

28. The support of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F., with comparatively small numbers and equipment far from modern, was altogether admirable; and the co-operation between army and air forces close and efficient.

29. The Royal Navy assisted with their usual efficiency and spirit at Kismayu, Mogadiscio, Berbera, Massawa and elsewhere.

30. I should like to add a special tribute to Field-Marshal Smuts for his unfailing support of the East African campaign; and to the generous response that the Union Government invariably made to any requests for assistance, either in personnel or material, during the whole period of my command in the Middle East.

REPORT BY LT. GEN. SIR WILLIAM PLATT, K.C.B., D.S.O., ON THE OPERATIONS IN ERITREA AND ABYSSINIA.

From 1st December, 1940, to
26th August, 1941.

H.Q. Tps., Khartoum.

11th September, 1941.

PART I (A)

The Planning for the Battle of Kassala.

On 2nd December, 1940, at a conference held at G.H.Q. Middle East, the C.-in-C. outlined the policy for the troops in the Sudan as follows:—

- (a) To prepare to capture Kassala triangle in February.
- (b) To maintain pressure in Gallabat area but to attempt no large-scale operations at present.
- (c) To foster the rebellion in Abyssinia by all possible means.

The Enemy Situation.

By this time the enemy's chances of a successful major offensive against the Sudan had passed. Reinforcements consisting of 5th Indian Division, less one brigade group, much exaggerated by the enemy, were already in the country. We had fought the partially successful action at Gallabat. It was therefore probable that the Italian strategy would be:

- (a) To remain on the defensive on the Kenya front.
- (b) To prevent access from outside Ethiopia to the patriots, while concentrating inside to stamp out the revolt.
- (c) To protect Asmara and Massawa and to remain on the active defensive in the Kassala and El Gheba areas.

Although the Italian main strategy would probably be defensive, an attack in force to recapture Gallabat seemed likely. If successful, this would do much to prevent the passage of men, arms and money into the patriot areas from the Sudan. Furthermore, a success in the Sudan was needed to offset the serious reverses the Italians had suffered in Albania and were then suffering in the Western Desert.

Enemy Strength.

At this time there were the equivalent of two Italian Divisions in the Kassala area, one in the area Kassala—Tessenei—Sabdarat and

one in the general area Adardeb—Serobatib—Wachai—Baraka Valley. The defences of Kassala had been developed to such an extent that considerable forces would be needed if Kassala was to be attacked with any chance of success.

As a result of our recent offensive at Gallabat, the enemy had increased his forces in the neighbourhood of Metemma and along the Gondar—Metemma road, making it necessary for us to retain sufficient forces in this area to prevent a successful hostile offensive.

Preliminary Operations.

Additional to these plans to achieve surprise in the major action, certain complementary operations were to be staged:—

(a) In the Boma area, G.O.C. East Africa intended to operate about 15th January to capture Baco and Maji. The Equatorial Corps and Patriots were to co-operate.

(b) In the Upper Nile area, minor operations were to be carried out in January by 2/6 King's African Rifles and the Upper Nile Police Forces.

(c) In the Blue Nile area the company of the Frontier Battalion, which was already in the Belaya massif, was to be reinforced and the Emperor himself was to move into this area.

Forces Available for the Attack.

It was necessary, for purposes of defence, to maintain one brigade (7th Indian Infantry Brigade), less one battalion, in the areas Port Sudan—Gebeit and one complete Indian Infantry brigade group (9th Indian Infantry Brigade) to contain the enemy forces opposite Gallabat. That left 4th and 5th Indian Divisions with only two brigades each available for Kassala. Moreover, 5th Indian Division was short of 144 Field Regiment which was split between 9th Infantry Brigade at Gallabat and Gazelle Force. This was, to some extent, compensated for by the addition of one medium battery, 6-inch Hows., and two troops 3.7-inch Hows. Sudan Defence Force.

'B' Squadron 4 Royal Tank Regiment had arrived by sea some time previously and had been concealed near Port Sudan. Considerable difficulties of movement were caused by the wrong specification of weights and length of "I" tanks being given to Sudan Railways. This resulted in the flats for moving this Squadron by rail being strengthened in the wrong way. When the real weights and lengths were discovered, hardly any time was left to modify the flats. It was never possible to move the whole squadron by rail at once. The first troop was moved forward 15th January and reached Sabdarat on night 23rd January.

Topography.

The country round Kassala can be compared with a sea studded with islands. The desert is the sea, the jebels the islands, rising steep and rocky from the desert plain. West of Kassala the jebels are few and unimportant. Eastwards they increase in numbers and size until the foothills are reached. North and South are scattered jebels of considerable tactical importance. The desert is, on the whole, good going for M.T. of all types. If

* NOTE.—"I" (Infantry) tanks are medium tanks used for co-operation with infantry.