

separately, made the task no easier. These included Military Administrators in Eritrea and Somalia, the Military Governor of British Somaliland, His Imperial Majesty The Emperor as well as British Military authorities in Ethiopia, in addition to five civil Governors and one Resident in the southern half of the Command territory. The last six were to some extent co-ordinated by the East African Governors' Conference, but that co-ordination did not at that time include either the issue or acceptance of instructions. Even with the good will which has been generally accorded to me, this division into territories under independent civil Governors does not, from a military point of view, tend towards ease or rapidity of execution.

The problems of the Command were further complicated by the state of communications. Except for the short length of railway joining the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia to the Union of South Africa, the only other railways between Eritrea and the Zambesi, and there were in fact only four, ran from West to East. There is no North and South railway communication.

Save in Uganda and the small Island of Zanzibar, there was nothing in the British Colonies, Protectorates and Mandated Territory which could be dignified by the name of "road." The so-called Great North road was "great" and "road" in name only, just an earth surface without foundation which the rain put out of action for anything but the lightest traffic for several days at a time. That was our one and only road of communication by land from North to South throughout British territory.

There was a great contrast, both in accomplishment and in future planning, in the countries captured from the Italians. In Ethiopia the bankrupt nation of Italy had, in the space of five years, constructed many hundred miles of tarred and beautifully graded roads rising at points to 9,000 feet above sea level, capable of use by the heaviest of traffic at all seasons and in all weathers.

PART II.—GONDAR OPERATIONS.

Gondar is situated on the Ethiopian plateau at a height of about 6,800 feet. To the North-East and South-East the country rises considerably higher, the highest peak being 14,000 feet. To the south the country falls to the depression containing Lake Tana, over 1,000 feet below the general level of the plateau. Erosion has been considerable, the plateau being cut up by a series of steep-sided valleys, sometimes several thousand feet deep. Communications on the plateau itself and from the surrounding plains to the plateau are difficult.

A series of small hills surrounding the town of Gondar overlook the principal routes of approach. The country is generally open, with scattered clumps of trees and bush. Streams are numerous, and water is plentiful.

There are three main approaches to Gondar. From the North by a good road from Asmara via Axum and the Wolchefit Pass: from the South-East from Dessie by an earth road with rickety bridges: from the West from Gedaref via Gallabat and Chelga by a rough track devoid of bridges over the main waterways. The forces of General Nasi were concentrated about Gondar with strong outlying detachments at Wolchefit, Kulkaber, Feroaber and Chelga.

The enemy troops about Wolchefit and Chelga were contained by troops from the Sudan under the Kaid. Early in September, with a view to concerting operations against Gondar as soon as practicable after cessation of the rains, East Africa Command accepted responsibility for all activities from the direction of Asmara and Dessie. The Sudanese about Chelga were to conform and co-operate, the Kaid, of necessity, retaining administrative control of his troops. 12th (African) Division took over control of all operations. Plans were made for 25th (East African) and 26th (East African) Infantry Brigades to relieve Sudan troops in the Wolchefit area. 25th (E.A.) Infantry Brigade effected this relief by 26th September, 1941.

Towards the end of September, the garrison of the exceptionally strong position of Wolchefit surrendered. This came as a surprise. It was due to pressure by the 25th Brigade and by Patriot Forces, and to bombing by aircraft. The road was now clear for our troops to move forward and make contact with the enemy defences North of Gondar itself. A change of plan was made necessary since the original plan had included a preliminary operation for the capture of Wolchefit.

The new plan was, briefly, to concentrate the main forces about Amba Giyorgis while a column attacked the Kulkaber—Feroaber position from the direction of Dessie, and others operated along the Metemma—Chelga road and round the West side of Lake Tana against the road Azozo—Gorgora.

Operations were held up for a fortnight by bad weather which made transport very difficult. In the second week of November, the 2nd Ethiopian Battalion under Lieut.-Colonel G. Benson, O.B.E., successfully cleared the Italians from their outlying posts between Gorgora and Azozo, after a long and tedious march round the West side of Lake Tana.

The next thrust was against the Kulkaber—Feroaber position, which was held in strength. An attack by 1/6 King's African Rifles and 1st East African Pioneers on 13th November, drove a deep wedge into the enemy's line. Unfortunately, however, our troops were unable to maintain their positions, and fell back under cover of darkness, bringing prisoners with them.

On 21st November a second attack was launched, 25th Brigade coming in from the North and 1/6 King's African Rifles and 1st East African Pioneers from the East. After stiff fighting this attack was successful.

The way was now clear for the final advance on Gondar. This took place at dawn on 27th November. Opposition was strong and our troops suffered a number of casualties, the majority of which were from mines and booby traps. The enemy's rifle and machine gun fire, though heavy, was inaccurate. By 1730 hours in the evening, the town was in our hands, though some of the surrounding garrisons did not get the order to surrender until the following day. A total of 23,000 prisoners was taken.

Spasmodic disorders and looting continued for several days in and around Gondar, but order was finally restored. The Crown Prince of Ethiopia, who had accompanied Advanced Headquarters 12th (African) Division throughout the operations, was installed on 29th November.