

59. 1st T.S. then continued the advance on to Dessie and found 46 lorries and 6 medium guns abandoned on the road; these evidently having been cut off by enemy demolitions which had been blown prematurely.

While work on the demolitions was proceeding, enemy artillery fire opened from Dessie. Our own artillery was brought into action and the infantry were deployed into the hills to engage enemy infantry now appearing on the mountain tops.

60. However, soon after our medium artillery opened fire, a deputation came from Dessie to discuss terms. Unconditional surrender was demanded and given, and 1st T.S. moved forward into the town in enemy transport, as its own transport was stopped by a destroyed bridge, the passage over which was not made good until 30th April.

The garrison of Dessie consisted of 5,000 Italians and 3,000 native troops; the area was full of guns, M.G., ammunition and war material of all sorts. Altogether in the Combolcia-Dessie engagement 52 guns were captured.

The battle of the Combolcia Pass and the capture of Dessie was a considerable victory. It was evident from the defensive positions and the number of guns captured that the Italians were determined to make a strong resistance. At Combolcia the positions were well dug and heavily wired, and Dessie itself was prepared for all round defence, there being seventeen localities, supported by seven forts and numerous strong points.

61. On 30th April 1st R.N.C. with supporting arms continued the advance to the north, while the remainder of the brigade continued to clear up Dessie and patrol along the roads to Gondar and Assab. On 1st May 1st R.N.C. occupied Waldia taking 200 prisoners, but a demolished tunnel on the road held up further advance for three days. In the meantime Campbell's scouts were directed forward on to Alomata and Quoram. On 5th May Alomata was occupied and some prisoners including two Brigade Commanders were captured; but road blocks 8 miles to the north prevented a further advance until 7th May.

62. On 7th May the remainder of 1st S.A. Brigade Group, less one company of 1st D.E.O.R. and some armoured cars, which were left to garrison Dessie, moved forward, and on arrival at Alomata on 8th May I placed them under command of Kaid for operations against Amba Alagi from the south, which place was then being attacked by him from the north.

#### *C. Operations against Maraventano's Column.*

*(4th April—22nd May, 1941.)*

63. On the 4th April the Italians evacuated Debra Marcos. The garrison of Debra Marcos had apparently received orders to withdraw to Dessie, but the occupation of Addis Abeba by our troops on 6th April deprived them of the use of the only known motorable road between Debra Marcos and Dessie. A column of some 14,000 including 700 civilians, under the command of Colonel Maraventano withdrew across the Blue Nile at Safartak and was pursued by one weak company of the Frontier Battalion, Sudan Defence Force, as far as Cuiu near Ficche. On the 8th April this column was located at Quoziyam when they were effectively bombed and machine-gunned by our aircraft.

After further bombing on 23rd April Maraventano abandoned his M.T. and took to the hills. The Frontier Battalion Company which had now been reinforced by portions of two Operational Centres and a platoon of the 2nd Ethiopian Battalion (a total strength of 150 all ranks) again took up the pursuit. Maraventano's column, although reduced by desertions to about 8,000 combatants, made towards Addis Dera presumably with the object of eventually reaching Dessie.

Dessie, however, fell on 26th April to the 1st S.A. Brigade and it then appeared likely that Maraventano would surrender, but in spite of being harassed by his pursuers, hampered by the lack of transport and food, and burdened with many sick and wounded, he stubbornly continued his arduous trek towards Uorro Ilu where he apparently decided to remain as he considered the country suitable for defence and shelter, and food was available. On 14th May, however, there were indications that Maraventano was again on the move, this time in the direction of Debre Sina (Agibar). A small force was sent off at speed to take and hold the fort at Uoghidi which commanded the enemy line of retreat. This fort was successfully occupied and its Banda garrison joined our forces. On 17th May our main force had followed up and gained contact with the enemy rearguard travelling over extremely difficult country.

64. On 18th May the enemy column having deployed on a plateau, Colonel O. C. Wingate, D.S.O., Commander of the Sudan and patriot forces, decided to attack wherever possible, and proceeded to do so. These attacks were continued on the 19th and on the 20th, when the Italians were seen to be withdrawing. Once more a general advance of the patriot forces was ordered. A running fight ensued, the patriots fighting with great courage and inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

Maraventano's column, which had by now been reduced to about 7,000, found their retreat to Debre Sina cut off by our occupation of the fort at Uoghidi and so deployed and took up a defensive position in the Borena area. Opposing him were some 1,000 patriots with a further 500 patriots and 37 Sudanese in reserve, but Maraventano still refused to surrender.

Finally, on 22nd May, after being told that he would be attacked unceasingly, Maraventano capitulated and his force was escorted back to Ficche and handed over to the 11th (A) Division. So ended what must have been for the whole of his column an exhausting and desperate flight through mountainous country full of hostile Ethiopians.

#### *D.—Internal Security and Mopping Up Operations in North East Somaliland.*

*(20th April—21st May, 1941.)*

65. These operations, carried out in north-east Somaliland, resulted in the clearing of that part of the country of all Italian posts, the re-establishment of British control in the Mijertein, and the re-commissioning of the lighthouse of Cape Guardafui, which the Commander-in-Chief, East Indies, required.

66. On 20th April, a column under the command of Major G. R. Musgrave, consisting of a company of Aden G(R) troops and a section of R.A.F. armoured cars, also from Aden, left Burao in hired transport. Accompanying the