

the recapture of Berbera on 16th March. This was speedily followed by the reoccupation of the whole colony. The use of the port of Berbera and the road from thence to Harrar enabled General Cunningham greatly to shorten his line of communications.

20. The success of General Cunningham's operations involved us in some very difficult administrative and political problems, the administration of the conquered territory, the security and feeding of the very large Italian civilian population in Addis Ababa and its vicinity, and the question of French Somaliland with the port of Jibuti and the railway from there to Addis Ababa.

I had begun preparations for the administration of enemy-occupied territory in Italian East Africa as early as December 1940 and a nucleus organisation was in existence at the time the occupation began. So rapidly, however, did the advance proceed, especially in the south, that it was almost impossible for administration to keep pace. In the circumstances it reflects the greatest credit on Sir Philip Mitchell, Brigadier Lush, Brigadier the Hon. F. R. Rodd and others that so much was accomplished and that there was no general breakdown of administration or of law and order.

21. The problem of the large Italian civilian populations in Asmara, capital of Eritrea, in Addis Ababa and elsewhere gave me anxiety both with respect to their safety and to the food problem. In the end our apprehensions were, however, largely relieved, the behaviour of the native population towards their former conquerors was in general tolerant and no revenge was sought, while the problem of food supply was of less difficulty than had been expected.

22. In connection with the feeding and possible evacuation of the population of Addis Ababa the position of the port at Jibuti and the railway was obviously of considerable importance. From the point of view of military administration the obvious policy was to come to an arrangement with the Vichy authorities for the use of the port and railway under certain terms in exchange for relaxation of the blockade to French Somaliland. It would probably have been possible to come to a satisfactory agreement and I proposed to open negotiations with the Governor of French Somaliland. The Free French were, however, anxious for political reasons to bring French Somaliland over to the Free French movement and were confident that this could be done by propaganda and by strict maintenance of the blockade. H.M.G. decided that the Free French policy should be adopted. The problem remained unsettled up to the time that I left the Middle East; the Free French authorities failed to win over the colony to their movement and the blockade failed to have the effect of reducing its resistance.

23. After the occupation of Addis Ababa on 6th April, General Cunningham wished to employ his forces to the west and south-west in order to reduce the enemy centre at Gimma and to secure his line of communication in the Lakes area. I was, however, anxious to get as quickly as possible the South African division and a large quantity of transport to Egypt and ordered him to advance north to secure the main road from Addis Ababa to Asmara so that troops and transport from South Abyssinia

could reach Egypt by embarkation at Massawa or Port Sudan or by the Nile Valley route. The 1st South African Brigade Group accordingly left Addis Ababa on 13th April and after capturing Dessie reached Amba Alagi on 8th May. The combined attack of the South Africans and the Sudan forces from the north resulted in the surrender of Amba Alagi on 17th May. The Duc D'Aosta, the Viceroy of Italian East Africa, surrendered at this place.

24. After the fall of Amba Alagi, the remaining centres of enemy resistance were in the Galla-Sidamo area in the south-west and in the Gondar area in the north-west. Some brilliant operations by the African divisions, assisted by a Belgian force from the Sudan, resulted in the complete liquidation of all Italian resistance in the south-west of Abyssinia, while the Italian outposts of the Gondar area were also cleared. The Gondar area itself was allowed to remain for the present as it could have no further influence on operations and I was anxious to transfer troops back to the main theatre in Egypt as rapidly as possible. The 4th Indian Division had begun to return to Egypt immediately after the fall of Keren and the 5th Indian Division followed after the fall of Amba Alagi.

25. During the operations by regular troops in the south and in the north, the west centre of Abyssinia was being cleared by some daring operations of Colonel Wingate's small regular force of Sudanese troops and bands of Abyssinian patriots assisted by British officers and N.C.Os. The Emperor, with Brigadier Sandford, followed the operations of these troops, and the Emperor made a formal entry into his capital of Addis Ababa on 5th May.

26. The conquest of Italian East Africa had been accomplished in four months, from the end of January to the beginning of June. In this period a force of approximately 220,000 men had been practically destroyed with the whole of its equipment and an area of nearly a million square miles had been occupied. Some of the chief features of this remarkable campaign were the storming by British and Indian troops of the formidable mountain barriers at Keren and Amba Alagi, the boldness and skill with which the operations from East Africa were pressed over a distance of about 2,000 miles from the base, and the very skilful guerilla fighting in Western Abyssinia.

The ultimate pattern of the conquest was a pincer movement on the largest scale, through Eritrea and Somaliland converging on Amba Alagi, combined with a direct thrust through Western Abyssinia by the patriot forces. It looks Teutonic in conception and execution; but, as explained above, this result was not foreseen in the original plan but arose gradually through the development of events. It was in fact an improvisation after the British fashion of war rather than a set piece in the German manner.

27. As will be seen from the above, General Platt and General Cunningham acted on broad general instructions from me and I made no attempt to control their operations in detail. Success was due mainly to their boldness and skill in execution, the quality of their subordinate commanders and to the dash and endurance of the troops. Both South African and African troops greatly distinguished themselves.