

78. After the action at the Marda Pass it became possible to transfer the L of C of the 11th (A) Division to the line Berbera-Hargeisa.

The Force at this time was, therefore, maintained from two advanced bases, Berbera and Mogadiscio, with L of C from the former 250 miles and from the latter 800 miles. It was, moreover, necessary simultaneously to maintain from the port of Chisimaio some 4,000 L of C troops and, in addition, to keep the whole of the 1,600 miles of road L of C to Kenya open for the passage of motorised units and M.T. convoys, since facilities for handling M.T. at the ports did not exist.

79. Two more enemy prepared positions remained in front of Harrar, the first at the Babile Pass, the second above the Bisidimo River. In order to force the first of these the Commander 11th (A) Division planned to move by two roads, sending the Nigerian Brigade by the southern route, while the Royal Natal Carbineers took the old road to the north. The Babile position looked even more formidable than the Marda Pass. High broken hills, steep-sided and formed of granite blocks, flanked the roads on both sides. The southern road had been blocked by cratering and a cliff fall. Some considerable resistance was met by the Nigerians, who owing to better going reached the position first. The Royal Natal Carbineers found the old disused road extremely difficult going; by dint however of energetic perseverance, they were able to make their presence felt. The Italians had not expected the old road to be used, and feeling the weakness of their left flank, were forced off the position on the evening of 24th March, and the Nigerian Brigade continued their advance on the 25th.

80. On the morning of the 25th an announcement was picked up on the wireless that Harrar had declared itself an open town. Having had no official communication to this effect, I had a message dropped on the town informing the authorities that operations would go on, and unless all troops were withdrawn to the west of the town, it could not be considered open.

Notwithstanding this, the Nigerian Brigade met with opposition at the Bisidimo position during the morning of the 25th, coming under fire at first light from Medium and Field guns based on the high ground covering Harrar.

Two batteries of the 7th S.A. Field Brigade were brought into action in the only possible position which was entirely open except for a little cover from observation by scrub and bushes. Although they came under intense fire while deploying, they succeeded by 1200 hours in establishing a superiority of fire over the enemy guns which they eventually silenced. At the same time they gave supporting fire which enabled the 1st and 2nd battalions of the Nigeria Regiment to advance.

With the arrival of a section of six inch Hows the enemy abandoned his guns and withdrew.

81. As soon as the enemy had withdrawn an Italian Civil Official appeared with a white flag, and was met by Major-General H. E. de R. Wetherall, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., Commander 11th (A) Division. This official attempted to insist that the message which had been dropped in the morning meant that the Italian forces should be given time to withdraw west of the town, and said they would

have done so by 0700 hours the following morning. Major-General Wetherall however, left him no illusions on this point, and sent him forward with the armoured cars to occupy the town. The occupation took place without incident on the evening of the 25th, the Italian troops encountered laying down their arms. Amongst other war material captured were two batteries of 105mm. guns, weapons which had not before been met.

82. In the period covering the advance from Mogadiscio to Harrar a further 19,000 of the Italian armed forces were accounted for, killed, prisoners, or by desertion, bringing the total up to that time to 50,000.

83. I would here bring to notice the achievement of the Nigerian Brigade and attached troops, under the command of Brigadier G. R. Smallwood, M.C., who commenced their advance from the Giuba on 23rd February and were in the van of 11th (A) Division until the capture of Harrar on 25th March. Thus in 30 days they had covered 1,054 miles, an average of 35 miles a day. The final 65 miles into Harrar entailed an advance through most difficult country in face of opposition from three strong positions, yet the distance was covered in three-and-half days. The Nigerian soldier, unaccustomed to cold and damp, fought his way from the hot and dusty bush to the wet and cold highlands of Abyssinia, where he maintained his cheerfulness and courage in spite of strange conditions and the strenuous climbing operations made necessary by the terrain.

84. On 21st March I had received a telegram from the Commander-in-Chief Middle East to the effect that he saw no military advantage in going beyond Dire Dawa unless it was likely to end the campaign, and pointing out the dangers of becoming too deeply committed. I was told that the C-in-C did not wish to hamper my action, and was asked for my views.

I replied that my information showed that there were only two brigades between my forces and Addis Abeba; furthermore that there were no signs of reinforcements being moved up to the Auasc River which would be the enemy's last line of defence before Addis Abeba; that the morale of the Colonial troops in front of me was very low, and they had little fighting value. Under these conditions the capture of Addis Abeba seemed quite possible. Although I was not prepared to say that this would result in the capitulation of the enemy, yet if Eritrea went as well, I thought they would give in.

85. It should be mentioned that it was at this time that the German threat from Tripoli was developing. I had been informed that 1st S.A. Division was to proceed to Egypt as soon as my operations were finished, and that as much transport and as many other units as possible, were to be sent up as they became available. I therefore informed C-in-C that on account of the Jibuti railway there would be no new transport commitment in an advance from Dire Dawa to Addis Abeba. Furthermore I stated that I could release 1st S.A. Division Headquarters and 5th S.A. Brigade then in Kenya, at once. I received permission to proceed with the advance on Addis Abeba.

86. On 27th March the 1st S.A. Brigade took the lead and advanced from Harrar on Dire Dawa. Two routes were available to the Auasc