

23. On 4th August the enemy began his advance on Hargeisa, and was engaged by a motor company of the Somaliland Camel Corps, which inflicted considerable loss. One enemy armoured car was set on fire and two others damaged by fire from Boys rifles. Next day the enemy attacked our covering position at Hargeisa, and after three hours' continuous fire by artillery, mortars and machine-guns, attacked with 12 light tanks which overran the position and compelled a withdrawal. The enemy made no further advance on 6th or 7th August and was apparently concentrating at Hargeisa.

24. The enemy resumed his advance from Hargeisa on 8th August. At 12.30 hours on 9th August he encountered our forward delaying detachment, consisting of one Company Northern Rhodesia Regiment with one machine-gun section of the Somaliland Camel Corps. This position was quickly overrun by three tanks which are reported to have been led round the mines, which had been placed in front of the position, by Somalis who knew their location. These tanks were reported as medium tanks, their type has not been definitely established, but they were certainly larger than light tanks. Since the force at this time possessed no weapon to deal with medium tanks, Captain Howden of H.M.A.S. Hobart sent a 3-pdr. naval gun with three ratings up to the battlefield where it was placed at Observation Hill in the Tug Argan position. On 13th August two Bofors guns also arrived at the front.

25. On 11th August the main attack on the Tug Argan position began. At 0730 hours a heavy, low altitude, air attack by bombs and machine-gunning was made on the 2nd battalion The Black Watch in reserve about Laferug. The battalion sustained no casualties and brought down one bomber by A.A. Bren fire. At 0840 hours an enemy bombardment opened on the Tug Argan position. The Tug Argan Gap, through which runs the main Hargeisa-Berbera road, is some 8,000 yards in width. It is flanked on the north-west by a succession of flat-topped hills with numerous deep sandy tugs ("tug" is the local name for wadi or ravine) separating them; and on the south-east by a range of hills varying from 600 to 1,500 feet above the floor of the gap. The country in the gap itself is fairly flat, sparsely covered with thorn bush and intersected with fairly numerous tugs of all sizes mostly running in a south to north direction. The Tug Argan itself is a large sandy river bed some 150 yards in width and running roughly south to north; it was on the south-west or enemy side of all our defended localities.

There were four forward defended localities named Black Hill, Knobbly Hill, Mill Hill and Observation Hill. These hills were from 1,000 to 2,000 yards apart and were held by three companies of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment and the Machine-gun Company of the Somaliland Camel Corps. There were two guns of the East Africa Light Battery on Knobbly Hill and two on Mill Hill. The comparatively short range of these guns necessitated their being put in these forward positions.

Behind these four forward posts was Castle Hill held by the remaining Company of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment. The posts themselves were reasonably strong but there was no

depth in the position, nor did the ground lend itself to defence in depth, had more troops been available.

26. During the morning of 11th August the enemy made an infantry attack on the hill positions. The main localities held out successfully but some the enemy penetrated round the left flank, between the Northern Rhodesia Regiment and the 2nd K.A.R.

27. At 2000 hours on this date Major-General Godwin Austen arrived and assumed command. He had only completed handing over the command in Palestine on 8th August and was not available earlier. He was sent when it seemed likely the reinforcements ordered would increase the number of troops above that of a Brigadier's command.

28. On 12th August the enemy's attack developed in full force, each defended locality was attacked by large forces of infantry, supported by artillery. The enemy came on with great determination and undoubtedly suffered extremely heavy losses. Mill Hill position, which was the weakest of the four forward posts, since it had been the last constructed and its defences were still incomplete, fell at about 1600 hours. The section of 3.7 guns in this post was lost, but only 7 rounds of ammunition remained; the guns were rendered completely useless before withdrawal. The other posts all held out. The enemy succeeded in working round the left flank and reaching the high ground about Donkey Hill, which overlooks both Observation Hill and Castle Hill. Small detachments also penetrated to the Berbera road behind Castle Hill.

29. During the night of 12th-13th August the 2nd King's African Rifles, who were holding the hills on the left flank of the Tug Argan position, were driven from the Mirgo Pass; and the enemy thus threatened to cut the road between the Tug Argan position and Berbera. Measures were taken to restore the position in this area but were not completely successful.

30. Enemy action on 13th August was less determined. The garrison on Knobbly Hill broke up an enemy attack at daybreak and captured two pack guns; and further attacks on Black Hill and Castle Hill were also repulsed during the morning.

31. During the night of the 13th-14th August a convoy, consisting of one Company 2nd Black Watch with two carriers, was despatched to deliver water to Castle and Knobbly Hills and gun ammunition to Knobbly Hill. This convoy was ambushed near Castle Hill. One carrier fell into the ditch and could not be recovered and three lorries were abandoned by their Somali drivers. But the enemy then withdrew and the remainder of the column reached the posts, delivered ammunition and water, evacuated the wounded and returned before daylight on 14th August.

32. This incident showed Major-General Godwin Austen the danger of the line of retreat to Berbera being cut by continued enemy infiltration. It was also obvious that the enemy, with his great superiority in artillery and numbers, could concentrate on each post in turn and destroy it. There was only one battalion in reserve, and if this was used to counter-attack or to reinforce the forward positions there was a serious danger that the whole force might be surrounded and unable to retreat. In these circumstances Major-General