

miles. The Order of Battle of 11th (A) Division on 11th March is given in Appendix "E."

72. Information was now in the hands of the Air Force that the enemy were using almost exclusively Dire Dawa aerodrome and its two satellites close by. Another fighter ground attack was organised and took place between 13th-15th March. This operation resulted in the loss to the enemy of 20 aircraft, 6 destroyed in the air, 9 on the ground and 5 damaged. Our losses were two Hurricanes. The value at this particular period of these heavy losses to the enemy was very great. Our further advance was over mountain roads through many narrow defiles and passes, where our columns would have been extremely vulnerable to air attack. Although they were bombed sporadically the attacks were not pushed home and little damage resulted. Our columns were still able to advance by day.

73. On 19th March supply arrangements permitted 11th (A) Division to continue the advance from Dagabur with the whole of the Nigerian Brigade.

The remaining two brigades which had been placed under the orders of 11th (A) Division, namely, 1st S.A. Brigade and 22nd E.A. Brigade, were not able to operate forward of Dagabur till 21st and 26th March respectively owing to administrative restrictions.

Giggiga was attacked on 17th March and occupied by advanced forces of the 23rd Nigerian Brigade with only slight opposition, the enemy retiring to a position covering the Marda Pass.

74. Meanwhile, A.O.C. Aden, taking advantage of the threat to Giggiga, through which ran the only easily passable road from British Somaliland into Abyssinia, successfully attacked Berbera on the 16th March from the sea, with two Indian Battalions and attached troops.

The plan for the capture and opening of the port, the provision of the port personnel and the landing of the stores necessary for the further advance of my troops, were all in his hands.

I would like to place on record my appreciation of the great ability shown by Air Vice-Marshal G. R. M. Reid, D.S.O., M.C., in carrying out the operation, and the fine spirit of co-operation and helpfulness displayed by both Air Vice-Marshal Reid and his staff in the establishment of the port. Colonel A. H. Pollock, M.C., who commanded the troops which carried out the landing, and who subsequently became Area Commander Berbera, was responsible, with the assistance of the Royal Navy from Aden, for the handling of the supplies from Aden destined for my troops. I wish also to commend the efficiency shown by the Royal Navy and Colonel Pollock in this work. Although short-handed and with poor facilities, great energy and determination resulted in landing sufficient stores to enable my advance beyond Harrar to proceed without a pause, a state of affairs which at one time I did not think would be possible.

75. As our advance was proceeding northwards from Mogadiscio the enemy in British Somaliland had issued orders for the withdrawal of their forces. The rapid advance on to Giggiga, however, cut their normal route for retirement and the 70th Colonial Brigade under General Bertello attempted to escape by Borama and Dire Dawa. The subse-

quent adventures of this column are obscure. It became known that General Bertello had passed through Dire Dawa mounted on a mule shortly before we captured that place. Furthermore, large parties of prisoners in British Somaliland and just south of the border were captured at various subsequent dates. It is assumed therefore that 70th Brigade melted away.

On the 20th March a small column of Nigerians occupied Tug Wajale on the British Somaliland border, and two armoured cars, led by the Chief Engineer E.A. Force, motored through Hargeisa to Berbera and established contact with Aden Force.

76. The occupation of Giggiga marked the end of the fighting in the flat bush country, and the commencement of a period of hill fighting in the Abyssinian highlands. Up to the present our tactics had almost invariably been the same, the reconnaissance to find the flanks of the enemy position by armoured cars, its rapid envelopment by armoured cars and embussed infantry if the going permitted, or infantry on foot if it did not. It was seldom during the period up to Giggiga that some form of mechanised column could not be placed behind the enemy position. It was our experience that as soon as the Italian Colonial Infantry realised there was something behind them their resistance gave way.

With the entry into the hills it was clear that A.F.Vs. could no longer be depended upon to the same extent as heretofore, and that the Infantry would have to revert to true infantry fighting on their feet. In anticipation of such a situation arising I had formed a small transport company of 600 mules in Kenya, and had arranged to portee one 3.7 in. How. Battery, mules and guns complete. Owing, however, to the extreme difficulty of getting them over the long distance from Kenya, I was not able to get them up in time for the operations covered by this report.

77. The Marda Pass appeared to be held strongly by the enemy, and viewed towering above the extensive flat plains of Giggiga, looked indeed a formidable proposition. Nothing could move on the Giggiga plain without being seen, and the aerodrome was in full view of the hills 9,000 yards away. The enemy appeared to be holding a broad front and therefore Commander 11th (A) Division decided he would await the arrival of 1st S.A. Brigade and attack the pass with two brigades on 23rd March. Patrol activity by the Nigerian Brigade during this period resulted in a claim by the enemy that heavy attacks had been carried out, all of which had been repulsed with great loss. On 20th March I received definite indications that the enemy was planning a further withdrawal and it was decided to attack with the Nigerian Brigade only, next day. After stiff fighting 1st Nigeria Regiment were able to take a height overlooking the pass on its northern side by 2000 hours on the evening of the 21st. The enemy evacuated the pass that night. It transpired that the position was in fact 4 miles in breadth. It was heavily wired, had gun positions tunnelled into the hills, extensive tank traps and mine fields. It had however no depth, and there is little doubt that the occupation of the height captured by our troops had made it untenable.