

The capitulation of the Vichy Forces in Madagascar caused much concern in Jibouti, but the attitude of the Government towards us did not change. The Allied landings in North Africa early in November still further disturbed opinion in French Somaliland. Towards the end of the month it became clear that a crisis was approaching, and on the 28th, Colonel Raynal, Commander of the 1st Battalion Tirailleurs Sengalais, with his Battalion and a large percentage of the artillery personnel of the garrison, crossed the frontier at Zeila and announced their adherence to the United Nations. The party, which amounted to nearly one-third of the garrison, brought with it personal arms and equipment.

On my visiting Harrar on 7th December I learnt that the American Consul from Aden had flown to Zeila the previous day, and had gone into Jibouti, on direct instructions from Washington, to examine and report on the situation.

The next few days were occupied by the authorities in Jibouti endeavouring to play off the Fighting French against ourselves, and either or both of us against a hinted commitment to the American Consul. These manoeuvres were dispelled by a visit to Aden where I met the Acting Governor, Senior Naval Officer, Air Officer Commanding, American Consul and Mr. Hopkinson who arrived opportunely, having been kindly sent by the Minister of State to help me in political discussions.

In the middle of December the Acting Governor of Jibouti, General Dupont, invited the British Military Commander to visit him to discuss the situation. Although the Fighting French were excluded from the invitation, I gave instructions, with specific safeguards regarding the Fighting French, to Major-General Fowkes to accept the invitation. On 17th December he and Mr. Hopkinson presented themselves at the Frontier and were conveyed by special train to Jibouti, where they were greeted with enthusiasm by the populace and accommodated at Government House.

No agreement was reached at the meeting, but an alternative proposal was put forward by General Dupont for an economic agreement with the United Nations. This was unacceptable. General Dupont was informed in clear terms that the only means of settlement was for French Somaliland to join the United Nations as part of the Fighting French. Our representatives returned to Harrar.

On 24th December, a further communication was received from General Dupont to the effect that it was impossible for him to negotiate with the Fighting French and he returned to his previous proposals for an economic agreement with representatives of the British and United States Governments. From this reply it was clear that more drastic steps were needed to resolve the situation. My instructions from the Chiefs of Staff were to the effect that all efforts short of serious bloodshed were to be

made to bring the Colony over to the Fighting French. I felt that this could best be done by continuing to present the facts of the case to the populace who had been misled regarding the true state of affairs. To this end leaflets were frequently dropped from the air.

At the same time I had to be prepared to face the possibility of armed resistance by those whose anti-Gaullist attitude in the past made them ready to go to any lengths for their own salvation. A display of overwhelming armed strength would make it clear that fighting was useless.

The two big bridges on the railway between the frontier station at Dauone and the town of Jibouti were a further care. One was at Hol Hol, 30 miles inside the frontier, and the other at Chebele only 10 miles from the town of Jibouti. If either of these were destroyed, the railway would be out of action for the rest of the war.

Plans were laid for a Fighting French Force under Colonel Raynal to move into French Somaliland along the railway to secure these bridges, and at the same time try and rally the remaining garrison to their side.

Should this have failed to produce the required effect, and after a last appeal by pamphlet from the air, a naval and air demonstration off the town was arranged, concurrent with an advance of British troops into the Colony. All Services had strict instructions not to open fire unless first fired upon themselves by the French.

On 26th December, Colonel Raynal's Force moved in, and successfully seized the bridges, rallying various outlying garrisons on the way. On the 27th and 28th, a large party of the garrison came over to them, and at 1000 hours on the 28th, the Acting Governor sent a message asking for an interview with General Fowkes. The interview was held that night at Chebele in a railway coach, Monsieur Chancel, Free French Delegate in East Africa, being present. General Dupont signed an agreement whereby French Somaliland took her place as part of the Fighting French on the side of the Allied Nations. The anxieties of the last few days were terminated without bloodshed. Credit for this is due to Major-General Fowkes, Mr. Hopkinson and Monsieur Chancel. The resolution, patience and co-operation of Monsieur Chancel were remarkable and made a great contribution to our common cause.

On New Year's Day, 1943, General de Division P. Legentilhomme, immediately on his arrival in East Africa as High Commissioner for the French Possessions in the Indian Ocean, visited Jibouti where he was received by a guard of honour and carried out a formal inspection of the troops. I accompanied him on this visit, and a week later at Tananarive handed over to him responsibility for the administration of Madagascar, less the defended area at and around Diego Suarez, with due ceremony and in an atmosphere of friendship and collaboration.

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