

should preferably be an armoured brigade. I very reluctantly decided that the operation would not be possible until after the rains were over in May. The morale of the Italian troops was obviously good; many of them had fought in British Somaliland, and in the small local brushes we had with them they were fighting very well. On the other hand many of my own troops were untrained in field-work and movement by M.T.; some battalions had not even completed their musketry. Furthermore, there was not sufficient M.T. in the country to motorise fully the six brigades I felt were necessary, to carry supplies over the long L. of C., nor to provide the water echelon required to transport the water over the stretch of country between Tana and the Giuba, which my information at that time gave as being completely waterless. Also the shortage of supporting arms caused me some concern. It was not then apparent that the enemy would fail to put up a determined resistance, and his positions were strongly wired, entrenched, mined, and provided with tank traps. In February when the main advance took place the total supporting arms in E.A. Force for all fronts, outside the infantry units, was as given below. Furthermore my battalions had no Bren carriers:—

#### Artillery—

- 36 field guns, 18 pdrs. and 4.5 hows.  
(Equal to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  modern regiments.)
- 24 3.7 hows.
- 4 60 pdrs.
- 4 6 in. hows.

#### Tanks—

- 12 Light Mk. I.

8. I decided therefore to occupy the period before the rains broke in reducing the distances everywhere between my own forces and the Italians preparatory to a major offensive after the rains, to make every effort to find and develop water in the waterless belts, to construct routes forward through the bush suitable for two lines of M.T., and to establish large forward dumps. I may say here that the 280 miles of bush between the Tana and the Giuba was traversed only by narrow, winding bush tracks originally made by game and widened later merely by occasional human use.

Further, it was my intention to make use of this period to obtain moral ascendancy over the Italians by every means possible, such as by vigorous offensive patrolling, and by cutting out isolated posts. Initially I ordered the forward move in the south to the boundary of Italian Somaliland, and in the north as far as Hobok, these advances to commence on 15th January. Nevertheless I later instructed my Divisional Commanders that the extent to which they did in fact move forward was only to be limited by administrative possibilities.

9. It will be readily appreciated that the administration and maintenance of the forces in the type of terrain over which the operations were to be carried out presented problems of considerable difficulty. For instance, before any advance was undertaken all forward troops were already being maintained by road hundreds of miles in front of railhead. The troops on the Tana were 230 miles in front of railhead, at Wajir 300 miles, at Dukana 390 miles, at Lokitaung 317 miles. The greater portion of the roads were liable to be impassable in wet

weather. The resultant commitment in transport, particularly as these distances were increased by our forward moves, was extremely heavy, but by the establishment of large dumps as far forward as I could get them I was able to reduce the transport requirements for the first phase of the campaign. In spite of the large amount of transport I was able to obtain through the good offices of the Union of South Africa, at no time had I too much, and during subsequent operations my plans had invariably to be based on the availability of transport as one of the main factors in deciding my moves.

10. Even before operations began the 1,300 miles of road which had to be maintained under military arrangements was a heavy enough commitment; but our subsequent advance throughout the whole campaign increased this out of all proportion.

11. Another important aspect of the operations from the point of view of administration was the provision of water. This problem had received special previous study in conjunction with the Quartermaster General of the Union Defence Forces, Brigadier General J. Mitchell Baker, C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C.

M.T. convoys for the carriage of water were organised, and special vehicles and equipment provided by the Union Government. A very valuable supplement to the water convoys was furnished by the work of the 36 Water Supply Company, S.A.E.C. which, aided by geophysical experts, developed boreholes, and a limited supply of water in the vast track of hitherto waterless bush between the Tana and Giuba rivers. The existence of this waterless area had been regarded as one of the most formidable obstacles to an advance on the Giuba position. The fact that at no time were the troops without the daily allowance of one gallon per man and half a gallon per radiator does credit to those who organised the supply.

12. The first of the cutting-out operations, directed against El Wak, some 110 miles from our forward positions at Wajir, took place between 16th and 18th December 1940. This raid was most successfully carried out by 12th (A) Division. In order to gain maximum experience of moving large M.T. columns over long distances at night, both the 1st S.A. and the 24th Gold Coast Brigades were used, although the forces in El Wak were known to consist of only one battalion and 16 guns and some Banda. A large proportion of the enemy battalion escaped into the bush, but all the guns, a quantity of stores, and a number of prisoners were captured at a very small loss to our troops, and considerable loss in killed and wounded to the enemy.

I cannot speak too highly of the way in which Major General A. R. Godwin Austen, C.B., O.B.E., M.C., planned the operation, nor of the dashing manner in which it was carried out by both brigades. This action marked the start of the ascendancy of the morale of E.A. Force over that of the Italians.

13. Shortly after this raid the whole military aspect in Africa was altered by the successes in the Western Desert, and the enemy withdrawal in Eritrea. About the 1st February 1941 I came to the conclusion that an operation on a reduced scale against Chisimaio would have a reasonable chance of success owing to the lowered morale of the Italians. I calculated I had sufficient transport for a force of four brig-