

down their arms, none of the British troops under my command will enter Gimma unless I order them to do so to continue the fight against the Italian armed forces.

In accordance with my previous warning to His Royal Highness di Savoia, I am quite unable to accept any responsibility for the safety of your nationals in Gimma."

Furthermore I instructed 11th (A) Division that until it became an operational necessity, Gimma should only be entered if it appeared that the women and children were in real danger from lawless native elements.

43. Another broadcast message was received from Gimma which is so indicative of the anxious state of mind of the enemy that it is given here in full.

"Italian column commanded by General Pralormo near Kindo on the river Bottego is in desperate condition because attacked by rebels. We beg the English H.Q. to help that column. We will be grateful. Commander of the city of Gimma General Bisson Milio."

General Pralormo was the commander of 24th Division, the elements of which took to the bush after being cut off at Dalle. He had been contacted on the Omo south of Soddu by a few of our armoured cars and called on to surrender. This he had refused to do as he stated we had insufficient forces. He had subsequently failed to cross the river Omo and was repeatedly attacked by patriots. The Gold Coast Brigade brought him in to Soddu with the remnants of his forces on 17th June.

44. Meanwhile General Bisson who had been left by Gazzera in charge of the Gimma area was in constant touch with Brigadier Fowkes of 22nd E.A. Brigade at the Little Ghibbie. On 14th June I received an answer from Gazzera to my message, in which he stated at considerable length that he had left General Bisson to negotiate and that outrages against the civil population would be the responsibility of the British. To this I replied curtly that there was no military or political advantage to me in the occupation of Gimma for the present, and I accepted no responsibility for the safety of the city. I also told Brigadier Fowkes that I would be satisfied with the surrender of all troops south of Mendi, which was in fact the whole of the Italian Southern Command.

45. Previous to the advance towards Gimma, patriots under the Chief Gerasu Duke with British Officers had been instructed to invest the city. This they had done with great success, but in the process the patriot forces had been swelled to some 12,000, not by true patriots but by many lawless elements who had attached themselves to the force in the hope of loot when the city fell. On 15th June it appeared that Gerasu Duke was not in a position to control this force and Brigadier Fowkes told me he was concerned lest the city should be overrun, which he stated could happen in a few hours, before he could get forces into it to keep order. I therefore asked the Emperor to send down his representatives to divert the patriots to fighting the Italian forces, leaving only sufficient to maintain the pressure on Gimma. On 17th June the Emperor's representatives arrived on the spot, but it was reported to me that they had failed in their task. I now received information that Gazzera, who had proceeded to Bedelle some

time previously, had washed his hands of Gimma and was even resenting Bisson's references to him. Furthermore, the advance of the Nigerian Brigade along the Lechemti road was progressing, the enemy rear-guard left east of the Didessa amounting to some 400 white troops had been all either killed or captured, and the attack on the Didessa position would be carried out in a few days time. Also all indications showed that the enemy had given up hope of holding the Didessa and intended to withdraw all their troops to the Dembidollo-Gore area. I therefore decided that no further advantage was to be gained by remaining outside Gimma, more particularly as it was now necessary to commence an advance northwards through Gimma in conjunction with the operations being carried out against Ghimbi, to prevent, as far as possible, the withdrawal of the enemy forces on the Bedelle-Dembi front. I therefore ordered the occupation of Gimma as part of a general advance northwards through that town. It was occupied without incident by 22nd E.A. Brigade on 21st June.

The total number of prisoners taken in the Gimma area was 12,000 Italians and 3,000 Africans. Generals Scala, Tissi, Bisson and Maynardi and eight Brigade Commanders were among the captured.

46. The enemy situation at this time was that 22nd Division which had been at Bonga and had had orders to go to Dembi on foot, were now diverted to Gore. The 23rd Division was being withdrawn from Mendi to move southwards to the Dembidollo area, and 26th Division had some elements behind the Didessa at Ghimbi and some at Bedelle, but were about to withdraw into the Iubdo area.

47. The situation which now confronted us was that the rains were increasing in intensity and the tracks leading on from the Didessa were extremely unreliable and narrow. On the Lechemti, or main front, one-way traffic had to be instituted for many miles.

48. On the other hand the enemy were gradually being reduced in numbers. A very successful action by the patriots under Fitaurari Misfin resulted in the occupation of Bedelle on 20th June yielding a considerable number of prisoners and much equipment.

49. On 27th June 1/1 K.A.R. attacked Dembi and captured General Nam and 700 prisoners.

West of Gimma General Bertello with a small force gave himself up to 22nd E.A. Brigade on 28th June thus closing his long flight from British Somaliland.

50. There could therefore only remain to General Gazzera some 2,000 nationals and 4,000 Colonial troops. The latter, however, were now so unreliable that there was no need to consider them.

By the end of June it became apparent that the enemy had given up all hope of holding out anywhere except in the Dembidollo area. Gore and Bure were occupied by patriots and Pialorsi with 22nd Division was therefore cut off.

In view of the very few enemy left and the scattered nature of his forces retiring on Dembidollo, I impressed on the Emperor that the greatest chance of reaching a speedy conclusion on the Galla Sidamo front lay with the patriots, and urged him to spur them to