

Throughout the operations our air forces, under Lieut.-Colonel Mostert, South African Air Force, had provided active and effective support. The enemy resistance in the air was negligible.

The change of plan brought about by the unexpected fall of Wolchefit in September had necessitated a change of line of supply, but the necessary administrative changes had been carried out satisfactorily and worked well.

The positions chosen by the enemy for the defence of Gondar were naturally strong, and he had plenty of time to strengthen them and protect them with wire, booby traps and land mines. Our artillery amounted to only 25 guns, and though we had control of the air, it was never possible to shell or bomb any centre of resistance with a really heavy concentration. Credit is due to the Infantry who fought their way forward to close quarters with their own weapons.

The fall of Gondar, the last stronghold in Ethiopia, completed, in ten months, the eclipse of the Italian East African Empire. This final surrender was accomplished by African troops, drawn principally from East Africa, with a proportion from West Africa and the Sudan. 1st Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were the only troops other than those drawn from Africa to take part. The total number of casualties suffered by troops under East Africa Command during November, 1941, was 369, the heaviest total for any one month since the inception of the campaign from Kenya.

Besides the officers and men who took part in the operations, credit is due to Major-General H. E. de R. Wetherall, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., who was generally responsible for direction, and to Major-General C. C. Fowkes, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., who commanded in the field with boldness and decision.

### PART III.—MAJOR EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA AFTER THE GONDAR OPERATIONS.

The fall of Gondar removed any immediate hostile threat to the territories comprising East Africa Command. It was thereby possible to concentrate on certain important internal matters. The most pressing and complex of these problems was the evacuation of Italians from Ethiopia.

Early in November, 1941, the Cabinet gave a formal decision that all Italians were to be evacuated from Ethiopia. This decision was in accordance with the demand which had been expressed loudly and frequently for some months by most Ethiopians from the Emperor himself downwards.

The Italian population of some 34,000 were mainly concentrated in or near the five largest towns—Addis Ababa, Gimma, Dessie, Diredauna and Harrar. The evacuation was not a simple movement of a mass of people from one area to another, but had several complicated features, namely:

(a) Compulsory separation from their families of men for evacuation to British East African territories;

(b) Repatriation to Italy in Italian ships of the women, children and old and infirm men;

(c) Retention in Ethiopia of a number of Italian men (and their families) for work on essential services pending replacement by Allied nationals from elsewhere;

(d) Uncertainty regarding the arrival of the Italian ships, and which port, Berbera or Jibouti—was to be used;

(e) The need to construct, and staff, staging camps for the evacuation of Italians of both sexes and all ages in territory that was by nature short of shade and water;

(f) A last minute desire on the part of the Ethiopian authorities to retain a large number of Italians for non-essential services, thereby engendering a spirit of opposition to evacuation among the Italians.

In December, 1941, the evacuation of Italian subjects from Ethiopia commenced. By February, 1942, despite shortage of shipping, 10,000 males had been transferred to East African territories. In May over 9,000 women, children and infirm males were embarked at Berbera in Italian ships for repatriation, every body and thing being safely moved from shore to ship by lighter. The Italian staffs of these ships expressed surprise at the healthy and well-fed appearance of the repatriates whom they had expected to find in a condition of starvation.

In November, 1942, a further 8,700 were repatriated to Italy from Berbera and Eritrea. Over 4,000 have changed their location within Africa.

The moves of these civilians were in addition to those of prisoners of war.

#### *Retention of Italian technicians for essential services.*

As the fall of Gondar was to be quickly followed by the evacuation of our troops from that neighbourhood, and their replacement by Ethiopian control and administration, it was immediately apparent that valuable and modern works installed throughout Ethiopia by the Italians would fall into disuse and ruin unless some competent technicians maintained them. As qualified personnel from Ethiopia or Allied countries were not available, an interim proposal was made that a total of 500 Italian technicians should remain subject to my Intelligence staff being satisfied as regards each individual on the grounds of security. This proposal was accepted. The general Ethiopian clamour for total evacuation soon gave way to active obstruction to entrainment, to failure to disclose the presence of enemy subjects and even to hiding them. It is a matter for regret that others besides Ethiopians placed difficulties in my path in my endeavour to carry out the specific policy which I had been instructed to perform by His Majesty's Government.

Immediately on the arrival of His Majesty's Minister at Addis Ababa in February, 1942, I informed him verbally of the decision of His Majesty's Government and of my proposal for the temporary retention of 500 Italians for essential services. I explained fully my reasons, on grounds of military security, why I could not agree to that number being increased. Mr. Howe was good enough to say that he appreciated the position and that he considered my views were reasonable.

It was with some surprise that in April, after no previous consultation, I received copies of telegrams from His Majesty's Minister advocating the retention of no less than 2,800 Italians, making with their families a total of 4,000. It was with even greater surprise that I was informed by His Majesty's Minister himself, in July, 1942, that he had left Eng-