

28 Field Regiment was under orders to sail for the Middle East, and could not be retained in the forward area later than 19th July.

R.A.F.

Since this operation, the pressure on Gondar and the Wolchefit Pass has been maintained mainly by the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. On completion of their operations in the Galla Sidamo, the S.A.A.F. was placed at the disposal of 203 Group R.A.F.

Patriot Activity.

Since 15th July patriot activity has died down. The weather is bad and the patriots are anxious about the cultivation of their crops. It is unlikely that they will produce any major effort until their crops are harvested. Major Ringrose, his bodyguard, and one company of 3 Ethiopian Battalion attacked the enemy positions at Cianch between Wolchefit and Bosa on 26th August capturing 108 Italians, 8 natives and some mortars and machine-guns. The patriot forces under Major Douglas have moved closer to Gondar and, supported by the S.A.A.F., are increasing their pressure on Gondar from this direction. Communications at the moment are bad, and news is only coming through by runner, taking in some cases five or six days to reach Asmara.

PART VII.

Operations in the Blue Nile Frontier Area and Baro Salient.

Along their western frontier, the Italians had maintained garrisons covering the entrances into Ethiopia. During the summer and autumn of 1940, the strength of the Sudan Defence Force had not allowed more than defensive patrolling by Police and "Armed Friendlies." Many of these patrols were led by Political Officers of the Sudan Civil Service, who were not professional soldiers, but who displayed commendable skill and courage in this frontier patrol work. The efforts of these small parties were assisted by the R.A.F. who effectively bombed enemy garrisons and carried on a leaflet and propaganda war, mainly directed against his native troops, whenever aircraft could be made available.

It was not until January 1941 that sufficient reinforcements in the form of 2/6 King's African Rifles and the Belgian Contingent in the Sudan allowed of more active operations being undertaken in the frontier area.

It was important that the enemy's frontier posts in the neighbourhood of the Blue Nile should be removed so that the camel routes into Ethiopia could be opened for the supply and maintenance of the rebellion, which could not have flourished without a steady flow of arms, money and material from the Sudan. The removal of the enemy forces from this area automatically lessened the threat against the Nile L. of C. and the Sudan Railway, which, if cut about the Sennar Dam, would have left the troops operating in the Butana Bridge and Gallabat areas isolated from Khartoum.

On 9th January our patrols entered Guba, the Italian frontier post covering the north bank of the Blue Nile. The post was found deserted, and a considerable quantity of war material was discovered. This post had been induced to evacuate by air action, and the action of armed friendlies.

On 20th January 5 Patrol Company, Frontier Battalion, encountered a force of the enemy at the Shogali crossing of the Blue Nile. A sharp action ensued, the enemy withdrawing towards Asosa. On 12th February Kurmuk was captured by detachments 2/6 K.A.R. and Sudan Frontier Police. This cleared the last Italians out of the Sudan. Operations continued with the object of attacking Asosa.

Topography.

The Sudan, east of the White Nile, is mainly flat grass country. As the frontier is approached, the country rises into foothills of considerable size, and, about Asosa and Afodu, is mountainous, Afodu itself being on top of an escarpment.

At this time 2/6 K.A.R. were spread from Kurmuk to the Baro Salient, a distance of over 200 miles. The Belgian Contingent was disposed behind the K.A.R. protecting the White Nile. Advancing from the north based on Roseires, the Eastern Arab Corps, Sudan Defence Force, with 5 Patrol Company, Frontier Battalion, and C Troop Light Artillery Battery, S.D.F., under command were co-operating with the northern detachment 2/6 K.A.R. Between 14th February and 9th March Qeissan and Belad Deroz were captured by the Sudan Defence Force, and, on 9th March, after heavy fighting, the escarpment at Afodu was stormed by the Eastern Arab Corps with two companies 2/6 K.A.R. under command. Guns and stores, and some M.T. fell into their hands. The advance was immediately pressed on towards Asosa.

In the meantime a detachment of the Belgians had moved forward, and was in a position facing Asosa from the south. Unfortunately the Belgian Contingent, which had been ordered to cut the road east of Asosa, was too late, and a considerable body of the enemy escaped.

After the fall of Asosa the whole of the Blue Nile frontier was cleared and open for the passage of camel caravans to the Gojjam. Units of the Eastern Arab Corps were moved to the area east of Gallabat, as has been previously described.

Operations against Gambela.

The next important centre of enemy resistance was in the area Gambela-Dembi Dollo. A detachment of 2/6 K.A.R. which had been operating at Asosa now marched south-east, encountering strong enemy positions on the Dabus River based on Mendi. By 20th March the remainder of 2/6 K.A.R. had been concentrated, and was about three miles west of Gambela. Here they were subjected to heavy attacks by enemy aircraft. On 23rd March the Belgian Battalion from the Asosa area was also moved south to operate against Gambela, and from now on the whole of the Belgian Contingent, later brought up to three battalions and one field battery, operated in this area. On 22nd March 2/6 K.A.R. with that portion of the Belgian Contingent which had been moved forward, attacked Gambela and, after severe fighting, captured it on the 23rd. Here again the enemy escaped.

From Gambela the Belgian Contingent patrolled towards Dembi Dollo, while 2/6 K.A.R. moved north to the Dabus River and Ghidame. The enemy's position at Dembi Dollo was found to be strong. Throughout April there was considerable fighting here, with