

rapid reinforcement, this party held on for three days during the whole slow process of getting 5th K.A.R. across the river in the few assault boats available. During this period a platoon of 1/3 K.A.R. (MGs) succeeded in working their way forward and in bringing the enemy 105 mm. gun batteries under M.G. fire. Great difficulties were being experienced in the construction of pontoon ferries and no vehicles had been got over.

In spite of this and the fact that they were out of range of artillery support, 5th K.A.R. executed a wide turning movement northwards, and succeeded, though greatly exhausted, in reaching the road north of the foot-bridge. The enemy Blackshirts counter-attacked several times during this operation, but were beaten off with great loss.

To attack with one battalion without A.F.Vs. or transport, with the river at its back and no means of rapid reinforcement or artillery support, was without doubt taking a considerable risk. Brigadier Fowkes had, however, already been delayed by demolitions and mud and, recognising the need for speed, gladly and justifiably took the risk and met with great success.

40. In the north at the Abalti crossing it had been intended to cross on the night of 1st June. Our troops had been on this position for some time, much reconnaissance had been carried out and thought given to the plans for crossing the river. Even without the flooded river the operation was difficult. All possible places where bridging could be carried out were under direct observation of the enemy from the ground rising up to the Abalti escarpment 9,000 yards back, as were the roads leading up to it. Off the roads the country was broken and steep and could only be covered on foot.

It was planned to cross the river at a point facing the broken and very steep ground south of the road as all information was to the effect that the enemy did not consider this was feasible and had no important defences in that area. A few nights previously a rope was put across the river, and on the night of 30/31st May the 3rd Nigeria Regiment moved into concealment in the bush near where the rope was in position. Here again it would not be possible to put vehicles across for some time and all troops going over had to be self-contained until a ferry could be built. It was estimated that the bridge would take six days to build. (It eventually took 18 days.)

The first attempt to cross was made on the night of 31st May/1st June but unfortunately the current at the place chosen was found to be too swift and the attempt proved abortive. After further reconnaissance another spot was chosen and the attempt made again on the night of 4/5th June. On this occasion the attack was completely successful. 3rd Nigeria Regiment advanced on foot some 2,000 yards and then swung right cutting off the enemy's defences on the river. 1/1 K.A.R., crossing at the same place, advanced straight on and were able to reach the spot where the road climbed the escarpment cliff 9,000 yards back, located the wires for two major demolitions, cut them, and proceeded to take Abalti. The enemy, sure of our inability to cross the river, were completely taken by surprise. A F.O.O. was captured asleep in his O.P. and staff cars containing officers from Gimma coming forward

to ascertain the situation, motored unwittingly into the middle of our troops. In the two crossings of the Omo 3,900 prisoners and 20 guns were taken.

41. It was now apparent that the enemy forces east and south of Gimma had been totally defeated and that Gimma could be taken at any time. The defeated enemy were withdrawing north of Gimma. South-west of Gimma at Bonga was still the 22nd Division although I had information that this Division was withdrawing to Bedelle across country. North of Gimma the 23rd and 26th Divisions were in the Lechemti-Ghimbi area under De Simone. The Lechemti area had been considerably harassed by patriots and there were indications that De Simone thought he was too strung-out and was contemplating withdrawal behind the Didessa at Ghimbi and Bedelle. There was a good motorable road from Addis Abeba to Lechemti. Furthermore the occupation of Gimma at this stage would cause me some embarrassment in view of the large number of civilians there. I therefore decided to transfer the main weight of attack as soon as possible along the Lechemti road, with the object of once more cutting the enemy forces in two and dealing with each portion separately. It was essential to get 22nd Brigade on to a good line of supply as soon as possible. The road through Sciasciamanna and Soddu was in an execrable state and with the increasing rain it was feared might become impassable altogether. Moreover permanent bridging of the Omo on this road would have been extremely difficult. 22nd E.A. Brigade was therefore directed on to the Gimma-Addis Abeba road to the point where it crossed the Little Ghibbie so that its line of supply could be down this road, and 23rd Brigade was ordered to send light forces forward from Abalti to clear the road as far as this point and establish contact with the 22nd E.A. Brigade. Meanwhile the process of transferring 23rd Nigerian Brigade and the bulk of the artillery to the Lechemti Road was begun, and by the evening of 9th June 3rd Nigeria Regiment had arrived at Ambo being followed by the remainder of the brigade and the artillery.

42. I had been quite certain that as soon as we came within measurable distance of Gimma the enemy would make an attempt to hand the town over to us and was equally certain I would not take it over unless and until I required it for the continuance of operations against the enemy forces. I therefore prepared a message for General Gazzera, and held it ready either to drop from the air or hand over to any white flag which might appear. Sure enough, on 9th June Gimma wireless station broadcast a request for us to listen in, and sent over a message declaring Gimma an open town and saying that the town would be handed over to us and representatives would be sent out to meet our forces on the Little Ghibbie. I merely replied that I would hand the representative a message. This was done on 10th June when the following message was handed over.

"To His Excellency General Gazzera.

From Lieut. General Sir Alan Cunningham, General Officer Commanding East Africa Force.

I have to inform you that until all Italian Forces within reach of my troops lay