

Brigade through his Chief Staff Officer. The warning about destruction of the port was given to him in writing, and he was informed that this warning had also been communicated to the Duke of Aosta.

At 0830 hours on 3rd April, 7th Indian Infantry Brigade, advancing south, was only 25 miles from Massawa. By that evening it had made contact with the enemy forces. 7th Indian Infantry Brigade Group was placed under command 5th Indian Division in order to co-ordinate the attack on Massawa.

On the other fronts the Mounted Infantry from Arresa had reached Adi Ugri, releasing all British and Imperial officers and men who had been taken as prisoners of war by the Italians. Mobile forces had occupied Adowa and Adigrat over 100 miles from Asmara.

At Adigrat natives were found looting mattresses on which their wounded compatriot soldiers lay. Beyond Adowa native children, some not more than two years of age, were found brutally and horribly mutilated.

In the meantime, 4th Indian Division, less 7th Indian Infantry Brigade, were clearing Keren battlefield, preparatory to moving back to Middle East. On 29th March, orders were issued for the first brigade group of 4th Indian Division to move to Port Sudan for embarkation.

On 5th April, further demands for troops were received from Middle East, and practically all of the remainder of 4th Indian Division, less 7th Indian Infantry Brigade, was released. It was sad to part with this Division, which had rendered such distinguished service under Major-General Sir Noel Beresford-Peirse, K.B.E., D.S.O.

#### *Terms of Surrender of Massawa.*

That evening, the Admiral commanding the Italian Forces in Massawa sent in a flag of truce, and asked for our terms for the surrender of Massawa. These were dictated over the telephone to Commander 5th Indian Division, who passed them on to the Italian envoys. A truce until 1100 hours 6th April was imposed, but the terms were refused and hostilities were resumed at 1300 hours.

#### *Capture of Massawa.*

Massawa was now attacked from the north and west, and after some fighting, the enemy surrendered. Commander 5th Indian Division entered Massawa, receiving the surrender of the Admiral Commanding at 1410 hours on 8th April. It was then found that considerable destruction to the town had been carried out, many ships scuttled in the harbour, and the port facilities badly damaged. Prisoners included over 450 Officers and 10,000 Other Ranks, both Italian and Native. Many enemy units were represented from the forces that had been broken at Keren and Ad Teclesan, and had made their way to Massawa.

### PART III.

#### *Operations leading up to the Battle of Amba Alagi.*

After the capture of Massawa, the two main enemy centres of resistance in Northern Ethiopia were Amba Alagi and Gondar. The remnants of the Italian armies from Eritrea had retreated along the two main roads from Asmara to these areas, and for some time pre-

viously the enemy had been preparing a defensive position to hold the Toselli Pass where the road goes over the first big range of hills leading into central Ethiopia. Gondar had always been a big military station, the centre of the Italian military organisation in the country North and West of Lake Tana. At this time, commitments elsewhere made it imperative for the C.-in-C. to withdraw as many forces as possible from Eritrea. The policy laid down by him was that no major operations should be undertaken in Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia which would interfere with the withdrawal of troops to the Middle East. Though the enemy forces which had withdrawn southwards were no longer a menace to the Sudan and though they had little chance of staging a counter-offensive to recapture Eritrea, their continued presence in the country was a source of possible future trouble and disturbance. It was desirable that they should be eliminated.

#### *Forces available.*

The forces which remained and were available for operations against Amba Alagi and Gondar and for internal security for the whole of Eritrea were:—

- 5th Indian Division.
- Two M.M.G. Groups S.D.F.
- One Commando.
- One Battery 68 Medium Regt., R.A.
- Two Companies Mounted Infantry, S.D.F.

#### *Commitments.*

One brigade, at least, was needed to garrison Asmara.

One brigade could easily have been expended on guarding important centres and dumps of captured stores in other parts of Eritrea and the Tigre. At the time of the fall of Massawa, only light mobile forces had pursued the enemy southwards along the two roads from Asmara. Central India Horse was in the area of Mai Mescic. They were soon withdrawn on relief by Skinner's Horse. No. 1 M.M.G. Group had reached the river Tacazze at Mai Timchet on the way to Gondar. No. 2 M.M.G. Group was carrying out a reconnaissance down the Red Sea coast as far as Zula.

The task of attacking the Amba Alagi position was entrusted to 5th Indian Division. Amba Alagi is 235 miles south of Asmara. Transport was very limited. Reconnaissance revealed that the Amba Alagi position was naturally strong. The administrative problem of staging a battle in this area was considerable and involved a dumping programme which necessarily took time. At first only the minimum troops were kept forward in the area Mai Mescic, Quiha and Macalle. Their task was reconnaissance and to act as a screen to protect the dumping programme and the concentration of other troops at the last possible minute. Sufficient troops were not available for operations to be undertaken in strength against Gondar and Amba Alagi simultaneously. It was decided to engage Amba Alagi first as success here would open the road to Addis Ababa, allowing the move of South African forces to be routed through Massawa to Middle East.

#### *Topography—The Amba Alagi Position.*

Amba Alagi is a mountain over 10,000 feet above sea level. The road into Ethiopia crosses a spur of this mountain at the Toselli