa had supplied us with an invaluable airport.

This aerodrome, and its two satellite landing grounds, had figured prominently throughout the advance from Mogadishu. It was from Diredawa that most of the Italian aircraft had set out to raid our columns, and the South African Air Force had found it necessary to make the spectacular ground attacks of 13th to 15th March, during which 13 enemy aircraft were destroyed, five in the air, eight on the ground, and eight others damaged, all at the cost of two Hurricanes. This devastating attack greatly assisted our advance. It crippled the Italian Air Force at a time when our convoys were especially vulnerable to air attack, as they drove along the narrow mountain roads, and such bombings as they suffered thereafter were sporadic and ineffective. The possession of Diredawa, however, brought furthermore this positive advantage. Whereas hitherto our nearest air base had been Jijiga, we now possessed a nearby airport from which to harass the enemy columns retreating by road and rail to Addis Ababa.

From Diredawa two roads run west to Mieso, the northern through the plains beside



THE LAST GREAT OBSTACLE. The deep gorge of the Awash, planned by the enemy as the final defence. The railway bridge (*below*) lay on the river bed, its back broken; the road bridge (*above*), destroyed at sunset, was replaced by dawn.



the railway, the southern through the hills. The Italian army had retreated along both roads, and the South Africans gave them not a moment's rest. Now that the main mountain defences had fallen, the offensive again gathered way. Diredawa had been taken on 29th March. By 1st April the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles had reached Asba Littorio along the southern road, while by 2nd April the rest of the South African Brigade had fought its way through the hills along the northern route as far as Mieso. On the same day the 22nd East African Brigade had taken the lead in its turn, and advanced to the Awash.

Italian morale had now definitely cracked. Collapse was no longer confined to the colonial troops: it had spread to the Blackshirt battalions themselves. Evidences of degeneration were everywhere. Demolitions were sometimes left deliberately uncovered; on other occasions men ordered to guard the road-blocks either fled at the coming of the South Africans or stood their ground—and surrendered. The Mieso - Asba Littorio line was abandoned after a mere skirmish, and when the East Africans passed into the lead this state of affairs continued. Eleven Italian tanks with-



INTO THE STRAIGHT. The amazing last day's dash to the capital begins.

drew before a company of infantry who came upon them unexpectedly in a wooded valley and attacked them with hand-grenades. The strongest evidence of the collapse of the enemy's morale was the attitude of prisoners. The tents of our Intelligence Officers were crowded with captured Italians, who thrust themselves forward to offer information in embarrassing numbers. Two months ago the early capture of Addis Ababa had seemed the most improbable of dreams; now a successful Italian rally before the capital was equally unthinkable.

The channel of the Awash was the last of the great natural obstacles to the advance on Addis Ababa. There the river runs swiftly through a deep gorge between tall and, in places, quite precipitous cliffs, and it was here that the Italians had always planned to make their final attempt to save the city. It was a splendid defensive position. When the King's African Rifles arrived they found that the great steel railway bridge had been destroyed and had fallen 200 feet into the bed of the river, where it lay like some optimistically designed switchback railway. The road bridge, too, had been blasted, and the further side of the gorge was dotted with machine-gun posts. Our men,

however, flung themselves fearlessly into the river: they crossed it at two points, one between the bridges and the other half a mile upstream at an old Abyssinian ford. Then they charged. The Italians fired furiously, but inaccurately; after that they fled or died. That night armoured cars were manhandled across the ford: they were hauled with blocks and tackle up the steep slope beyond. And on 4th April they advanced some 20 miles, while the engineers were at work upon the bridge.

No one who was lucky enough to take part in that amazing last day's dash on Addis Ababa will ever forget it. Most of the men made no attempt to sleep: those that did rose at midnight and by 3 a.m. the Brigade was under way, punctually and in perfect order. They crossed the Awash over a bridge that had seemingly been conjured from nowhere to span the gap that had, at sunset, yawned between the buttresses; they climbed diagonally up the steep further wall of the gorge, rumbled through the empty village of Awash, and out across the broad plain. As they rolled on a greyness stole slowly through the sky, for in this part of Abyssinia dawn does not break with the usual tropic rush. Thirty miles



ITALIAN ENVOYS, smiling, speed their victors ; their authority gone, they fear trouble in the city.



EXCITED ABYSSINIANS line the road at Adama, waving white flags and yodelling their salutations.

on the lorries came to a stop : the mechanised column had overtaken the advance motorised units. The men waited, eating a few biscuits, some of the more fortunate ones smoking cigarettes, and wondered what the day had in store for them. Then a rumour spread down the line. An Italian envoy had arrived, it said, escorted by an armoured car and a small posse of police, to ask Brigadier Fowkes to push on to the capital without delay, as fears were felt for

the safety of the civilian population.

The Brigade moved on. The leading units, now only an hour ahead of the main force, came to Adama, 75 miles from the Awash, and found the road lined with excited Abyssinians, waving white flags and giving vent to that most unyodel-like yodelling which is their unique form of salutation. The Italians had only just gone, the villagers said. They had fled down a side-road towards the south and west, and a

company was sent in pursuit of them. Other Italian forces had retired down the road to Mojo, another 20 miles farther on, and, as our men approached the town, the still smouldering wrecks of burnt-out motor-cars testified to the effectiveness of our air force and to the hurried retreat of the Italian army.

The situation was an extraordinary one. The column was advancing on Addis Ababa by request of the civil authorities and escorted by Italian policemen, but as it halted momentarily on a hill five miles beyond Mojo, it was very apparent that fighting had not ceased. Guns could be heard to the south, and rifles were firing on either side of the road down which the convoy had already passed. The guns belonged to the main Italian army, which was withdrawing southward towards Ponte Malcasa. Some of the rifle-fire came from isolated parties of Italians which had not yet been mopped up, most of it from Abyssinians, who were firing at nothing at all in an ecstasy of greeting and jubilation.

Ten miles from the beginning of the city proper, the Head of the Italian Police was waiting to surrender the town, but the King's African Rifles did not enter Addis Ababa that night. Victory had come as the result of the joint action of all forces, and General Cun-

ningham had decided that as representative a force as possible should have the honour of occupying the capital. The surrender ceremony was, therefore, postponed until the arrival next morning, the 6th April, of Major-General Wetherall, the Divisional Commander, and a weary but contented brigade lay down to sleep, marvelling at the extraordinary days through which they had just lived, and anticipating the excitements of the morrow.

21—The Miracle Accomplished

THE OCCUPATION of Addis Ababa was an extraordinary climax to an extraordinary campaign. Some of the differences between the German point of view and the British point of view are typified by their respective methods of entering captured capitals. The Italians,

THE ESCORT WAITS. Italian police, bristling with tommy-guns, wait to surrender the city.



familiar with the Nazi-Fascist practice of marching in irresistible might through the compulsorily flag-bestrewn streets of a bomb-flattened city, must have anticipated something of the kind. Instead they first saw approaching from the direction of the British camp no tanks, no guns, no bands, no flags—only a dozen heterogeneous cars and trucks. These belonged to no unit more formidable than the Press, whom the military authorities had permitted to enter the city early in order to record the surrender ceremony.

It is a long drive through Addis Ababa from the beginning of the houses to the Duke of Aosta's palace. The route was lined by armed

Italian soldiers and police. Motor traffic had been stopped, but there were plenty of people in the streets—Abyssinians in thousands, Italian civilians, even Italian women. As the cars passed them the police and the soldiers saluted smartly in the British style, whereas the Abyssinians welcomed democracy with the friendliest of Fascist salutes (thereby showing how much they had assimilated of the ideological meaning of this gesture); the Italian civilians looked on with interest, occasional smiles, and no trace of hostility, though on the faces of the senior soldiers who looked down from the windows of the official buildings the most common expression appeared to be blank

FREEDOM ENTERS ADDIS ABABA. One armoured car, flying a home-made Union Jack, "with an attitude of apologetic benevolence," is the only show of force at the ceremony of surrender.



amazement at this most unwarlike occupation of the capital. "Wherever are the tanks?" they seemed to say.

Inside the gates of the Duke of Aosta's palace all was ready for the ceremony. In front and a little to one side of the massive, rather heavy building of grey stone, with the sculptured eagle, stood a Fascist Guard of Honour, while on the central steps General Mambrini, the Military Governor of the capital, dressed in all the greens and yellows and buttons of Italian senior officers, awaited the arrival of the British. The ceremony was short and extremely to the point. A squad of Italian police, riding motor-bicycles and dressed in shiny black, swept up the drive. Behind them, in cars, came Major-General Wetherall, Divisional Commander, Brigadier Pienaar, Commander of the 1st South African Brigade, which had forced the Juba line and captured Diredawa, and Brigadier Fowkes, Commander of the 22nd East African Brigade, which had captured Afmadu, Brava and Merka, and later led the advance from the Awash. They had their staffs with them, but no troops. The only show of force was one armoured car, which flew a Union Jack homemade by a daughter of Kenya's Attorney-General, Mr. Walter Harragin. This car parked itself under a convenient tree a short distance from the palace, and seemed to eye the ceremony with an attitude of apologetic benevolence. The British officers were greeted by the Italian representatives, received the salute from the Fascist Guard of Honour, and went immediately into the palace in order to complete the necessary arrangements.

The only touch of pageantry concerned the flags. In the centre of the lawn before the palace stood a 40-foot pole, from which the Italian flag had been hauled down a trifle prematurely. General Wetherall ordered that it should be re-flown and saluted with full honours. After that the Union Jack was raised in its place and greeted with Fascist salutes from the Italian officers and the Italian Guard of Honour. That was the end of one of the most businesslike ceremonies on record.



A PILE OF SMALL ARMS, 10 feet wide by 200 feet long, symbol of the enormous material captures in Addis Ababa.



BURNT-OUT BOMBER, CRASHED FIGHTER. Italian air power in East Africa silenced finally at the city aerodrome.

Addis Ababa is a rather dreary town. It is in no sense an insignificant capital, for its European population alone is five times as numerous as Nairobi's, and it sprawls over an immense area, but it is a town without a centre. As you drive along the straggling, winding roads, lined with sad blue gums, past occasional fine residential houses interspersed with squalid huts, you feel that you are in the suburbs of a gigantic city, which must possess a magnificent core. But Addis Ababa is all suburbs, and you find that it has no core at all, unless the crowded, dirty triangle called the Piazza del Littorio can be described as such. Though the shops contain articles of value, their exteriors are ramshackle, and one feels that in this city Italian and Abyssinian cultures are neither sufficiently

separated nor satisfactorily blended. Grey skies, comparative cold, and daily rain assist in creating this atmosphere of mild depression.

But at the time of arrival this was not apparent. The men of the South African units and the King's African Rifles who entered the city shortly after the surrender ceremony lived through unforgettable hours, which were quite unlike anything they had envisaged in all their desert daydreams. The Abyssinians were in the streets, the crowds excited, wondering, the chiefs rattling by in their little pony traps or riding like mediæval lords to hear the proclamation and to cheer the hoisting of the Ethiopian flag above the Emperor's palace. Major-General Wetherall was mobbed by the delighted population, which ululated in the queer Abyssinian way and wrung his hands and kissed his feet. It was an extraordinary outburst of spontaneous enthusiasm.

Addis Ababa had regarded itself as a beleaguered city. It was protected by a ring of outer forts, within which was a closer circle of 53 concrete blockhouses, connected by continuous double - aproned barbed - wire fences. Each blockhouse was garrisoned by 30 or 40 Europeans with five or six machine-guns, and the guards discharged their firearms continuously at night against hordes of mythical attacking Patriots. Every male in the city was found to be carrying weapons, in addition to the 10,000 armed soldiers and police. Our occupying force was far too small to attempt any such heroic protective measures, and in order that Italian standards of security should be maintained, the police were permitted to continue their functions, pending the creation of an Ethiopian force. A number of the more dangerous Fascist police were replaced by South African troops, and the arrival of the Nigerians a little later made it possible to relieve some other Italians of their duties.

The atmosphere in Addis Ababa during the first 48 hours seemed curiously unreal. Here were British, Italians and Abyssinians all living together in the same city, yet everything was peaceful and no one was cutting anybody

else's throat. The unanticipated smoothness of the occupation was due to the co-operation of all races. The Abyssinians showed an altogether remarkable restraint, and as for the armed Italians, the existence of this immense body of alleged enemies caused the British authorities no loss of sleep at nights. If no other nation could have entered a hostile capital so unaggressively as did the British, surely no defeated people could have welcomed their conquerors in such a friendly and co-operative spirit as did the Italians.

Examples of this Italian co-operation were everywhere in evidence. For instance, when a detachment of the King's African Rifles took possession of Addis aerodrome they found more than 1,000 Italian soldiers, most of them fully armed and equipped, many of them in lorries, waiting for someone to arrest them. All day they sat there patiently, guarded only by a few askaris, gazing incuriously at the wreckage of 32 aircraft which the S.A.A.F. had destroyed a day or two previously in their most devastating raid of the war, which had put the finishing touch to the virtual obliteration of the Italian Air Force in East Africa.

The material captured in Addis Ababa was remarkable in quantity: it far exceeded even that which had been taken in the ports of Italian Somaliland. In Mogadishu enough rations had been captured to feed 10,000 men for six months: at Addis Ababa there were enough to feed them for more than a year, and from the moment of the taking of the capital it proved possible to victual both Italian prisoners and the Ethiopian armies without calling upon British supplies. 350,000 gallons of petrol had been found at Mogadishu; at Addis Ababa 500,000 gallons were captured, as well as 300,000 of Diesel oil. A pile of small arms 10 feet wide by 200 feet long soon made its appearance. Signal material was valued at £250,000, and the wireless station, which had been very little damaged, was rapidly repaired by men of the Royal Signals, and put to use for propaganda purposes. Finally, immense medical stores were taken to the value of over



THE EMPEROR COMES. Young people gather to greet him, dressed in flowered frocks, smiling in the sun.



The ancient "boasting" ceremony.



Chiefs and their picked men swear allegiance.



The Patriot Army honoured.



The country's leaders listen.



The Coptic Church attends in full regalia.



The Lady Shoa Reged, Patriot.

THE EMPEROR SPEAKS, ETHIOPIA LISTENS, REJOICING. After five years of foreign rule, the country celebrates its freedom. Its Church, its dignitaries, its warriors, its people gather in ancient pomp and ceremony.







THEY HAVE MADE HISTORY. Some of the men who, against sweat and dust and bumping lorries, against

£1,000,000. Such hauls would have represented a magnificent prize had the victory been measurable in mere material terms. But the capture of Addis Ababa stood for very much more than that.

For five years the mention of Abyssinia had stirred uncomfortable memories in sensitive hearts of our disastrous period of weakness. The first of many pledges to the victims of aggression had now been redeemed. This was cause for national pride, but the joy of the troops as they entered the capital was a closer, more personal emotion. Some remembered evacuation from Berbera, some the withdrawal from Moyale, South Africans and King's African Rifles alike the boredom and the heat of the Northern Frontier District, when they had crouched beneath the dwindling shade of a tarpaulin tied between two bushes and scowled at the sun as it climbed up the sky. In those days Addis Ababa had seemed many years away. They remembered, too, the weeks of the advance, the unrelenting effort against a composite nightmare enemy, who consisted of sweat and dust and bumping lorries and exhaustion and scanty tepid water, and who proved again and again a sterner foe than the Italians. They remembered how, as they struggled forward, the thought of the taking of

the capital had suddenly ceased to be a day-dream and had become a goal. And now that goal was realised, and the effort had not been made in vain.

This victory, so swift and so inexpensive in human life, achieved against an enemy always superior in numbers, an enemy who in the early stages of the campaign had proved himself not incompetent, and who had never ceased completely to resist, is worthy of long discussion. In this book it must suffice to quote certain of the records of the 11th Division, which was most closely concerned in the pursuit. During the 53 days from the 12th February to the 6th April, on which date Addis Ababa fell, Headquarters opened 21 times, moved on an average every two and a half days, and averaged more than 36 miles per day over a journey from Bura of 1,725 miles. During this period the fatal casualties in the Division could almost be counted on the fingers of two hands. But on the enemy's side, in addition to the many thousands killed, wounded, or dispersed into the bush, no fewer than 10,350 Europeans and 11,732 Africans—a total of 22,082 men—had been taken prisoner. The southern campaign, so far, had been not so much a war as a well-organised miracle. General Cunningham had won a triple bet



exhaustion and scanty tepid water, and against an enemy always superior in numbers, advanced 1,725 miles in 53 days.

against the enemy, against the weather, and against difficulties of supply. If he had lost any one, he would have lost all three, and he was always more in danger of losing the last two than the first.

The reader has now been given an account of the three major events of the East African campaign—the northern attack which broke Italian arms at Keren, the southern to which Addis Ababa fell, and the return of the Emperor. But this was not the end of the story. After the loss of Addis Ababa it is probable that the Italians in Abyssinia would have preferred to surrender rather than to fight, but they received stern instructions from Rome to continue to hold up the British for as long as they could. Their resistance was heartened by the German successes in Libya, which coincided with the occupation of Addis Ababa. It was given out, and in some cases actually believed, that the German army would have come down through Egypt and rescued the beleaguered forces within three months—by the beginning of July. Certainly the advantages accruing to the Axis by prolonging the war in Abyssinia were obvious, and the object of the Italians from now on was less to hold any given area of country than to delay final defeat.

Abyssinia is a vast land, and the Italians

made the most of its dimensions. From Addis Ababa roads radiate like the spokes on the hub of a cartwheel, northward to Dessie, north-west to Debra Markos, west to Nakamti, south-west to Jimma, and south to the central Abyssinian lakes. The Italian armies, still far more numerous than our own, and still as well or better equipped in all respects save aeroplanes and morale, retired along most of these spokes, but especially towards Dessie, Jimma and the Lakes. Into these retreats our forces had to follow them.

In following them they fought a series of secondary campaigns, the story of which must now be told. These stories do not possess the military importance of what has already been described. The great pincer was the supreme military event of the East African campaign, and before the jaws had quite closed (by the time the northern was at Keren and Massawa and the southern at Addis Ababa) the Italians were lost. But the secondary campaigns, which include the final closing movement of the jaws, are alive with military interest, and contain many of the most amazing stories of the whole amazing campaign. There are three of them. The first to be told is that which reached its climax on the 10,000-foot-high peak of Amba Alagi.





THE SEARCH FOR THE

SCATTERED ARMIES



THE SOUTH AFRICANS' LAST BOW.

22—Dessie: *The South Africans*

Finish Their Job

THE DUKE OF AOSTA, the Italian Commander-in-Chief, surrendered on the peak of Amba Alagi on 18th May, a little less than six weeks after General Platt's forces entered Massawa to the north of him and General Cunningham's forces marched into Addis Ababa to the south of him. He was to be trapped on the Amba between Cunningham and Platt. From the south, General Cunningham's South Africans advanced along the Addis Ababa - Asmara road, fighting the battle of Dessie on the way, and then securing on Triangle the final artillery observation upon the inner fortress of the Amba. From the north, forces from General Platt's army that had smashed the backbone of Italian resistance at Keren advanced down the same road. They reached the Amba before the South Africans, and the actual fighting for the peak was mainly theirs. As the reader will see in this chapter, which tells the story of the southern arm of the pincer upon the Amba, the South Africans' stiff fighting was at Dessie. Indeed, Dessie

was one of the sternest battles of the war.

For a powerful Italian army had retired along the excellent metalled highway that runs from Addis Ababa through Dessie toward Asmara in Eritrea. The force sent in pursuit of it was the 1st South African Brigade, recalled for the purpose from the Addis Ababa - Jimma road, along which it had already made good progress in pursuit of other enemy forces.

On 13th April, exactly two months after passing through Afmadu in Italian Somaliland, the South Africans covered 110 miles to the "Mussolini Tunnel." Here progress was delayed for a day or two by demolitions, rain and consequent falls of rock, but by 17th April the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles were climbing out of a great hot valley when they were fired on by artillery from the heights to the right of the road. This marked the beginning of the first serious resistance they had encountered since the break-through on the Juba.

The battle of Combolcia Pass—which was also the battle of Dessie—lasted for five days, during the first four of which the South Africans were engaged in a series of seemingly interminable advances which paved the way for the final assault. The country was steep, mountainous, rough and bush-covered; communications with headquarters were most difficult; the weather was cold and wet; pack transport was naturally unavailable. The enemy's positions were strong, well-sited, constructed in great depth, and in Europeans alone the defending army was many times stronger numerically than the attacking force.

Throughout the battle the dominant motif was the strength, accuracy and persistence of the Italian artillery. This gave a foretaste of its quality on 17th April, when its fire caused casualties and put out of action two 18-pounder guns, and it continued to render the road impassable and the approach through the hills perilous until in the end it was gradually overcome by the even greater accuracy and persistence of the South African batteries.

The attacking infantry consisted of the 1st

THE SEARCH FOR THE
SCATTERED ARMIES



INDIAN OCEAN

La Verrier

Royal Natal Carbineers, the 1st Transvaal Scottish, and the 1st Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, assisted by European-led Patriots who were known as Campbell's Scouts. A frontal attack along the road being quite out of the question, it was decided to take to the hills, which ran parallel to the road in a series of undulations, and offered comparative equality of altitude with the Italians, who were entrenched upon the heights. The plan was that the 1st Royal Natal Carbineers should occupy a feature, which Campbell's Scouts had already captured, and work round from there in such a way as to attack the flank of the last and most northerly of the Italians' main positions. When this flank attack had sufficiently engaged the enemy to make the move possible, the 1st Transvaal Scottish were to attack along a lower and more direct route. The third battalion, the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, was held in reserve. It had borne the brunt of the first four exhausting days and nights, had repulsed a strong counter-attack on the 19th, in which the enemy may have lost anything up to 400 men, and could do with a well-earned rest.

The day of the attack dawned cold and misty. Fierce shelling began at once, but by 11 a.m. the 1st Royal Natal Carbineers had established themselves all along the eastern face of their objective, and though at 12.30 reinforcements were reported to be on the way from Dessie, by 1 p.m. the hill was in our hands. Other positions remained to be taken nearer and lower down, in particular the height that was known as Village Mountain, but, caught between the two battalions of South Africans and overrun by local Abyssinians who rushed in fearlessly and mercilessly at the climax of the battle, by 4.30 the last of the Italians had broken and fled. It is not known how many of the enemy were killed, but the 1st Royal Natal Carbineers alone buried 118.

The victory of Combolcia settled the fate of Dessie, although difficult demolitions had to be cleared, and further smaller actions remained to be fought on the steep and winding mountain

roads. The town itself surrendered four days later and was taken over gradually.

Dessie had been a hard fight though only 10 South Africans had been killed. The spoils of victory once again make fantastic reading when weighed against our losses. Some 8,024 prisoners were captured and 52 guns of various kinds and calibres, 236 machine-guns, 40,151 rifles, and between 200 and 300 motor vehicles, a number of which had been accidentally stranded in excellent condition on our side of the demolitions. Those of the enemy who did not lay down their arms withdrew northwards and eastwards, and a triumphant South African force marched off the Abyssinian map down the road that led to the final surrender of the Duke of Aosta at Amba Alagi, in the assault upon which they played a part, though not the major one.

Save for two battalions, which were attached to the 22nd East African Brigade and played their part in the taking of Shashamana, it was really at Dessie that the last of the magnificent South African brigades made their final bow upon the Abyssinian stage. Theirs was an especially satisfactory farewell performance,

RAS SEYUM, veteran leader against the Italians addresses his troops before the attack from the south.



for in this battle they did not find it necessary to call on any non-South African unit to provide actors for even the minor parts.

No history of the East African campaign is complete which fails to pay tribute to the work of the South Africans. Their infantry brigades acquitted themselves with distinction on every occasion when they were in action, and their technical units, which assisted both East African and West African brigades, played an important part in almost every battle. Every soldier who fought in Kenya, Italian Somaliland or Abyssinia knows how much our victory owes to the work of the South African artillery, the South African engineers and the South African medical units. He also knows how much it meant, during the weeks of advance across coverless deserts and congested passes, not to be subjected to relentless air attack. For his freedom of movement, which was so largely responsible for the record-breaking achievements of that remarkable two months, he has to thank the South African Air Force.

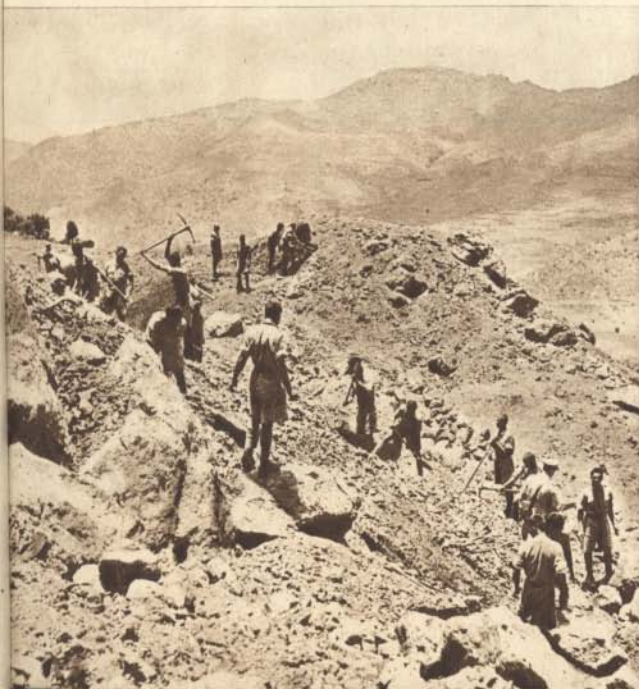
It is time now to tell the story of the northern arm of the pincer closing on Amba Alagi and of the surrender of the Duke himself.

23—The Closing of the Pincers

WHEN ERITREA FELL to General Platt, General Frusci got away south to Amba Alagi with very few troops. All but a few companies, the last reserves that he had received from Nasi in Gondar had been captured at Adigrat. The remainder only of the 43rd and 45th Brigades that had escaped from Um Hagar and the Walkait to Adi Ugri formed his bodyguard. But he acted with promptitude. By midnight of the day that Asmara was occupied he had set up anti-aircraft defence on the Amba and was himself there, prepared to lay out the land defences in the morning.

Amba Alagi, even when stripped of the circumstance of war, presents one of the most striking scenes in Abyssinia, which has many.

CLOSING ON THE STRONGHOLD. On the slopes below Amba Alagi, Indian sappers from the north dig and blast a way through blocks left by the Italians as they retreated up the roads and mountain tracks.





THE ASSAULT ON AMBA ALAGI


The great peak, over 10,000 feet above sea-level and nearly the same height above the Danakil plain a few miles to its east, is, as it were, the navel of a circle of mountains tumbled around it—an African navel, ill-cut and protuberant. Through a narrow pass below the crest the Strada Imperiale, main link between Asmara and Addis Ababa, coils in sharp fantastic bends laid thickly one upon the other. This is the

Toselli Pass, and between it and the peak of the Amba there is Toselli Fort, where an Italian major and his garrison were destroyed by Ras Makonnen, father of the present Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, in 1895. Seven miles to the east another door, the Falaga Pass, opens through the massif. Through these two narrow ways the army of Marshal Badoglio streamed in 1936 into the plain of Ma' Chow to the south,

At eight miles north of Amba Alagi as the crow flies—not as the road winds—another road breaks south-east at the wells of Ma' Meshik to go through the Falaga Pass. Frusci constructed road-blocks on both of these routes, the first just north of the native village of Enda Medani Alem, two miles from Amba Alagi, the second three miles north of the Falaga Pass. On 4th April he learned that a British force (in fact, Flit) was nearing Guiha beyond Ma' Meshik. So he blew the first road-block and cut off 200 of his vehicles on the wrong side; not that it mattered much, for they burned well and made the block altogether more impressive. On the same day he issued his final instructions to the army, now reinforced from Dessie by the Savoia Grenadier Machine-gun Battalion and from Addis Ababa by two battalions of the 211th (white Italian) Infantry Regiment and the rest of the Savoia Divisional artillery which had left the capital with the Viceroy. The orders to all these troops were: "Resist to the last man; no man may leave his post for any reason whatever, even if surrounded."

Over 5,000 men were now in the castle, with 250 machine-guns and 54 pieces of artillery. Its natural caves and gullies were improved by the art of the Italian engineer, which shone throughout this campaign both in construction and demolition. Long stretches of cliff were blown into the road, pits were carved into the rock for guns and machine-guns, wire was spread across the razor ridges and great sangars of stone piled to hide the infantrymen. There were springs of water, and a great deal of food was stored away, including *foie gras*.

Next day a few British trucks appeared . . . a reconnaissance. It was not pressed. The command in Asmara also had its problems. Amba Alagi was 235 miles to the south, and that meant 235 miles of administrative difficulty added to a line of communication that was already taut between Khartoum and Asmara. Once the operation had been ordered, a group of 5th Division, consisting of 29th and part of 9th and 10th Brigades, had been selected to execute it. The dumping of supplies took



there to fight the decisive battle of the Ethiopian War. So, for both Abyssinian and Italian, Amba Alagi has its history. Buttressed about by lesser peaks and pinnacles, articulated with narrow granite ridges that slip into the abyss on either side, at different parts of the day sodden with cloud or sawn by an icy wind, the Amba Alagi group of mountains make a natural fort of rare strength and magnificence.

another fortnight. The concentration of troops took more time, for the enemy with his heavy automatic hitting power could not be blasted frontally out of Amba Alagi; he could only be stalked out. This battle was to be won only by a series of subtle feints.

On 26th April the 1st South African Brigade from the south, as was told in the last chapter, broke their way into Dessie, also under Frusci's command. Some remnants of the Dessie army went north, destroying the Waldia tunnel road-block as they went. But this obstruction did not long delay the South Africans; and in the meantime 5th Indian Division had begun to pierce from three sides the fortress of Amba Alagi.

Major-General Heath had now been promoted and had left the Division, which was commanded by Major-General Mayne. Examining the vast panorama of the Amba Alagi mountains, where the enemy stretched 12 miles from east to west, he decided to feint on the left and in the centre and to put the full muscle of the Division into the right.

The feints must be adjusted nicely: serious enough to draw the enemy from his main front, not so serious that they would expose the numerical limitations of the force that carried them out.

Skinner's Horse, the 51st (Middle East) Commando, part of the 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment and some guns and sappers went down the road towards the Falaga Pass. They took Commando Hill on 1st May. Many of the men and their supplies had to be hauled up the rocks by rope. They beat back bitter counter-attacks and shot the enemy off Wireless Hill next day. On the night of the 3rd they fought a fierce inconclusive action with him in the pass itself. The Italians were fully deceived; on the Amba many of the commanders guessed that this must be the main attack. There were 6-inch howitzers behind it. They therefore laid off some of their reserves to the east.

In the afternoon of 3rd May the British Command provided the Italian with confirmatory evidence. The Bren carriers of the 3/18

Garhwal Rifles debouched down the main road through Enda Medani Alem and occupied the whole valley; riflemen secured the hills west of the village. When night fell a magnificent show of headlights and vehicular noise was staged in the valley. So the great attack on Amba Alagi was being supported down the main road. . . . The Italians manned the frontal defences of Amba Alagi.

The surprise came at 4.15 in the morning of 4th May.

Suddenly from behind Sandy Ridge, away to the opposite west flank of the massif, the orchestra of the British artillery tuned in. The whole of the 29th (composite) Indian Infantry Brigade, concentrated there with its guns in unbroken secrecy, poured over the unguarded crest. They leaped with extraordinary speed from mountain to mountain. Pyramid fell at 4.45, Fin at 5.45, Whaleback at 6.44, Elephant at 7.35. Here the cliffs crowded in to make a slender passage to Middle Hill—a passage, moreover, commanded by the fire of the Italian pack artillery from Bald Hill just below the Amba. So the Brigade lay back until the morning, and then took Middle Hill by an advance just before dawn behind a barrage of hand-grenades. But as the sun rose they saw that their troubles were not over.

A ridge 150 yards wide joined their latest capture with the head of Little Alagi, western consort of the Amba. Precipices fell away on either side. Wire was staked from precipice to precipice and heavy machine-guns in a linked fire held the wire. Part of the Worcestershire Regiment got under the wire, but to have continued would have been suicide. The surprise attack had brought the Brigade in a wave up to the foot of the Amba, where it stopped dead.

The Major-General readjusted his battle-plan.

The Patriot forces of Ras Seyum had already entered Frusci's old headquarters to the south at Ma' Chow, and the 1st South African Brigade were now speeding up the road from the Waldia road-block.



THE OUTER FORTRESS FALLS. Fort Toselli, at the height of the pass, is occupied by Empire forces.

South of Little Alagi, and again on the skirts of the fortress Amba, lay Castle Hill. In the early hours of 8th May the British guns opened on Little Alagi and Bald Hill, whose garrisons stood in the tension before attack. But they were not attacked. This was another feint. Without artillery support the 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles and part of the Worcestershires went up Castle Ridge and took the whole except for the northern summit. Here white flags dangled out. As the Indians went forward to occupy they were met with a shower of grenades and suffered heavily.

Under cover of a mist which now began to swathe the mountain the Italians gathered for a counter-attack. It was fiercely delivered and when the sun stood out again drove the British off Castle Ridge.

It looked like a check on the west side of Amba Alagi; but it was not a check to 5th Division battle-plans.

The Major-General had switched a battalion, the 3/18 Garhwal Rifles, to the Falaga sector and turned what was originally a feint into a serious threat to Amba Alagi. On the night of 7th May they captured prisoners and guns,

while the Abyssinian deserters swarmed towards them. Next evening they had seized the pass itself.

From there they turned west to the Amba, seizing peak after peak. Now from both sides, east and west, the British had superb artillery observation on Fort Toselli and the blasting of the Amba began. Guns and ammunition dumps leapt in scarlet sheets of flame. A 60-lb. shell fell into the Chianti store. Steel rained upon the springs of water and the stone sangars splintered about the cowering infantry. The bombardment went on at night. The Italians could find no way to evacuate their copious wounded out of forward positions. Somehow the moral strength that the Amba gave them seemed to be ebbing away.

On 11th May the Divisional Commander flew over and across the Italian positions on the Amba to meet the South Africans from Addis Ababa. It was decided that this Brigade, which in three months had zig-zagged its way across Abyssinia from the Kenya frontier, should with Patriot support assault Triangle, immediately to the south of the Amba, and so secure the final artillery observation upon the inner fortress and the Italian High Command. The pincer was about to close.

They were 500 yards from the top of Triangle on the evening of the 14th, and in the night Indian Sappers and Miners blew terrifyingly loud Bangalore torpedoes in the enemy wire—and the enemy himself melted away to his last caves and his desperation. The circle was complete at Triangle. His heart for the fight was broken. On 16th May the Duke of Aosta sent out General Volpini to negotiate surrender. Volpini was murdered by Abyssinian villagers. There were more talks. The white flag flickered to and fro. Some of the Italians wanted the Duke of Aosta to remain with a formal Italian garrison in charge of Amba Alagi until the end of hostilities. Such melodrama did not appeal to the British soldier-mind. Military honours, yes; but it must be a total capitulation.

So, on 18th May, the Duke of Aosta was the last to leave the Amba, and the defeated rem-

nants of the Italian army of Eritrea, Addis Ababa and Dessie, all that was left of the Savoia Division, were accorded the honours of war and filed past a guard of honour to the music of the pipe band of the 1st Transvaal Scottish. Then they deposited their arms in neat heaps against the colossal grey background of the Amba, Little Alagi, Triangle, Elephant, Pyramid, Castle, and a dozen other jutting crowns of rock renamed and humbled after three weeks' campaigning.

Fifty thousand prisoners and 340 guns had now been taken by General Platt. Many tens of thousands of colonial troops had deserted to their homes. The hardest mountain positions in Abyssinia had been won exactly four months after the Sudan army had crossed the frontier. All had been done with a remarkable economy of force against an enemy who had the big battalions until the last battle.

There had been moments of deep anxiety in this campaign that had climbed every foot of the road until it lowered the Italian flag on Amba Alagi: at Agordat the enemy might have torn British communications to ribbons by an attack to the west; at Keren if he had attacked the open northern flank of the British positions after the first failures on Sanchil he might have captured the British Command and the entire British artillery. There were reverses at Keren when all seemed black, when mangled battalions had to be pulled out of the thin line and replaced by others not yet up to strength, and when plans had to be recast day after day. But the British Command never surrendered the initiative, always whetted the sword for another attack. The iron order and the superior training of our soldiers found them prepared for the casualties, the mountains, the heat and the cold. An antiquated air force, pointed with 10 Hurricanes and braced by British skill and morale, downed the best types that Italy could provide. As the South Africans passed through Massawa on a clear route to Egypt, the staff in Asmara could afford to sit back a little with the consciousness of good work well done.



BLOWN FROM THEIR CAVES, their impregnable positions stormed, the remnants of Italy's northern armies file past a guard of honour, to the music of the pipe band of the 1st Transvaal Scottish. *Below*, Italian H.Q., high on the Amba ; the Duke of Aosta, Commander-in-Chief and Governor of an Empire, marches into captivity.





REMNANTS
CAUGHT AT
GAMBELA

22nd. E.A. Brig. of
11th. AFR. DIVISION

ITALIAN
SOUTHERN
FORCES
TRAPPED
HERE

12th. AFR. DIVISION

THE BATTLES OF THE LAKES



24—South to the Lakes

THE CAMPAIGN in the south-west, the second of the three secondary campaigns, cleared all the region south of Addis Ababa and west of the Lakes.

It consisted first of all of converging attacks from north and south—the two battles of the Lakes. When the two forces met at Soddu the first phase of the south-western campaign was over. The second phase consisted in the crossing of the River Omo and the pursuit of the Italian forces moving west until General Gazzera surrendered at Gambela and Italian resistance south and west of the capital was at an end.

The battles of the Lakes were the most elaborate operation of the campaign. They were fought almost entirely by European-led East and West African troops against an enemy force largely European and possessing great superiority in numbers of men, tanks and guns. The northern force was for the most part the 22nd East African Brigade of General Cunningham's 11th Division, advancing south after the capture of Addis Ababa. These forces fought the northern battle of the Lakes. The southern force was General Cunningham's 12th Division, consisting of the Gold Coast and 21st King's African Rifle Brigade, which had left the 11th Division during the advance through Somaliland to strike north up the Juba, along the road which the Italians had taken in the war of 1935. This division fought the southern battle of the Lakes. The northern battle took place among the Lakes themselves, and included three full-scale battles, two lesser fights, and a whole series of minor skirmishes. The southern battle took place many miles to the south-east of the Lakes, and included the three

weeks' battle of Wadara, perhaps the toughest action fought in Kenya, Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia during the entire war. The story of the two battles of the Lakes, taken together, is essentially one of how the Italians retreating from north and south were caught between General Cunningham's 11th and 12th Divisions and ground out of existence.

The region of the Lakes is one of the loveliest stretches of country that can be found, even amid the Abyssinian highlands. The pilot, looking down on it from the air and remembering the desolation of the Northern Frontier District, is struck by its more than European greenness, but the secret of its charm really lies in the impression which it gives of moderation—an unusual quality in this part of the world, where scenery, though often grand, is seldom mild. The Lakes are not perched in the crevices of mountains; they sprawl easily across the tree-bestrewn but seldom forested plateau, a plateau that has its mountains when it feels inclined, but which refuses to be hurried in the matter.

The battle of the Lakes cannot be fully understood without recourse to maps, but an essential, though crude, picture will be formed if the following facts are grasped. The chain of lakes, named Zwai, Abyata, Langana, Shala, Awusa, Abaya and Chamo, runs from north to south and forms a barrier impassable to motor traffic over the entire 200 miles of its length, save for one all-important gap. This gap occurs in the middle of the chain on either side of Lake Awusa. Here, roughly, stand Shashamana and Dalle, and through here ran the Italian line of communication westward to Soddu and ultimately Jimma. Any enemy troops operating east of the Lakes would have to retire along this route. In actual fact in the very beginning of the battle all the Italian forces north of Shashamana had withdrawn to this line of communication, but south of Shashamana and east of Lake Abaya at least two divisions of Italians at Wadara and Giabassire were resisting stoutly the advance of the 12th Division, the southern arm of the pincer,

closing in from Neghelli. If Shashamana fell the retreat of these 15,000 Italians would be threatened: if Dalle fell or if the road to Soddu was cut, they would find themselves completely bottled up between the 22nd Brigade to the north, the 12th Division to the south, the Patriot-filled mountains to the east, and Lake Abaya to the west.

This chapter tells the story of the northern battle of the Lakes and of the operation of the northern force coming down from the capital. When Addis Ababa was declared an open town, part of the Italian army withdrew south and west, towards the central lakes. The Italian High Command had a practical reason for the choice. The few place-names on the map seldom signified more than some native huts or an experimental agricultural station. The roads joining them together became impassable in the rain, and rain often fell in this pleasant land. The numbers of the enemy engaged between the fall of Addis Ababa and the surrender of Jimma cannot be exactly known, but it is a fact that 25,000 prisoners were captured, whereas the force at Brigadier Fowkes' disposal never exceeded 6,000 and was in the earlier stages less than 1,500 strong.

The northern half of the battle of the Lakes divides itself into three stages—from 6th to 21st April the unsuccessful attempt to get through to Shashamana using the road that runs to the east of Zwai; from 24th April to 17th May the drive down the road west of Lake Zwai, which led to the battle of Fike and the capture of Shashamana and Dalle; from 17th May to 22nd May the drive west from Shashamana and south-west from Fike, which led to the battle of Colito and eventually to the fall of Soddu.

Phase One. On the day of the advance on Addis Ababa the Italian forces withdrew across the River Awash along two roads, one of which ran from Adama through Ponte Malcasa to the east of Lake Zwai, and one from Mojo through Bole to the west of Lake Zwai. As they retired they had time, though barely time, to blow up the bridges at Ponte Malcasa and Bole,

and in view of the minuteness of the forces at Brigadier Fowkes' disposal it was necessary to choose one or other of these routes for the pursuit. In the absence of adequate maps—and no accurate maps of the Lakes area exist—a gamble had to be taken, and it was decided, unfortunately as it afterwards turned out, to use the eastern route. On 9th April the river was bridged, and that same day our forces reached Aselle, which stands high up in pleasant cattle country; by 13th April they were in Bocoggi.

Here trouble began. The road from Bocoggi climbs rapidly to 12,000-foot passes on the slopes of Mount Carra-Cacci; the rain fell in torrents, and the surface, which is unmetalled, degenerated rapidly into a sea of mud, in which adequate communications were impossible and a whole division might easily get bogged. A complete change of plans was necessary, and it was decided to return to the main road, to rebuild the bridge at Bole, and to try the western route, which a reconnaissance had shown to be more passable. By 24th April almost the whole Brigade had retraced its steps: the only force remaining east of Lake Zwai was a company which was left behind for demonstration purposes and a large body of well-disciplined Patriots under Captain Henfrey, who had established themselves in the hills only a few miles to the east of Shashamana, and who caused the Italians considerable worry by a series of well-executed raids.

Phase Two. Phase two of the advance began when the bridge near Bole had been completed. The King's African Rifles crossed it, left Lake Zwai behind them, and occupied Adamitullo, still without a fight. From Adamitullo two roads ran south on either side of Lakes Abyata and Shala towards the all-important Shashamana-Soddu road. The eastern route was known to be passable though it implied three river crossings, and it led direct to Shashamana where the Italians were in strength. The western route was more in the nature of a track which led past the foot of the 1,500-foot Fike Hill. Beyond that, so far as maps were

concerned, it petered out, but in actual fact it joined the Shashamana-Soddu road at Colito, a fact which was responsible for the immense importance which the Italians attached to Fike. At this stage the Brigade was so woefully short of men that minor operations seemed hazardous and major operations impossible, but the insolence of advancing on the thousands of Italians gathered together in this sector with a force that consisted only of a battalion and a half was justified by events.

On 29th April, General Bertello, reputed to be a resolute fighter, was known to be planning an attack, but the one meeting between our armoured cars and his tanks suggested that the Italian offensive was likely to be half-hearted, and Brigadier Fowkes perpetrated a further successful insolence. While waiting to be attacked along the road from Shashamana, he detached the two companies which were all that existed of the 5th King's African Rifles, with orders to attack Fike. There were insufficient troops for a complicated plan—there were even none to hold in reserve—but the attack was entirely successful. One company demonstrated frontally, while the other company made a flank attack from the west and stormed the hill at the point of the bayonet. Thirty Italians and 20 Africans were killed; 100 prisoners, three 65-mm. guns and numbers of Bredas and machine-guns were captured. This brilliant little action had an effect on the enemy's morale quite out of proportion to the forces engaged. Carried out as it was at the moment when General Bertello's much-vaunted counter-attack was due to drive all British forces back to Mojjo, it may have appeared to the Italians that any move of theirs was destined to fail. In any case, after a day or two of quarter-hearted manœuvring with tanks, the Italians' counter-offensive petered out without firing a single shot. This was an immense relief to General Cunningham, who for the first and only time during the campaign had felt tactical misgiving. If the enemy had used his immensely greater strength to recapture Mojjo and Adama, there would certainly have

been grave embarrassment and even a possibility of disaster to the British forces.

By 3rd May the strength of the force had doubled. The absent companies of the 5th King's African Rifles had rejoined Brigade, and the 1st Natal Mounted Rifles and the 1st Field Force battalion had arrived to fill the gap caused by the absence of the 1st King's African Rifles, who were still on garrison duties far away. The moment had come to attack. Transport problems demanded that the main advance should be made east of Lakes Abyata and Shala, but a subsidiary attack past Fike to Bubissa was launched in order to confuse the enemy. The 5th King's African Rifles with the 18th Mountain Battery and South African Armoured Cars therefore crossed the Gidu River on 9th May. They struck trouble three miles from Bubissa, where the leading vehicles became bogged, but a route was found next day, and the battle developed excellently until the enemy counter-attacked strongly with medium tanks. After capturing Bubissa our men withdrew, with the temporary loss of one officer and three armoured fighting vehicles, but they themselves had captured 80 prisoners, and would have resumed the attack had not the main offensive been already developing along the other road.

Of the three rivers that barred the way to Shashamana, the first two, the Awada and the Dababa, were crossed unopposed, but at the Little Dababa the Italians had blown the bridge and made all preparations for defence. Throughout the campaign the enemy made the mistake of massing their forces on the tops of hills and along the banks of rivers, and the battle of Little Dababa was no exception. In addition their flanks were far too short, their patrol work ineffective. The Italians asked to be outflanked, and they were. On the night 12th/13th May our artillery opened up. This kept the minds of the Italians busy and their patrols unobservant, while the bursts of the shells served to act as guides to Henfrey's "Scouts" and 1st/6th King's African Rifles, who were working their way round their

positions to the east, as well as to the South Africans, who were doing the same to the west. A surprised enemy surrendered *en masse* to the South African attack. Eight hundred prisoners, nine tanks and eight guns were taken. Next day the armoured fighting vehicles entered Shashamana, and three days later the occupation of Dalle by a patrol, which was sent out merely to study the position, cut off the retreat of the Italians' 21st and 24th Divisions, which found themselves bottled up to the east of Lake Abaya. Our progress, which had seemed exasperatingly slow to us, had yet proved altogether too swift for Italian expectations.

Phase Three. Once Shashamana and Dalle had been captured the Brigade swung west along the Soddu road: while west of Lake Shala the companies which had fought at Bubissa were pushing south along the track after a badly rattled enemy. The two roads joined at Colito, and Brigade arrived there first. The Italians soon gave up the idea of defending the junction and took up their position beyond it at the Billate River crossing.

The forces nominally available for this battle were the 1st/6th King's African Rifles, the 2nd Nigeria Regiment and the 5th King's African Rifles, but of these the 2nd Nigeria Regiment had only just joined Brigade, had been marching all night, and were now dead beat, while the 5th King's African Rifles had not yet arrived from Bubissa. There was evidence, however, that the enemy was surprised and hurried: his guns were ill-placed and poorly concealed, his infantry positions easily located, and it was considered best to give him no chance to rally. There is little need to discuss the tactics of the fight. It was a proper soldiers' battle in which the artillery co-operated magnificently with the infantry, in spite of the fact that the guns had no time to register: they had to get into action as they arrived on the individual initiative of each battery command. For their part, the infantry, having crossed the river, pushed the attack home with the bayonet against an enemy who fought bravely for an hour.

The battle seemed almost over when enemy tanks, hitherto concealed in the bushes, charged out upon our men. Because the bridge had been blown, we had no armoured fighting vehicles beyond the river, support from the rear bank was rendered difficult by the presence of our own troops, and the situation was critical when Sergeant Leakey performed an act of almost unbelievable heroism. He climbed upon the leading tank, opened the lid and shot the occupants, including the colonel who commanded the tank unit, tried to get the tank going himself, failed, chased the remainder of the tanks on foot and was last seen climbing on to one of them. This extraordinary single-handed action certainly decided the day.

It took some days to repair the bridge, but after that the pursuit was on once more. Armoured cars, light tanks, and Nigerians swept on unresisted until they came within six miles of Soddu. Here there was an attempt to stem the attack, but a captured medium Italian tank broke the enemy's only resistance. More than 1,000 prisoners were taken and the same day Soddu surrendered to three light tanks and a couple of armoured cars. At Soddu there were captured General Liberati with the staff of the 25th Division, General Baccari with the staff of the 101st Division, 4,800 officers and men, six medium tanks, four light tanks, about 100 machine-guns and the last remnants of the 21st Division, which had been struggling slowly across country round the north end of Lake Abaya and arrived nicely in time to give themselves up. The taking of Soddu was a fine example of the effects of relentless pursuit and surprise, and the speedy use of armoured fighting vehicles. The garrison were not expecting us for some time: they were in a lamentable state of unpreparedness: they had no time either to fight or to fly, and they surrendered wholesale.

The capture of Soddu was the final phase of the great victory of the northern battle of the Lakes, a campaign during which our little force often attempted the theoretically impos-

sible and repeatedly brought it off, thanks to its own high courage and to the general collapse of Italian morale. Evidence of this collapse was everywhere—demolitions were not properly guarded, forward Italian units failed to carry out fully the orders of their generals, and the generals themselves failed to see that their plans were carried out. By the end of the battles of the Lakes it was clear that this degeneration had proceeded to such a degree that future resistance was to be expected less from the powerful Italian forces remaining in the Jimma area than from the immense natural obstacle constituted by the spectacular gorge through which flows the River Omo. But before the story of the double crossing of the Omo can be told we must describe the southern battle of the Lakes.

25—The Advance up the Juba

AS THE READER has already learnt, the southern part of our forces in the battle of the Lakes was formed by General Cunningham's 12th Division, which had divided from the 11th Division on the line of the Juba and swung directly north into Abyssinia south-east of Neghelli.

It is not necessary to describe in too great detail the work of this division during the first weeks after they had crossed the Juba line and swung north-west up the river. Their task at first consisted of mopping-up; for Dolo, Bardera, Mandera, Lugh Ferrandi, and even Neghelli, one of the most important air bases in Southern Abyssinia, were surrendered without a fight.

The Italians had withdrawn into the highlands, believing that, so far from being able to follow them at this season of the year, the

British would have their work cut out to maintain themselves at all. This belief was not founded on optimism alone, and the 12th Division had a most heartbreaking time during the next few weeks. The roads proved utterly unable to stand up to the combination of motor-lorries and the rains, which now broke in full fury. Transport—the limited transport available—failed to get through for days at a time: supplies—the limited supplies that could be landed at Kismayu and spared from the main offensive—were irregular: rivers rose to startling heights with even more startling speed: bridges were carried away not once but many times: an engineering company reported its landing-stage to be 20 feet under water. And, to make matters worse, the 12th Division was responsible for a front which extended from the sea to the borders of the Sudan, where, north-west of Rudolf, the 25th East African Brigade was struggling forward in the direction of Maji. But, for all its difficulties and exasperations, the 12th Division was destined to perform one more spectacular act—to smash the Italians at Wadara, and thus to play its own absolutely vital part in the crushing victory of the battle of the Lakes.

Ever since the Italian conquest of the country Wadara has been famous in Abyssinian history. There the Ethiopians held out for eleven desperate months, defying every effort to dislodge them from positions whose natural defences minimised the mechanical advantages of their assailants. The Italians knew well the strength of this position, and the memory of the gallant Abyssinian resistance must have stirred them to emulation and raised their hopes. Certainly they fought with courage.

Five colonial battalions, stiffened by a high percentage of Eritreans, defended the precipitous slopes beyond a great ravine across which the road ran from Neghelli to the north. They held a three-mile front to the unusual depth of four miles. Their right wing, which rested on prominent features called the Twin Pimples, had a splendid field of fire; their left wing, which might otherwise have been more assail-

able, was protected by dense forest. This forest dominated the battle of Wadara: it hid the dispositions of the Italian forces and limited the use of aircraft, artillery and armoured cars. Many desperate encounters were fought out in the dangerous confusion of its depths and in the even greater peril of its occasional open glades. It has been described as a charnel-house, and by the end of the battle it was choked with bodies, most of them Italian. The whole country was one great tangle, difficult to observe in, difficult to fight in.

The battle of Wadara lasted for three whole weeks and can be divided into three main phases. The first phase (19th April to 22nd April) included the capture of the enemy's forward positions and the gallant though finally unsuccessful attempt to storm the main positions out of hand. The second phase (23rd April to 2nd May) was a period of night and day patrolling in the cold and rain, of the investigation of the 100-foot-deep ravine, of the discovery of innumerable branch ravines, of explorations in the gloomy forest, of the sifting out of deserters' reports, and of the gradual discovery of the enemy's positions. The third

phase (3rd May to 10th May) covered the assault on and the capture of these positions.

The plan was that one battalion of the Gold Coast Regiment should make a frontal demonstration against the "Twin Pimples" without becoming too heavily involved, while other Gold Coast troops and Irregulars should make a long and secret approach march against the enemy's left. If all went well, it was hoped that their attack would roll up the Italian left and centre, and force the right to evacuate.

The first day's fighting was perhaps the most severe. Although the preliminary manoeuvres had gone off well, for hours it seemed the attack would not progress. The fighting was audible but invisible in the forest: the attempted intervention of the armoured cars proved unsuccessful and costly, co-operation with the artillery was impossible, and there seemed a chance that a disastrous stalemate would develop. Suddenly, at 2.30, the whole position changed. News came through that a company of the Gold Coast had worked farther still around the enemy's left, that they were now sweeping back on him almost from his rear, and that they were carrying all before them. The deadlock was broken and the advance went on.

From this moment there was never any danger of ultimate defeat, but the battle was continued for four more days with a stubbornness that did the Italians credit. It was, in the words of a senior officer, "the stiffest fight the Gold Coast have encountered in the war, and one which will long be remembered by those who took part in it. Every credit is due to the courage and persistence with which all ranks fought, resulting in the enemy's finally collapsing and evacuating his strong position." A sergeant-major who had taken part in the Libyan campaign declared: "Bardia was a skirmish compared to this."

Considerable material was captured at Wadara, but the ultimate results of the battle were infinitely more important. On the road from Wadara to Dalle the Italians never turned to fight again, and next day Giabassire, a parallel feature on the road from Yavello to

NEGHELLI BOMBED. The Italian southern airbase on the Juba, later surrendered without a fight.



Dalle, which the Italians never succeeded in wresting from the Ethiopians by force of arms, surrendered without a fight. It was occupied by the King's African Rifles, who had been pouring steadily northward from Yavello, fighting successful actions at Soroppa and Finchoa, the first of which might well be taken as a text-book model, so carefully were the plans prepared, and with such completeness and efficiency were they carried out.

None of the many thousands of Italians who fled from Wadara and Giabassire ever got out of the vast trap in which they found themselves. All about them the Patriots were rising: to the west was Lake Abaya, and those that tried to struggle round north of the lake found their retreat cut off by the 22nd East African Brigade at Shashamana, Dalle and Soddu—the northern arm of the battle of the Lakes pincer closing down on the enemy from Addis Ababa. The pursuit of the enemy seemed desperately slow, but this was due not to Italian resistance so much as to the rain which fell continuously in this, the wettest section of the southern Abyssinian highlands, on one of the few road systems in Ethiopia that has not yet been hailed as first class by any correspondent.

The 21st King's African Rifle Brigade had the worst of it. At one time, for instance, they advanced 47 miles in 10 days, pushing their lorries up hills in pursuit of an enemy who had taken to his heels. At every village prisoners were rounded up, sometimes in their scores, sometimes in their thousands, and one rather delightful story is told of how a Captain with a platoon and an East African armoured car or two called upon an Italian Brigadier, who had with him many hundreds of men, and demanded his surrender. The Brigadier replied that it was beneath his dignity to surrender to such a junior officer with such a small force, especially as he carried no written authority to take such a high officer prisoner. The Captain merely said he had better make up his mind one way or the other within the next 10 minutes, as after that he was going to open fire. The Brigadier surrendered.

Major-General Godwin Austen has paid this magnificent tribute to the men of the Gold Coast who were under his command: "In every situation," he says, "they have distinguished themselves. Their spirit, their efficiency, their burning patriotism, and their high courage are admired and envied by all." Certainly his men had displayed these qualities in plenty at Wadara, where in one action they had brought about such a complete collapse of Italian resistance in this southern half of the battle of the Lakes.

26—Across the Omo to the Western Wall

THE LAKE BATTLES over and Soddu having surrendered, the task that remained in south-western Abyssinia was the destruction or capture of the enemy forces west of the River Omo. These forces were centred upon Jimma. Two roads converge on Jimma from the east: they run respectively south-west from Addis Ababa and north-west from Soddu, and at two points some 60 miles apart they have to cross the Omo. Both crossings were made, the southern by forces that had reached Soddu after the battles of the Lakes, the northern by forces advancing directly from Addis Ababa.

Very few people in Britain or America—even those who know a good deal about geography—have ever heard of this river, yet, together with the Blue Nile and the Juba, it ranks as one of the three great rivers of Abyssinia, cutting a southward course of many hundreds of miles through the Ethiopian highlands before it plunges into Kenya's Northern Frontier District and loses itself in the desolate waters of Lake Rudolf.

The view from the observation post of the Nigerians on the Addis-Jimma crossing was



THE OMO RIVER GORGE. The magnificent view across the Omo to Abalti, beside its single, thimble-like, gigantic rock. There, in positions of great natural strength, the Italians stand.

enough to madden, for different reasons, an artist and an attacking general. Here the river, 50 feet wide in the dry weather, 100 yards wide in the rains, runs through a deep-cut valley 1,500 feet below. This valley has been likened to the Colorado Canyon, but it is not a really accurate description, for though the walls of the gorge are steep, they are not vertical. Only six miles away in a straight line, but 15 miles by road, the village of Abalti stands on the resumption of the plateau, beside its single, thimble-like gigantic rock. To left and right the gorge runs away for miles through a perfect panorama of hills and changing lights.

Sixty miles to the south the southern crossing on the Soddu-Jimma road was every bit as spectacular. There the western wall rises from the deep bed of the river, less perpendicularly than at Abalti, but in a series of piled-up tiers 5,000 feet above the bottom of the gorge.

The plan was that simultaneous attempts should be made at both crossings, for this would

complicate the task of the defenders, and success at either would probably lead to the ultimate withdrawal of the Italians from both.

The story of the crossing of the southern Omo contains a series of adventures as desperate as anything in the whole of the East African campaign. It is true that cliffs and floods rather than men were the principal antagonists, but the Italians did not fail to increase the natural hazards by demolitions and artillery fire from excellent positions in the hills beyond the river. From the moment when at dawn on 31st May a company of Nigerians, who had scrambled down a precipitous trail, tried gallantly but unsuccessfully to seize the foot-bridge before it could be blown, to the moment on 5th June when the battle proper began, the river was the scene of titanic and often heroic efforts. Satisfactory crossings were sought for in vain all along the steamy, mosquito-ridden jungles of the river banks; assault boat followed assault boat into the night, only to

be swept away downstream through the darkness; the engineers fought by every possible means to bridge the six miles per hour, 100-yard-broad rush of oily water; one of them, who swam the river naked, towing a rope, encountered and arrested two armed Italians upon the further bank; three platoons of the 5th King's African Rifles obtained a precarious foothold upon the further bank and had to maintain it for three days while efforts were made to get more troops across. But by dawn on 5th June three companies of the 5th King's African Rifles and two of the 2nd Nigerian Regiment were ready to launch the attack on the Italian main positions.

The fighting itself came as something of an anticlimax after the crossing of this frightful river. The plan was that the Nigerians should work upstream along the river bank, while the King's African Rifles made a wide encircling movement through the foothills at the base of the gorge's western wall. Neither force had an easy time. The Nigerians had to work hard to clear up many isolated machine-gun posts, but by midday they were a mile beyond the remains of the footbridge and by 3 p.m. a company was astride the road awaiting the completion of the encircling movement by the 5th King's African Rifles. This movement had entailed a strenuous 12-hour march through the cut-up gulleys below the main escarpment; during the course of it they captured a troublesome battery, and with one hour's daylight left they were in position to attack the rear of the Italian right flank. The attack went well; but the hour was late, and night fell on the battlefield with the issue undecided. Next morning, as on so many other occasions in the war, it was found that the enemy had withdrawn during the night, leaving 53 officers, 1,038 Italian and 109 African other ranks in our hands.

The northern crossing of the Omo at Abalti provided very much the same problems as were encountered further south and some of the incidents were even more spectacular. The 3rd Nigeria Regiment had been stationed on the hills beside the river from 10th April till

the end of May. During this period they had seen the river rise from a fordable stream 18 inches deep to a swirling torrent 15 feet deep in parts, but a crossing-place had been selected and with immense labour a concentration of men and material was achieved on the night of 30th/31st May. At this very moment, however, the river chose to rise four feet and to expand 25 yards. Three native Sappers lost their lives in attempts to force a crossing, after which it was obvious that the attack would have to be called off.

A more suitable place was found next day near to the broken bridge, but this meant the transfer of all the stores and ammunition, which had to be shifted, partly by motor-car and partly on the heads of the Africans, over very difficult country. The 3rd Nigerians were now dead beat—they had already been camped for some days at the original crossing-place—and it seemed impossible that another attempt could be made till the night of 5th/6th June. However, it was necessary to synchronise the northern with the southern offensive and 4th June was the date that was finally selected. By a stroke of most unusual luck there had actually been no rain for the two previous



MEAL IN THE SOUTH-WEST. The Patriot troops retire before a persistent enemy—the flies.



THE CROSSING OF THE OMO.

nights, and by 2.15 a.m. on the morning of the 5th June the 3rd Nigerians and one company of the 1st King's African Rifles were across the river.

The straightforward fighting was the task of the Nigerians, and by midday they had beaten off four counter-attacks and secured a sufficiently firm grip on the bridgehead to permit the engineers to begin their work. By 6.30 p.m. this work was bearing fruit, and more troops were beginning to cross.

Meanwhile the 1/1 King's African Rifles were engaged on an exciting task. They started away from the river towards "Knif Ridge," covered 10 miles of difficult country, climbed what was almost a precipice, and lay up in concealment till dusk. By a miracle they had accomplished the whole movement without being seen by the Italians. When dusk came the company commander got his unit across the road, facing both ways. He then heard an Italian lorry coming down the hill

from the plateau. He shot the driver, about-turned the lorry, drove up the plateau road until he found the demolition wires, cut them all, went on farther, ran into an angry Italian Lieutenant-Colonel, kidnapped him, and returned to the demolitions, which he guarded in case of attempts to blow them by hand. During the night the 1/1 King's African Rifles marched up the road, and by dawn were on both the north-west and north-east ends of the escarpment, to the consternation of the Italians there, who had no idea that our men were across the river. By 10 a.m. on 6th June the plateau was in our hands, together with 2,800 startled prisoners, who never quite realised how it had all come about.

After the forcing of the Omo crossings there was no more serious fighting in the Southern Abyssinian sector. Jimma, the last important Italian city there, surrendered with 8,000 prisoners, 500 vehicles, large stocks of medical supplies and quantities of buried bullion.



Ras Garussa, Patriot chief of the south-west, who had never submitted to the Italians during the five years of occupation, leads his army across the swirling river. He wears a captured Italian uniform and rides his white mount with fitting dignity.

The Italian armies retired yet further into the westernmost fastnesses of the Abyssinian mountains. But their position was hopeless. They were caught. From the east came the blows of the hammer of the advance from the Omo crossings. To their west was the anvil of a line established in the early days of the campaign on Gambela and along the Dabus by the forces of the Sudan. The story of the establishment of this line can most conveniently be told here. It happened in this way.

Guba, the solitary Italian outpost opposite Roseires in Western Abyssinia, from which the enemy hoped to check British gun-running to the Emperor's forces in the Gojjam, received concentrated attention from three different quarters in November 1940, almost as soon as the Rolle expedition against Roseires had failed. The R.A.F. began a series of nerve-breaking raids on its neat grass compounds, and went on for two months; arms in ever-increasing quantities were issued from Roseires

to the semi-negro tribesmen round Guba, who tackled enemy patrols and bound him to his scorched fort; and with every air raid there went propaganda, playing on the alarm of Guba. The self-control of the garrison broke down in early January and, riddled with fever, they ran away east. The whole of Gojjam was now open to our huge camel convoys without fear of interference. Rather it was for the enemy to fear exploitation of this striking success in the province of Beni Shangul, further south. His fears were realised within a few days' time.

On 20th January the 5th Patrol Company of the Frontier Battalion, whose fellow companies had gone into Gojjam, by-passed the Italian post of Geissan on the frontier and pushed forward to the crossing of the Blue Nile at Shogali, where the 55th Italian Colonial Battalion were still trying to build a bridge to rescue the Guba garrison. The 55th were caught by surprise and very harshly handled.

Shortly afterwards they withdrew south, shrinking like an oyster on to their base at Asosa. Exploiting this, the Eastern Arab Corps of the Sudan Defence Force, which had replaced the Frontier Battalion at Roseires, reoccupied Geissan on 12th February, and two days later the Shogali crossing was permanently in our hands.

Two other columns were on the march from the west. The 2/6 King's African Rifles, solid black infantry lent to the Sudan by Kenya, reoccupied Kurmuk the day that the E.A.C. were at Shogali. The Belgian contingent from the Congo moved into place to the south. Asosa was directly threatened from three angles.

To defend the chief town of the gold lands of Beni Shangul the Italian commander of the 10th Brigade put a force of about 1,500 men, with a battery of mountain artillery, on the sharp ridge of the Afodu escarpment to the north. His Banda protected the western approaches.

To no avail. The Eastern Arab Corps out-maneuvred, mangled and dispersed this force on 9th March by a clever flank attack across the ridge and an ambush in their rear, and two days later the Belgians were in Asosa. What remained of the 10th Brigade fled across the Dabus River or deserted.

Within a fortnight the 2/6 K.A.R. had been switched to Gambela in the Baro salient to the south, and had recaptured Britain's old trading post in Abyssinia.

As was said above, on this line of the Dabus and Gambela the forces of the Sudan stood like an anvil until the hammer of Major-General Wetherall's advance struck across Galla-Sidamo from Addis through Jimma and Nakamti and broke Gazzera's army to pieces. Its soldiers surrendered quickly one after the other to the pursuing Nigerians and King's African Rifles from the east and to the swarming Patriot forces. The 2/6 K.A.R. garrisoned Beni Shangul, the Belgian Brigade Gambela; it was to these that the Italian commander, General Gazzera, surrendered.

So ended General Cunningham's campaign, in which over 30 Italian generals, 42 tanks and armoured cars, and 403 guns had been captured, and an army of 170,000 men had been put out of action by a force not one-third as numerous.

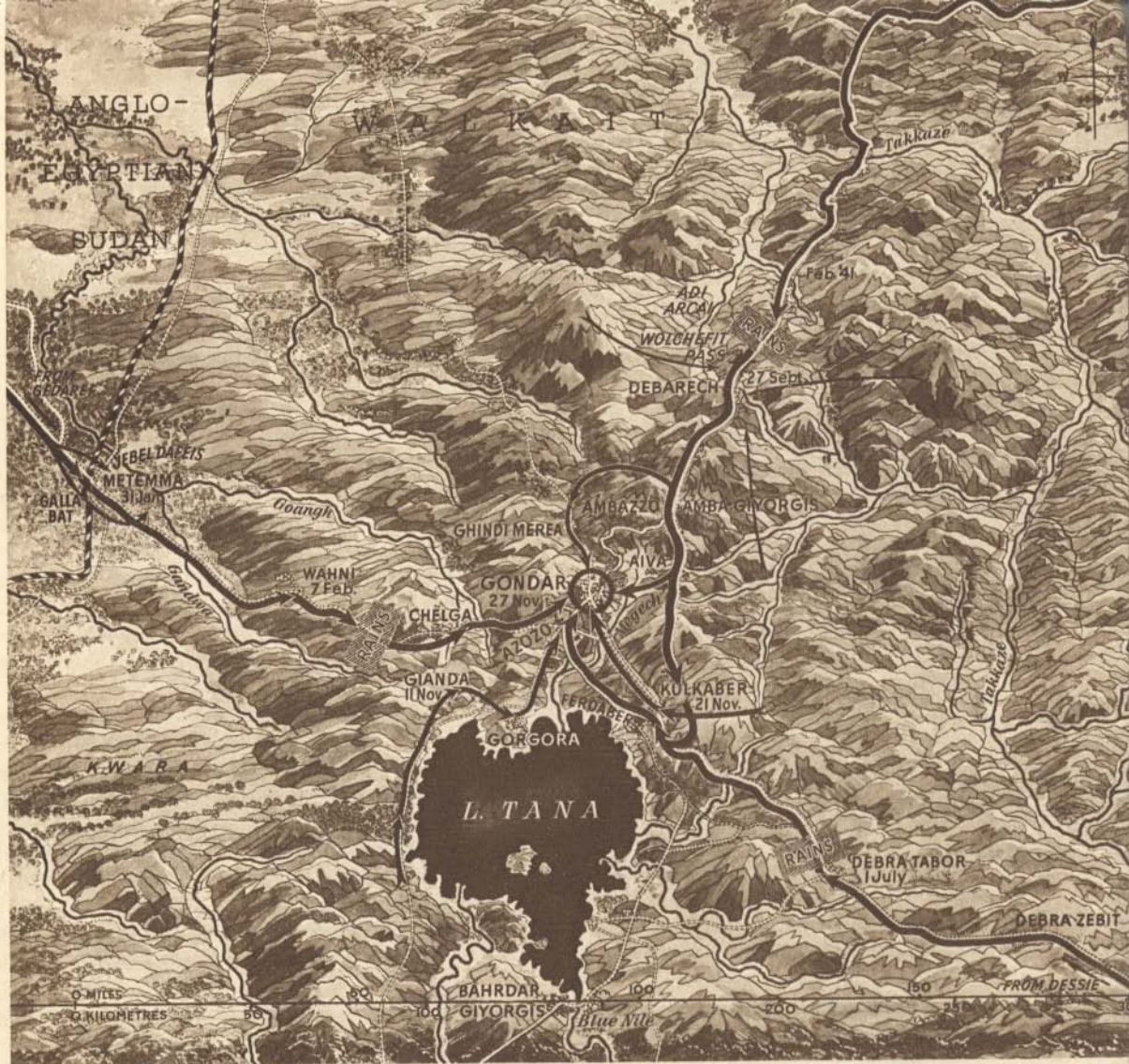
27—*Finale* :

The Fall of Gondar

WITH THE END OF Major-General Wetherall's brilliant sweep through the Galla-Sidamo region of south-western Abyssinia and the surrender of Gazzera in the far west, Gondar and a small tract around her old Portuguese castles was all that remained in Italian hands. The last shred of Italian authority in East Africa was vested in General Nasi, the able little disciplinarian with a key to the Abyssinian heart who now commanded a few shivering brigades in the forts of Gondar, Chelga, Wolcheft, Amba Giyorgis and Gorgora, upon whom the flooding rains now beat. Those rains prolonged their lives a few weeks only.

Even before the rains three British attacks, from the Sudan, from Eritrea and from Dessie, had reduced Nasi's former province of Amhara to a shrunken pale.

The Sudan attack began in January 1941, before General Platt struck at Eritrea. The 9th Indian Infantry Brigade, which alone of all his forces remained at Gallabat, were practising deceptions on Nasi and his capable subordinate Martini in the old style that had proved so effective in the early days of the Sudan campaign. Right and left they hacked the Gallabat bush into innumerable paths, cleared it into new landing grounds, never to be used, speckled it with bogus hospitals and dumps, trampled and scored it with a dummy tank



THE DRIVE AGAINST GONDAR

battalion. In the second week of January they put some teeth into this parade by sending the 52nd Commando on a circuitous march round the much superior enemy's line to attack his road to Gondar. They raided Jebel Dafeis on his northern flank with the 2nd West Yorkshires, Gallabat Fort in his centre with the 3/5 Mahratta Light Infantry.

They demonstrated against the Italian southern flank with the 3/12 Frontier Force Regiment. This mass demonstration concluded with a second attack on Gallabat Fort by the 3/5 Mahrattas on the night of 12th January which cleared the whole area, broke up and bayoneted the Italian garrison, and so whetted the troops' taste for battle that their officers had the

greatest difficulty in pulling them home again.

Nasi saw that he would have to retreat, and covered his preparations by active demonstrations until on 31st January all was ready, and the last of the Italian garrison of Metemma, three battalions and six guns, pulled noiselessly out. Martini's evacuation orders were captured by the troops that followed him up. They were models of their kind but they had that lighter side which throughout this campaign endeared the enemy to our more phlegmatic temperament. . . . The following injunction was not thought superfluous: "Commanders will see that their orders are obeyed. Be calm, serene, cold, do not be nervous."

A mobile British column had been formed out of the Bren carriers and what little motor transport the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade possessed, and by the afternoon of 1st February this column was master of the Gandwa River ford behind Metemma. In six more days it had chased up the Italian rear battalions, crushed two of them at Wahni, and occupied that hill fort on the way to Gondar, after clearing no fewer than 15 minefields on 54½ miles of earth road. Never in this campaign did the Italians strew mines so thickly and so cunningly as they strewed them before Wahni. They were planted not only in the road but up to 200 yards in the thick grass on either side. 2nd Lieut. Premindra Singh Bhagat, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners, grimly led the column through the 15 minefields one after the other. More than once blown out of his vehicle, his eardrum pierced, Bhagat refused to quit and himself cleared the lot in four days. He thus won for India her first Victoria Cross of the War, having performed, in the words of his commanding officer, "one of the longest continued feats of sheer cold courage I have ever seen."

The Italians stood at last on the massive escarpment at Chelga with two brigades, the 4th and 61st. Here the administrative difficulties of our 9th Infantry Brigade were found to be insuperable; the Brigade, moreover, was needed at Keren. One battalion was left

behind, to be replaced by the Eastern Arab Corps of the Sudan Defence Force and by the 3rd Ethiopian Battalion at the end of March. Then in a spirited attack in May the 27th Italian Colonial Battalion, smashed in the previous November at Gallabat and since reorganised, was smashed a second time in the hills north of Chelga. Nasi sent in a fresh brigade to the counter-attack, and once more administrative difficulties made it impossible to hold our gains.

Down at last came the rains in their full force, smothering the escarpment, and there was silence on this front.

Meanwhile, the second attack was proceeding towards the northern door to Gondar. The fine main road from Aduwa led to this door across the River Takkazze. Its name was the Wolcheft Pass.

The mobile forces of the Sudan reached this great cleft of rock in the days that followed the occupation of Asmara; but the work of prising the door open was postponed in favour of the attack on Amba Alagi, which cleared the essential land communications between Addis Ababa and Massawa and speeded reinforcements to Egypt.

But to open the Wolcheft Pass, where the Italians had field artillery and Blackshirt battalions, was a major operation that could not succeed without large regular forces; and these General Platt lost after the capture of Amba Alagi. When Wolcheft might have fallen they were fighting their way into Sollum and Damascus.

That did not mean that the Italians cornered at Wolcheft avoided their measure of misery.

Patriot forces were organised to the south, west and east of Wolcheft by a young English major. To these forces fled Dedjasmach Ayelu Birru, the great feudal lord of this country whom Nasi appointed in 1941 governor of Gondar. They then fell upon Debarech, south of Wolcheft on the only road to Gondar, and after ferocious fighting, in which over 400 enemy troops were killed, the Italian was thrown out of Debarech at the end of May.



THE NORTHERN DOOR TO GONDAR. An Italian machine-gun post which commanded the magnificent mountain road across the Wolcheft Pass. Here, the northern attack was held until the rains ceased.

He broke back from Wolcheft in June and re-occupied Debarech. Then, with the rains, came silence here, too.

Then, in the third attack before the rains, a small British force and Ethiopian Scouts, followed by Skinner's Horse, came up the road from the south-east. Magdala and Debra Zebit fell in succession after the fall of Dessie, and on 1st July Colonel Angelini, commanding the important garrison of Debra Tabor, surrendered with some 3,000 Italians and 1,200 colonial troops. Then on this front, too, silence came with the rains. Thus, when the rains of 1941 began, the Italians still held a

fairly large area centred on Gondar and extending far enough to make supplies for Nasi's troops possible.

It must be realised that Gondar was not an isolated stronghold but the centre of a large district in which the Italians held numbers of strong positions. It is easy to grasp the essential features of the country. Gondar stands about 7,000 feet up, amid mountains that rise to some 10,000 feet to the east, west and north. Southward the mountainous plateau falls away to the blue waters of Lake Tana. Our men, on the high ground to the east of the city, had magnificent panoramas of

green rolling country in which maize and millet grew, for it was the harvest season and, throughout the battle, Ethiopians were busy attempting to tend their crops with that supreme unconcern for war that they have inherited for generations, to whom both the sword and the spade were all in the day's work.

Although to Gondar roads of a kind ran from all points of the country, an army powerful enough to overcome Nasi's 34,000 men could only approach along two routes, one of which ran north-west from Debra Tabor and one south-west from Asmara. The two main Italian outposts were established respectively at Kulkaber on the southern road and at Wolchefit on the northern.

Wolchefit was the first to be attacked. Patriot forces under Colonel Ringrose crept up astonishing precipices unexpectedly by night and cut the road between Wolchefit and Gondar, regular forces arrived and started vigorous patrolling, our air forces and artillery pounded away, and finally on 27th September the Italian resistance ceased. Seventy-one officers, 1,560 Italian other ranks and over 1,450 African Colonial troops surrendered to the 2/4 K.A.R. This success opened up the road to Amba Giyorgis and to the first of the main Gondar defences. It also gave our Air Force access to an indifferent, but usable,

WOLCHEFIT SURRENDERS UNDER ARMS.
The Italian force are given the honours of war as they march past men from the 2/4 K.A.R.

landing ground, which proved to be of great importance during the final operations.

The early movements against Gondar had been carried out by General Platt, but on 22nd September the East Africa Command took over, and the reduction of the area became the task of the 12th (African) Division. Major-General Fowkes had to decide whether to launch his main attack from Debra Tabor or Asmara. An attack from Debra Tabor promised to open up the easier and more direct way into the heart of the Gondar area, and there could be no doubt that this route was the more suitable provided the road surface would stand up to the necessary transport. There was every reason to suppose that it would do so once the rains ceased, but as it happened they continued heavily for a fortnight longer than was to be expected, and the road became such a doubtful proposition that on 23rd October it was decided to switch the main offensive to the Asmara Road, which was, at least partially, metalled.

The new plan was to concentrate the 25th and 26th East African Brigades with various supporting arms at Amba Giyorgis approximately 30 kilometres north-east of Gondar, while a small force called "Southforce" of two battalions with a battery of medium guns backed up by dummy tanks and quantities of wireless sets belonging to non-existent units, should launch a sham offensive along the Dessie-Debra Tabor road. This offensive was not intended to be entirely sham, for it was hoped that the "Southforce" would succeed in driving in the enemy's outposts at Kulkaber.

By 7th November, Advance Divisional Headquarters and the two Brigade groups were established in the area to the east of Amba Giyorgis, but the attack had to be postponed to await the arrival at Massawa of the new 25-pounder guns of the 54th Nyasaland Battery from Middle East, without which our artillery was much weaker than the enemy's.

Heterogeneous, but highly-efficient bodies helped in the reduction of Gondar. There were the 2nd Ethiopians who, under Lieut.-



Colonel Benson, had marched from Debra Markos round the western shores of Lake Tana. On 11th November they fell on the post of Gianda, captured the position, and later contained a large body of Italians in Gorgora. There was the Sudan column which, advancing from the west, cut all communications between Chelga and Gondar. There were also in the field no fewer than five different Patriot groups, each of which, under European leadership, played a most effective part in the operation. One group was led by a Bimbashi Shepherd, who in peaceful times was a Professor of Poetry in Cairo University. First he established headquarters at Amba Giyorgis; later he descended the escarpment into the "Badlands"—a strange Walt Disney country just north of the Gondar mountains. There he fought a curious three-day mediæval war against the Kamant chiefs, who finally said, "You win," and came over to his side. Then he turned on the Italian outposts north of Gondar and was besieging Ghindi Merea when Gondar fell.

Another group, under Captain Campbell, did valuable scouting work in the Ambazzo area. There was Captain Van Veen, a Belgian, who with 150 Ethiopians joined the Sudan column and assisted in cutting the Gondar-Chelga road. There was Captain Ellis, whose 150 men acted as scouts to the 2nd Ethiopians and had a hand in the reduction of Gianda and the siege of Gorgora. And there was a powerful body of Patriots, led by Major Douglas, who had under his command some European officers and a force which varied between 2,500 and 5,000 men. They surrounded Kulkaber, cut the Gondar road, assisted in the first attack on Kulkaber, operated between the 25th and 26th East African Brigades in the last day's fighting, and were in fact the first troops to enter Gondar.

The main conception of the attack on Gondar is not difficult to grasp. North-east of the city our strongest force faced Italian concentrations in the Ambazzo area. South-east of the city our weaker units faced the strong Italian positions on the Kulkaber-Feroaber line, where the

natural defences provided by steep slopes had been considerably improved by fortifications, land mines and booby traps. Against these on 13th November a combined attack was launched by "Southforce" and Douglas' Patriots. This first attack failed after an initial success. But Kulkaber had to be taken otherwise one-half of the scheme would have to be abandoned and our medium guns would have to be left behind to waste their sweetness on the rarefied Ethiopian air miles from the scene of the main attack on Gondar.

The problem was solved by a combination of enterprise and engineering. An old track was found, in terrible condition, but possessing the supreme merit of offering a short cut between Amba Giyorgis and Kulkaber. Everybody got to work and by 19th November a road of a kind could definitely be stated to exist. It was so steep in places that tractors had to be used to haul lorries up the more severe gradients, but it was just out of artillery range and it was also screened from Italian observation, save along one single stretch. The first thing that General Nasi knew of the development of this road was a glimpse of the lorries of the 25th Brigade passing along it to the south, and he could give no assistance to the isolated garrison in the new battle which began almost immediately—on 21st November.

This, the second battle of Kulkaber, provided one of the hardest fights of the campaign. The enemy was once again attacked from two directions, by the 25th East African Brigade from the north, and by "Southforce" and the Patriots from the south-east. The 2/3 K.A.R. reached the ridge, which was their objective, but they were shelled off it and driven 600 yards downhill. There they were rallied by Major Trimmer. At 12.30 they attacked again and recaptured the hilltop with the help of two companies of the 2/4 K.A.R. Three strong enemy counter-attacks were launched and defeated in turn, and by 3 p.m. the familiar and ubiquitous white flags, with which even the most denuded Italian units appeared always to be equipped, were beginning to put in their

appearance. The attack from the south-east also attained its objective. The road was open at last for the 60-pounder guns; only the final battle remained to be fought to force the gates of Gondar.

The final attack on Gondar came mainly from the east and from the south-east in partial reversion to the original plan, which had had to be abandoned on account of the poor condition of the Debra Tabor road. Since a route had now been opened up southward from Amba Giyorgis and so much material and so many men had already been moved along it, it was no longer desirable to attack along the Asmara-Gondar road, where the enemy had not only his finest positions, but also his greatest strength. A small containing force was therefore left at Amba Giyorgis and the remainder of the 26th Brigade moved southward to Aiva.

Most of the 26th Brigade had to cross difficult country in which no roads existed, and in which for reasons of secrecy no reconnaissances had been attempted. For this purpose the Brigade was put on a "pack" basis, and it travelled on improvised resources and locally requisitioned horses, mules and donkeys. Each man carried fighting equipment and rations for three days. The final approach had to be made down a slope in full view of the enemy and the route had to be camouflaged by cutting down shrubs at night and replanting them so as to cover the track—a device used by the Japanese in the 1904 war.

At dawn on 27th November began the last battle of the East African campaign. Artillery fire was concentrated on the enemy's registered positions; the South African Air Force was soon active. The 26th Brigade crossed the river Megech, and began their assault upon Defeccia ridge. Further south, the 25th Brigade were attacking up the main road towards Azozo, and between the Brigades Douglas' Patriots flung themselves upon the series of enemy positions known as the Fanta Posts.

The country before the 26th Brigade turned

out to be much more cut up and difficult than it had seemed; at times it was so precipitous that they had to go upon their hands and knees, even midst vast anti-personnel mine fields. However, they reached their objectives at last and captured them after a certain amount of fighting, despite casualties from mines and heavy shell-fire.

Immediately south of 26th Brigade, the Patriots were meeting with very great success. But most spectacular of all were the achievements of the 25th Brigade, still further to the south. In a manner which one staff officer has described as "beautiful in its regularity," they took in steady succession the positions south and south-east of Azozo, and at last Azozo itself. Our armoured cars and light tanks roared across the river after the bridge had been repaired and found that Italian resistance had so far collapsed that they could push on to Gondar, interfered with only by small arms and rifle fire. The Patriots, who need not wait for bridges, had, however, got there first.

Meanwhile General Nasi had realised that the campaign was at an end. He had been deceived as to the direction of the attack and, though his guns were numerous, he was short of reserves. His only course was to send in envoys to ask for an armistice, but they arrived too late, for already Patriots and regular troops were getting into Gondar. In the end the last and best of the Italian commanders surrendered unconditionally to an officer of the Kenya Armoured Cars.

The last pocket of Italian resistance had been emptied and it had proved to be a very crowded pocket. Its contents included 11,500 Italians, 12,000 Africans, 400 machine guns, 24 mortars and 48 field guns of various calibres. The numbers of prisoners were, as usual, greatly in excess of our entire attacking force, and in addition General Nasi had possessed an advantage in artillery. Our own casualties (not including Ethiopian Patriots) in the entire operations—116 killed and 386 wounded—were once again ridiculously light when measured against the task that had been accomplished.

swept and so devoid of covered access. On these days the 25th and 26th East African Brigades held ceremonial parades and marched past Lieut.-General Wetherall and Major-General Fowkes. These parades did more than celebrate the taking of Gondar; they seemed to epitomise the East African campaign, for the extraordinary concourse of men of diverse races, which took part in them, was only typical of the international force which, welded together by superb leadership, had brought about the Italian collapse in East Africa. In addition to the Africans of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Nyasaland, there were other Africans from the Sudan and the Gold Coast. The South African Air Force was represented; so was the South African Light Armoured detachment with its Bren gun-carriers and tanks and South African engineers. The Kenya Armoured Car Regiment was there, so was half a battalion of that far-flung regiment, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. There were Indian Mountain Batteries. There were East African, N. Rhodesian and Australian Medical Units. There were Cape Pioneers. There was a detachment of the new Ethiopian Regular Army, looking very sophisticated by the side of the various groups of Ethiopian Irregulars, who, under their leaders, newly shorn and shaved, were well represented at the parade. Amongst them there was the 79th Colonial Battalion, which was originally an enemy unit, but which, after its capture almost intact early in the campaign, had been reorganised to take its place in the field as the "79th Foot."

To this extraordinarily heterogeneous force General Wetherall's message of congratulation was read out in no fewer than ten different languages.

Later, in the camp of Fitaurari Birru 10,000 Ethiopians reviewed by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Ethiopia, who had accompanied 12th Division's Headquarters throughout the battle, were celebrating in their own manner the final freeing of their nation and the collapse of the Italian Empire.



LAST CITADEL. The Union Jack flies over the old castle at Gondar.

So far in this account little mention has been made of air co-operation. This was whole-hearted and effective, throughout both the preliminary operations and the final stages of the attack on Gondar. The S.A.A.F. and the R.A.F. operating from Alomata and Asmara, and also later from the advanced landing ground carried out daily bombing attacks and played a great part in lowering the enemy's morale. On 11th November, for example, they assisted the 2nd Ethiopians in their attack on Gianda, when one pilot landed amid appalling conditions to rescue and take to hospital an officer mortally wounded in that engagement.

Support was given to the Sudan column in the attacks on Kulkaber, while on 17th November 45 aircraft attacked Ambazzo, Defeccia, Gondar and Azozo. On 27th November when the final battle took place, they were overhead all day, encouraging our men and demoralising the enemy.

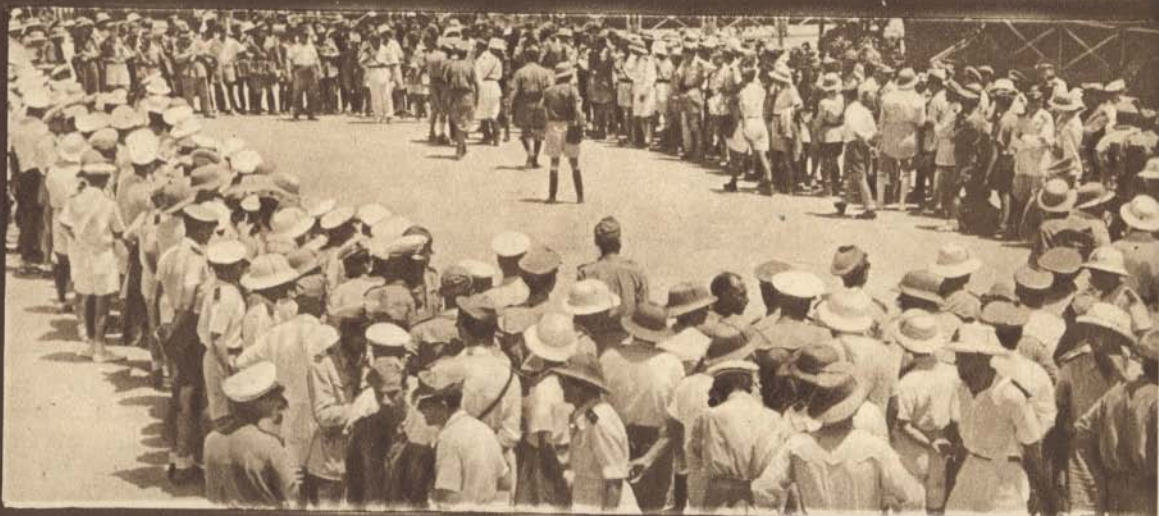
On 1st and 2nd December great gatherings assembled north of Gondar and on Azozo aerodrome, that vast field, which had seemed to the advancing infantry so formidably fire-



MEGA



HE JUBA



MASSAWA

AN ARMY OUTGENERALLED, OUTFOUGHT, DESTROYED



KEREN

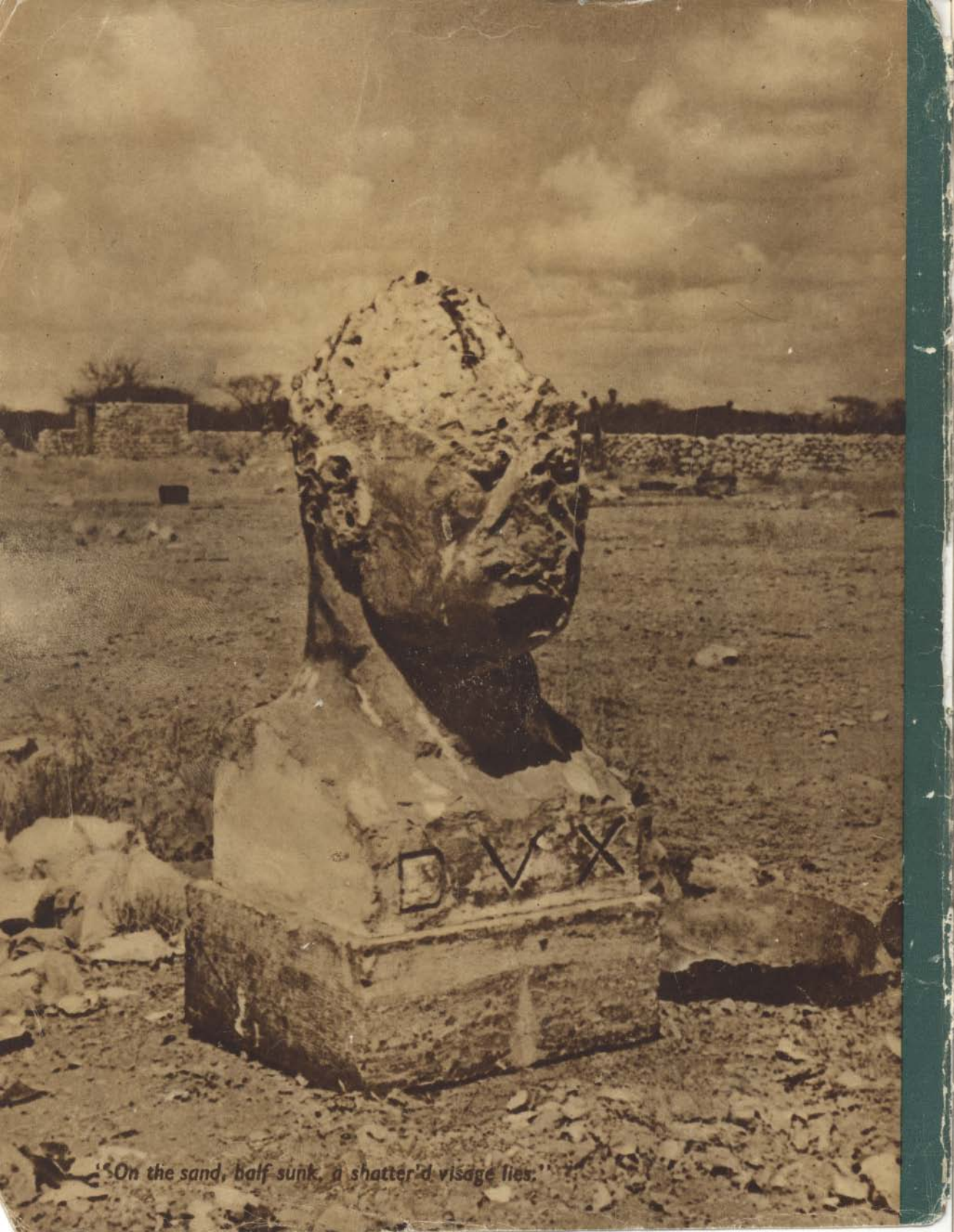


AMBA
ALAGI



GONDAR

... A PROMISE REDEEMED, AN EMPIRE FREED



'On the sand, half sunk, a shatter'd visage lies.'