

Mogadiscio) were replaced by 2nd Nigeria Regiment from Addis Abeba. 1 N.M.R. and 1 F.F. Battalion were directly under command of the division.

The Commander 11th (A) Division therefore decided to form a defensive flank in the Dalle area with the two South African battalions, and to use the 22nd E.A. Brigade to carry out the attack on Soddu. The enemy were known to be organising a defensive position west of the River Billate, which was crossed by the Soddu road at Colito.

34. On 19th May Colito was captured by the 2nd Nigeria Regiment and a bridgehead established by 1/6 K.A.R. The bridge was not completed until 21st May but the attack on the main position was carried out by 1/6 K.A.R. on 19th May. This action was distinguished by the way in which an enemy counter-attack, which was supported by M.II medium and light tanks and armoured cars, was broken up before it properly materialised. In spite of having no anti-tank guns and only anti-tank rifles on a very reduced scale, the native troops destroyed the counter-attack with great loss to the enemy, and as a result of a most dashing charge, captured a number of prisoners and tanks. One medium tank was captured single-handed by a British N.C.O. who climbed on to the back of the tank, opened the top of the turret and killed all the crew with his revolver. The other tanks then turned tail, presumably because, as it was afterwards discovered, their commander was killed in the captured tank.

35. As a result of this action the defence of Soddu crumbled and with only slight opposition the town was occupied on 22nd May. The delay in occupation was due to the time taken in repairing the demolitions left behind by the enemy.

Between the capture of Soddu and the start of the Battle of the Omo, by the actions of Ficche and Sciasciamanna, 12,852 prisoners, 42 guns, 23 A.F.Vs, including 5 Medium Tanks, were captured, including the Divisional Commanders and the greater part of 21st, 25th and 101st Divisions. General Pralormo, with the remnants of 24th Division, took to the bush, having abandoned most of his equipment.

36. It was now necessary for me to make a plan for further operations towards Gimma, and I ordered the Commanders of 11th and 12th (A) Divisions to meet me at Alatu on 24th May. Here Commander 12th (A) Division reported to me the very great difficulties he was encountering due to the rain and the roads. It was quite apparent that I would be unable to use either of his formations to attack towards Gimma from the south as I had hoped to do. I found at the most that the 24th G. C. Brigade of the 12th (A) Division could concentrate in the Dalle-Soddu area soon and could relieve 11th (A) Division of all garrison duties, and protect its rear. This would release the two South African battalions to proceed to Berbera for embarkation, and would free the whole of 22nd E.A. Brigade for the further advance. In order to enable an advance also to be made on the Addis Abeba-Gimma road, where the enemy were holding a position at Abalti south-west of the Omo, I arranged to transfer the Nigerian Brigade to this front. To do this I relieved the 1st Nigeria Regiment in Addis Abeba by garrison troops and moved up 1/1 K.A.R. which had in the meantime been similarly relieved. As time was all important so

that the enemy could not strengthen his defences on the unexpected line of attack from the south, I was unable to sort out the battalions and return 2nd Nigerian Regiment which was with 22nd E.A. Brigade, back to the Nigerian Brigade. I therefore sent 1/1 K.A.R. to the Nigerian Brigade who were to attack Abalti.

37. It should be noted here that administrative limitations in connection with transport and the port of Berbera, precluded the use of more than two brigades for operations beyond Addis Abeba. The L. of C. from Kenya through Iavello and Neghelli was in a most precarious condition due to rain, and I could not hope for any easing of the administrative problem from this direction.

38. I impressed on General Wetherall the necessity for speed and that the time factor must take precedence of all other considerations. The period of heavy rains was getting nearer and I was most anxious to liquidate the enemy in the Galla Sidamo before they took place.

The new line of advance towards Gimma opened by the capture of Soddu crossed the River Omo near Sciola. This river was a considerable obstacle, 450 feet wide, and required special bridging equipment. Provision had been made for this equipment for the crossing at Abalti on the Addis Abeba-Gimma road but there was insufficient available forward of Berbera for the second crossing at Sciola. It should be remembered that due to the long road link on the L. of C. from Berbera to Diredaau, priorities for stores and material had to be worked out very carefully so that the most efficient use could be made of the limited transport available. Two crossings of the Omo had not been foreseen and therefore the transport to move more bridging forward had not been made available. This fact unfortunately caused some delay in attacking the enemy position on the Omo south of Gimma. The number of bridges which had been constructed up to this time was 70 and captured or locally made material was beginning to run short.

39. My intention now was for whichever of the two brigades could get across the Omo first to advance and attack the enemy facing the other brigade in the rear. E.g. if 22nd E.A. Brigade succeeded in reaching the Gimma-Addis Abeba road first they were to turn right towards Addis Abeba and not left on Gimma.

At this time, most unfortunately, the Omo came down in flood. Although it was a wide river, in normal times it could be waded in many places, but with the floods it was 6 feet deep with a 6 knot current. This again delayed matters considerably.

So both the Nigerian Brigade at Abalti in the north, and the 22nd Brigade south of Gimma were faced with a considerable problem. In the south the enemy were holding, on both banks, the foot-bridge which crossed the river where the road met it. A gallant attempt was made to rush this foot bridge but was repulsed with some loss of life. The Brigadier therefore decided on crossing with the few assault boats available, some three miles south of the foot-bridge. On 2nd June three platoons of 5th K.A.R. were able to get across, and to establish a precarious bridgehead. In spite of heavy shelling and the fact that no means existed for