

greater efforts. As far as my troops were concerned I was sure, if only they could come up to the enemy, no further fighting would be required to cause the enemy to give in.

I was convinced that the forces in Galla Sidamo were on their last legs, my only fear being that they might maroon themselves in the mud and make it impossible for our troops to reach them. My information was to the effect that movement anywhere off the permanent roads, which ended at Lechemti and Gimma, was impossible after the middle of July when it was said that even the villagers shut themselves up in their villages and were unable to move out until September when the heavy rains finished.

51. On 3rd July, however, my anxiety on this score was ended, as General Gazzera broadcast a message to Addis Abeba that he was sending a car-load of delegates down the Dembidollo-Gambela road to negotiate the surrender of all troops in the Galla Sidamo.

52. The only Italians now left in the area for which I was responsible were the very inconsiderable party under Raugai, 600 Italians and some Banda, marooned on the northern borders of French Somaliland. The fiery Danakhils, who inhabited that area and who had hitherto been friendly to him, had turned against him and were attacking him. He was in desperate straits for supplies and eventually surrendered in two parties on 8th and 11th July.

53. The surrender of the Supreme Commander, General Gazzera, the whole of the province of Galla Sidamo and Raugai's column west of Assab, marked the elimination of all Italian troops in the area for which I was responsible and the conclusion of the campaign waged by East Africa Force which had started on 11th February.

It seems worth mentioning, in view of the many enemy claims that they were overwhelmed by superior numbers, that at no time were more than three brigade groups plus two battalions engaged in operations against the 40,000 enemy infantry and militia in the Galla Sidamo, where as at the commencement of these operations the enemy had five times as many guns as we had. After the fall of Sciascamanna only two brigade groups were used.

#### *B. Operations of 1st S.A. Brigade.*

*(13th April—8th May, 1941.)*

*(Order of Battle as in Appendix "A".)*

54. On 13th April 1st S.A. Brigade Group left Addis Abeba and in spite of extensive demolitions one mile beyond the Mussolini tunnel some 100 miles north of Addis Abeba, were able to occupy Debre' Sina with 1st D.E.O.R. on 14th April. This was done after slight enemy opposition had been overcome, while work on the road demolitions continued. On 16th April the advance continued from Debre' Sina and after encountering minor road blocks the leading troops on the 17th reached the southern approaches of the Combolcia Pass, where they came under enemy shell-fire.

55. It was soon apparent that the brigade was in contact with a strong enemy position well supported by artillery and sited in most difficult country. The enemy shelling was heavy and accurate, and in addition to a number of

casualties two of our 18 pdr. guns were damaged.

The road to Combolcia which ran over a series of saddles with steep mountainous country on either side, could be seen to be deliberately blocked by a mass of enemy vehicles. To the west of the road the ground was open and marshy and impassable to vehicles, but on the eastern side where there was a parallel valley a mile or two away, there was promise of a possible covered approach. The leading companies of the 1st D.E.O.R. were therefore ordered to seize commanding features on that side.

The battle then resolved itself into three phases, which altogether occupied five days, a long and difficult approach, the attack, and the hurried flight of the enemy.

56. On 18th April the 1st Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles were ordered to move along the high ground to the east of the road with 1st Transvaal Scottish operating on the lower slopes and 1st Royal Natal Carbineers in reserve. Patriots under Lieut. A. G. S. Campbell were directed round both flanks of the enemy's position to locate the extent of his position and to harry his rear, and if possible to get astride his L. of C. Enemy artillery interfered considerably with these movements. On the afternoon of the 19th April the Italians launched a strong counter-attack on the right flank of 1st D.E.O.R. which was beaten off with heavy loss to the enemy.

Progress continued to be slow in the mountainous country where all weapons, supplies and water had to be carried by hand, and where signal communications were very difficult. On the night of 20/21st April 1st R.N.C. relieved 1st D.E.O.R. who had then been four days and nights in the mountains.

The steady pressure of our advance had caused a continual thin stream of prisoners and deserters, which undoubtedly lowered the enemy's morale, but all reports showed that his main position was held by at least 2,000 Europeans, apart from African troops.

Meanwhile Campbell's scouts had been doing valuable work in occupying outlying features and harrying the enemy's flanks, and our artillery had moved into more concealed positions and gradually established a superiority of fire.

57. On 22nd April the assault was made by 1st R.N.C. who seized the main enemy position, while the 1st T.S. swept up enemy opposition on the lower slopes down the road. About 1430 hours the enemy were in flight, but road-blocks and the difficulties of the country, no less than the physical strain on the infantry of the preceding days prevented any effective pursuit. A large number of prisoners and material were taken including 8 medium, 12 naval, 4 field, 3 light and 4 A.A. guns.

58. On 23rd April the extensive road-blocks were cleared except for a small one which was covered by accurate enemy artillery fire. The artillery was brought forward into action and the D.E.O.R. who were then once more in the van, moved forward across country, finally occupying on the morning of 26th April features which overlooked Combolcia.

The road-block having been removed under cover of darkness during the night 25/26th April, 1st T.S. moved straight on to Combolcia where a considerable number of prisoners and material were captured.