

were scattered about on the main communications. There was a trench system at Loyada on the frontier on the Zeilah-Jibuti road.

At this period my administrative resources were fully stretched in the maintenance of the two brigades of 11th (A) Division which were engaging the Italians in the Galla Sidamo. Administratively I could engage in no more commitments without ceasing operations against the Italians. Furthermore E.A. Force was not equipped for the reduction of strong concrete defences, neither was the Air Force sufficiently strong in bombers. Admittedly there was a doubt whether the six Senegalese battalions which formed the garrison would fight. There was therefore at least uncertainty whether an attack on French Somaliland could be carried out with success. There appeared no doubt that the blockade must eventually be successful in forcing the Governor to give in, furthermore, by trusting to the blockade, there would be no need for cessation of the operations in the Galla Sidamo. I therefore recommended that offensive operations should not be undertaken against the Vichy French, at any rate for the present.

101. About this time a telegram was received from the War Office, presumably in reply to the representations made by the Governor of Jibuti on the subject of infant mortality, suggesting that the blockade might be lifted sufficiently to allow in milk etc. for the children. I felt that strict supervision of any relaxation of the blockade would be most difficult to ensure without contact and negotiations which I felt were most undesirable at that time. More over I was sure that any relaxation of the blockade occurring immediately after the receipt of the Governor's reply to General Wavell's letter would have an unfortunate effect in strengthening the former's position. He obviously would take steps to gain full propaganda value on these lines. I therefore telegraphed to General Wavell an alternative proposal to make an offer of evacuation of all white women and children to Madagascar or other Vichy French place. In due course I was authorised to make this offer.

102. Meanwhile the Governor of Jibuti had addressed letters both to General Wavell and myself to the effect that he had received instructions that should French Somaliland be reduced by either blockade or direct invasion he was to destroy all facilities which might be of value to the invader. General Wavell replied to this letter to the effect that from the purely military point of view Jibuti was of no consequence to him. If the Governor destroyed the port and railway he would merely make it impossible to feed his own nationals and prevent, or at any rate delay, the evacuation of Italian women and children from Abyssinia.

In due course a reply was received from Jibuti in which the Governor indicated that he took General Wavell's letter as an invitation to open negotiations on a wide scale for the evacuation of the Italian women and children and the relief of Jibuti. I was authorised to reply that General Wavell had given no such invitation and that his intentions remained as notified in the letter summarised in para. 97.

#### PART IV.—CONCLUSION.

103. During the period after the fall of Addis Abeba E.A. Force, besides capturing

Dessie and assisting in the fall of Amba Alagi, has now completed its task of securing the capitulation of all enemy forces in the whole area lying south and inclusive of Assab-Dessie-Bethor.

The area over which these final operations took place was 125,000 square miles, and although, due to the weather conditions, the tempo of the early part of the campaign could not be maintained, the time taken to complete the task cannot be regarded as unsatisfactory. The latter part of the operations was carried out entirely by East and West African infantry, though South Africa supplied most of the supporting arms. In spite of the continuous wet and cold weather the morale and dash of all troops remained unabated, though the physical difficulties caused by mud and demolitions demanded great endurance. It may again be stated that according to popular belief the campaigning season in Northern Abyssinia should have terminated at the end of May, and in Southern Abyssinia by the end of March. The fighting was the toughest yet experienced, due to the naturally strong defensive positions which abounded in the area, to the greater number of supporting arms, fields guns, medium guns and tanks which were available to the enemy, and also the tougher fibre of some of the Italian commanders. These had at last learnt that the true form of defence against the type of attack which we made, lay in the counter-attack with mobile troops rather than in their previous methods of withdrawal into wired perimeters. Though the East and West African troops met the enemy medium tank, the Mark II, for the first time, after the first uncertainty they were not dismayed and showed confidence in their defence against these vehicles.

104. Mention must be made of the artillery of which all but the light batteries were South African units. The extreme shortage in this arm (only 24 field guns) entailed frequent moves over long distances so as to give the greatest concentration of fire at the decisive points, yet the guns always arrived on time. Their action in silencing the enemy guns, often from most exposed positions was without doubt instrumental in most cases in enabling the infantry to get forward, and in some of the battles artillery action alone caused the enemy to vacate their positions.

105. The nature of the country, steep, rugged, with deep canyon-like ravines and broad swift flowing rivers, lent itself to extensive and effective demolitions. The work of the R.E. units, the greater portion of which were also South African, in the rapid construction of bridges and repair of roads was beyond praise. Had there been any greater delay imposed on the advance than was in fact the case, there is every doubt whether our troops would have been able to close with the enemy and finally liquidate him before the really heavy rains set in.

106. In the early part of the campaign much success had attended the use of propaganda leaflets scattered from the air. The capture of an excellent printing press, capable of printing in all local languages, in Addis Abeba greatly speeded up the process of getting out "hot" news by leaflet and many thousands of these were dropped almost daily. Of a total of 7,300,000 pamphlets dropped 3,500,000