

appreciated therefore that the defence of Kenya had to be carried out by holding isolated localities where water existed, on the tracks leading out of Kenya into Italian territory. Most of these localities have been mentioned in the description of the line held above. The policy for defence was to provide the localities with the strongest physical forms of defence possible, e.g., wire, mines, tank traps, etc., but that they should be lightly held. The main defence depended on the provision of highly mobile reserves kept outside and behind the localities for immediate counter-attack.

3. My predecessor had been able to establish energetic patrol superiority over the large area of desert which separated the two forces, but owing to shortages of various sorts, chiefly M.T., was unable to do more.

An important part in establishing control over No Man's Land was played by the Irregular Companies. The first two Somali Irregular Companies were formed in September 1940 with the object of countering the activities of Italian Banda in the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. Italian Banda consisted of Colonial troops specially enlisted and normally operating in the vicinity of the areas from which they were recruited. They were well led by specially selected Italian officers who "lived native" and with their knowledge of the country, and independence of communications, not only had a serious nuisance value but also provided the enemy with much valuable information about our troop movements.

The two Somali Irregular Companies each about 125 strong under British officers selected for their local knowledge, proved a valuable counter to Italian Banda in the Northern Frontier District. Backed up by offensive patrols of regular troops, they operated from one water hole to another, and although always inferior in numbers to the Italians very soon forced the enemy to adopt a much more defensive attitude in the vast No Man's Land which then separated our leading troops from those of the enemy.

At a later stage Irregular Companies were similarly organised from Abyssinian refugees and deserters, and later still from Turkana tribesmen in the area west of Lake Rudolf. During the operations in this area, and in the operational area of the 1st S.A. Division, Irregular Companies were frequently employed to cooperate with regular troops. Their principle role was the protection of exposed flanks, and movements directed against the enemy's L of C in cooperation with attacks carried out by regular troops.

4. With the arrival of the 2nd S.A. Brigade and later of the 5th S.A. Brigade the 1st S.A. Division was established under command of Major General G. E. Brink, C.B., D.S.O. I was then able to place the force on a three division front, 11th (A) Division on the right, 12th (A) Division in the centre, and 1st (S.A.) Division on the left. The length of the front to be held seldom permitted me to form a force reserve, though from time to time I depended on formations out resting in the Highlands or units under training. The Order of Battle of E.A. Force on 1st January 1941 is given in Appendix "A", and the Air Forces stationed in Kenya in Appendix "B".

5. In view of the mixed composition of E.A. Force, e.g. all the artillery less the light batteries was South African, I felt I must be in a position to move South African formations and units from one Division to another as the situation demanded. I appreciated that the desire on the part of the South Africans to keep 1st (S.A.) Division complete would very naturally be strong. I was able to take advantage of Field-Marshal Smuts' visit to Kenya in the first week of November to put this point before him. Field-Marshal Smuts most helpfully gave me a free hand in the matter, with the exception that he did not wish me to break the Brigade Group organisation. I was able to give this undertaking readily. As a result one S.A. Brigade was continuously employed under one or the other of the African Divisions, and other South African units were changed about as required. This gave an elasticity to the force which was of the very greatest value to me and enabled me to use the splendid South African troops to the best advantage. I am most grateful to Field-Marshal Smuts, and to the South African Commanders and troops who accepted this decision so loyally, and co-operated so well with the Imperial Commanders on the occasions when it became necessary to place them under African formations.

6. Although everywhere except at Marsabit itself our troops were in desert country, the characteristics of the terrain on the east of the forward line held were quite different to that on the west. The 400 miles of country from the sea to just short of Marsabit was all waterless, flat bush. The actual density of the bush varied considerably, but there were very few places where the light tanks could not push their way through. Movement of armoured cars off the tracks was restricted in parts of this area, but large portions of it were by no means impassable to these vehicles. Except in the rains, the surface of the soil permitted movement by M.T. anywhere, where the bush was thin enough to let it through. During the rains the many large patches of black cotton soil became impassable for days at a time.

Round Marsabit and west of it was quite a different picture. The Chalbi desert and the lava escarpment which surrounded Marsabit hill were completely open. The lava belts were impassable to M.T. without preparation, but in dry weather the sandy portions of the Chalbi desert could be driven over anywhere. Further west, north and west of Lake Rudolf, was stony country with some very thin bush, and hills from which observation was possible over great distances. Furthermore armoured cars could drive over it anywhere, albeit slowly.

To the east the bush country extended unbroken to the foot hills of British Somaliland and the Arussi Hills. In the west, on the northern side of the Chalbi desert, the country facing 1st (S.A.) Division was firstly similar to that north of Lake Rudolf already described, and then consisted of low hills covered with bush of varying density.

7. I had been instructed by General Wavell at the Khartoum Conference at the end of October to examine, immediately on my arrival, the possibility of carrying out an operation for the capture of Chisimaio before the rains broke in March. I came to the conclusion that the forces required for such an operation at that time, would be six brigade groups, one of which