

Godwin Austen prepared a plan for evacuation, but decided to wait the issue of the next day's events.

33. On 14th August heavy enemy shelling began on Castle and Observation Hills at 0700 hours. Over 500 enemy shells fell on Castle Hill during the day. At 1600 hours a heavy infantry attack on Observation Hill was repulsed. Its garrison reported that many parts of the defences had been destroyed by gun fire, and that it would be impossible to hold the post much longer. A message was sent to the post encouraging them to hold on, to which they responded.

34. Meanwhile a counter-attack had been made on the positions about Mirgo Pass which had been lost on 12th August. This was at first successful, but in the evening our troops were again driven back. Further east the Italians made an attempt to reach the Berbera road by the Jerato Pass, but were driven back.

35. The position early on 15th August was as follows. Observation Hill, which was vital to the defence of the whole position, was dominated by artillery from Round Hill at short range. Many of the defences had been destroyed; and the garrison, which had gallantly resisted for four days, was becoming tired. Attempts to dislodge the enemy from the Mirgo Pass and from the low ground south of Castle Hill had failed. There was also a threat from the enemy detachment advancing along the coast road from Zeilah, though this advance, which had been shelled by the Navy from the sea and bombed by the R.A.F., was not being pressed with any great energy. Enemy air attacks on troops and transport in the open had been constant. They were not very dangerous but had a considerable nuisance effect. In these circumstances General Godwin Austen came to the conclusion that a retreat on Berbera and evacuation was the only course to save the force from a dangerous defeat and possible annihilation. He accordingly telegraphed G.H.Q., Middle East, giving the two alternatives, immediate evacuation or continuation of the action with probable loss of a very large proportion of the force.

Lieutenant-General Sir H. M. Wilson, who was in temporary command of Middle East during my absence in the United Kingdom, decided in favour of evacuation. I have no doubt that both General Godwin-Austen's recommendation and General Wilson's decision were correct.

36. During the morning of 15th August the enemy remained inactive but during the afternoon he renewed his attacks. Black Hill was not directly attacked but the enemy infiltrated round this position and endeavoured to dig in a pack battery in a position behind the post. They were dispersed by gun fire and then shelled Black Hill heavily. Castle Hill was also shelled. The brunt of the enemy's effort was, however, made on Observation Hill which was subjected to a very heavy bombardment for two hours. This was followed by a fierce infantry attack at 1700 hours, under which the garrison at last gave way. I regret that the 3-pdr. gun of H.M.A.S. Hobart was here lost together with the detachment. Their presence and conduct had been of the utmost value to the morale of the garrison.

37. During the night of the 15/16th withdrawal from the Tug Argan position was

carried out. It was covered by the 2nd Black Watch with two companies of the 2nd King's African Rifles in a position at Barkasan, five miles south-west of Laferug, some 35 miles from Berbera. It was intended that this position should be held for 48 hours, and that a further rearguard position should then be held at Nasiye, 15 miles from Berbera.

38. The movement to Berbera on the 16th was carried out without interference from the enemy; and embarkation began on the night of 16th/17th August. The Italians had lost two planes in an air raid on Berbera on 15th, and their air force was afterwards inactive over this area. During 16th August, the enemy occupied the Tug Argan position, but made no other forward move.

39. At 1040 hours on 17th August a report was received of an Italian column having entered Bulhar, 40 miles west of Berbera. H.M.S. Ceres, patrolling off this coast, engaged this column and stopped its advance. At 1050 hours on the same day the enemy began a series of attacks against the 2nd Black Watch and the two Companies 2nd K.A.R. at Barkasan, which lasted till dark. The attacking force consisted of at least a brigade of fresh troops with artillery and tanks, which had been brought forward in M.T. An attack on the left of the position was first repulsed; and then a battalion attacked the centre Company and in spite of heavy casualties began to surround the forward posts. The position was restored by the Company Commander, Captain D. MacN. C. Rose, who, with three carriers, led his Company Headquarters and reserve platoon in a bayonet charge which threw the enemy back some 500 yards. Later the enemy again attacked the left and centre with infantry supported by eight to ten tanks, of which at least two were larger than light tanks. This attack was also checked by the use of the reserve Company. At least one medium and two light tanks were destroyed by the fire of the Bofors. Towards evening a serious threat by another enemy battalion began to develop against the right flank, and there seemed a danger that the whole force might be cut off from its transport and line of retreat. A gradual withdrawal was therefore ordered. The rear parties of The Black Watch hung on to their posts until night fell and the whole force was able to reach its transport and embus without interference, the enemy failing to take advantage of his superior numbers or to press home his attack.

40. It had now been decided not to hold a further position at Nasiye, but to embark the whole force during the night of the 17/18th. By the morning of the 18th the whole of the force, with the exception of a few hundred men holding the outskirts of Berbera and a few stragglers, had been embarked. The wind, which frequently renders embarkation impossible at the port of Berbera for many hours at this time of year, had fortunately been favourable. The local Somalis of the Camel Corps were given the option of evacuation to Aden or disbandment. The great majority preferred to remain in the country. They were allowed to retain their arms.

41. During the 18th H.M.A.S. Hobart embarked the remaining personnel, including some small parties which continued to come in. During the evening the destruction of petrol, vehicles and other stores was continued by