

Addis Ababa our forces advanced in three directions. One column moved North East towards Dessie, a second column advanced North West towards Debra Marcos to join forces with the Patriots, while a third column moved South West on Gimma to engage the considerable enemy forces in the Galla Sidamo. In the Gojjam the Patriots achieved much success, capturing Debra Marcos, the principal town, on 7th April. By the end of this period the Gojjam was practically cleared of the enemy.

Squadrons of the S.A.A.F. continued to operate in support of our troops, their activities consisting largely of offensive reconnaissances during which bombing and machine-gun attacks, the latter chiefly by fighters, were made on various enemy objectives.

During the advance of our forces on Addis Ababa effective attacks were made on enemy positions and M.T. in the Awash area, and on the aerodrome at Addis Ababa where some of the few aircraft remaining to the enemy were concentrated.

With the advance of the three columns from Addis Ababa in diverging directions, air operations in support of our troops were continued over widely separated areas. The main military objective at this time was Dessie which our troops were approaching from the North and South. The main effort of the S.A.A.F. at this stage was, therefore, against objectives in that area, bombing and machine-gun attacks being made by S.A.A.F. Battles, J.U.86's and Hurricanes on enemy troops and M.T., and against Combolcia (Dessie) aerodrome. Our forces advancing from the South captured Dessie on the 26th April but the enemy still retained his positions at Amba Alagi, holding up our advance on Dessie from the North.

Operations by Nos. 40 and 41 Squadrons, S.A.A.F. (Hartebeestes) and No. 11 Squadron S.A.A.F. (Battles), were carried out against widely scattered groups of the enemy in the Gojjam and the Lakes area and North East of Yavello.

In the Galla Sidamo, operations were concentrated largely against the Gimma area where No. 41 Squadron (Hartebeestes) and No. 3 Squadron (Hurricanes) attacked the aerodrome, enemy troops and M.T. Engagements with the enemy fighters were few at this time, but on the 10th April a formation of No. 3 Squadron Hurricanes attacking Gimma aerodrome encountered two of the remaining enemy fighters and shot them down over their own aerodrome.

59. As was the case in the Sudan, the general success of the campaign in Italian East Africa enabled two Squadrons to be released from the East African Command. No. 2 Squadron, S.A.A.F., and No. 14 Squadron, S.A.A.F., the latter subsequently re-numbered No. 24 Squadron, were therefore transferred to Egypt during the latter part of April, where they awaited re-equipment.

The South African Air Force are to be congratulated on the important and successful part they played in this campaign. They were operating over difficult country and under conditions which tested their initiative, stamina and technical efficiency to the utmost. They contributed largely to the complete defeat of the Italian Air Force in I.E.A. and to the

destruction of 300 aircraft, which is the estimated total of enemy aircraft destroyed on the ground or in the air in that theatre of war.

60. At Aden, under the command of Air Vice-Marshal G. R. M. Reid, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., there remained the following Squadrons at the beginning of the year:—

No. 8 (B) Squadron—Blenheims and Vincents, No. 203 (GR/L) Squadron—Blenheim IV's, and No. 94 (F) Squadron—Gladiators (not complete).

Though the Italian Air Force was within easy striking distance of convoys passing up and down the Red Sea they made no attempt to interfere with this line of communication, which was of vital importance to our Forces in Egypt. Whilst they were still capable of such attacks it was necessary to provide Red Sea reconnaissance, and a certain degree of air protection both to convoys and to Aden. The principal effort, however, of these Aden Squadrons during the period under review was in support of the campaigns from North and South into Abyssinia.

Repeated raids were made on Assab, Dessie, Direedawa, Addis Ababa, Alomata and Makalle. Besides damage to buildings, depots and repair shops, numbers of aircraft were destroyed on the ground in the course of these raids, 8 S.A.133s being set on fire at Alomata in one raid by two Blenheims.

In support of the operations, which resulted in the recapture of Berbera by landings from the sea on 16th March, 21 sorties were made against Direedawa aerodrome, 10 enemy aircraft being destroyed on the ground and 8 others damaged. Offensive reconnaissances were also carried out to neutralise possible enemy air action.

61. In April, operations in support of the Army in Italian East Africa were carried out almost entirely in the Dessie area and on the Assab-Dessie Road. Blenheims made a number of successful attacks on M.T. concentrations and troops in these areas and, in addition, attacked the aerodromes at Combolcia (Dessie) and Macaaca (Assab). The scale of effort at this stage was not heavy, only 31 offensive sorties being made during the period, including a number of machine-gun attacks by No. 203 Squadron (Blenheims) engaged on offensive reconnaissances.

Prior to the action on the 3rd April, already described, when four Italian destroyers were sunk or disabled, the considerable force of destroyers and other Italian Naval units at Massawa was a constant threat to our Red Sea communications. Regular reconnaissances of Massawa, Dahlak Island and Assab and the Eritrean Coast were therefore maintained, and a constant check kept on the movements of Italian ships and Naval units. After the occupation of Massawa on the 8th April this threat was greatly reduced, since Assab was the only port then remaining to the enemy. Thereafter operations in the Red Sea were largely confined to reconnaissances of the port.

The reduction of Red Sea reconnaissances, combined with the general success of the campaign in Italian East Africa, enabled No. 203 Squadron to be transferred to Egypt on the 16th April, 1941.