

the enemy held these jebels determinedly, it was an infantry task to drive him out. Previous experience in minor operations in this area had proved that the Italians did, in fact, hold these natural strong points even if surrounded by mechanized or motorised forces.

Concealment.

Such a country was unsuitable for the concentration of large forces if their presence was to remain undiscovered, quite apart from the difficulty of finding sufficient water. At the Butana Bridge, though water was plentiful, cover was scanty. For these reasons and to aid deception three brigade groups were initially concentrated at or near Gedaref.

Running North from Kassala is the Gash Delta, an area thickly covered by bush, containing ample water and intersected by numerous dusty tracks. This was capable of hiding a considerable force but it was too near the enemy in Kassala for it to be possible to conceal troops there for any length of time without their presence being discovered. The cover was sufficient to conceal the strength of troops located therein. 4th Indian Division, less two brigades, was eventually concentrated in the Gash, screened by Gazelle Force, which had been using this area as a harbour for some time.

Strength Needed to Capture the Kassala—Sabdarat—Tessenei Triangle.

To capture the Kassala—Sabdarat—Tessenei triangle, and confirm the victory, a force of four brigade groups supported by some medium artillery, tanks and aircraft, was necessary.

The Commander-in-Chief made a force known as "Force Emily" available for operations in the Sudan. This force was moved partly by sea and partly by the Nile Valley route. The first flight consisted of the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade Group plus 68 Medium Regiment, less one battery, and certain other units which arrived at Port Sudan on 30th December. This brigade was moved to the Port Sudan-Gebeit area. The remaining parts of the force were due to arrive by sea on 7th, 14th and 21st January. The part moved by Nile Valley route, consisting of the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade Group and the Divisional Cavalry Regiment, plus other units, was due to arrive at Wadi Halfa over a period of five weeks from about 30th December. For its success the attack needed a waning moon and 9th February was provisionally fixed. It will therefore be seen that there was very little time between the arrival of the last units of Force Emily and the attack. This was compensated for by the fact that the units of Force Emily were all seasoned troops and had had active service experience.

Arrival of Force Emily in the Sudan.

The arrival of Force Emily in the Sudan taxed the Sudan Staff and Railways to the utmost. At this time there were no L. of C. signals in the Sudan and the difficulty of getting instructions and orders to units as they arrived was very great. Although every effort was made to deliver to each unit as it disembarked at Port Sudan, or as it arrived at Wadi Halfa, a complete set of documents, code lists and instructions appertaining to the Sudan, this was

not in every case successful. The Sudan railway is only single line and the circuit had been cut by the enemy at Kassala. Accurate timing was needed so that the necessary rolling stock and flats should always be available to meet units as they arrived into the Sudan. The shortness of time available made it impossible to keep stock waiting and it was for this reason that some units had to be sent forward to concentration areas without their transport. This meant that on arrival they were immobile and were unable either to move themselves away from the railway or even to draw rations. In spite of this, no very great discomfort was experienced by any of the units. In general, the concentration can be said to have been carried out successfully and that, with the exception of the unfortunate bombing of the train containing 3/14 Punjab Regiment, enemy action caused no delay or casualties. Credit is due to the Q Movement staff in Khartoum that this move was completed without a hitch.

Operations during the Concentration Period.

During December and January, all through the period of concentration of Force Emily, active patrolling was continued both in the Gallabat area and in the country around Kassala. Day and night patrols kept commanders well informed of the dispositions and strength of the enemy. In the Gallabat area our artillery cost the enemy much loss, and, although we were unable to occupy Metemma itself, it was made untenable by the enemy as any movements seen immediately drew our artillery fire. In the country round Kassala, frequent and daring patrols by day and night established such an ascendancy over the enemy that he never ventured out of his defended positions except in strength, and that only rarely. Gazelle Force and 2 M.M.G. Group, S.D.F. from Butana Bridge dominated all the country that was not actually inside the Italian wire and fortifications.

Patrols laid frequent ambushes on the roads leading east and south from Kassala, destroying enemy vehicles and keeping him continuously on the alert. The effect of these patrols was to give the personnel of Gazelle Force and 2 M.M.G. Group a feeling of confidence and superiority over the enemy which may account for the skill and dash with which they led the pursuit in later days. Documents subsequently captured prove that, so effective was the screen put up by our forces at this time that the enemy's intelligence was gravely at fault. His estimate of our strength was exaggerated. Throughout this period 203 Group, R.A.F., afforded support to ground troops. The Rhodesian Army Co-operation Squadron, operating with Gazelle, carried out several successful joint operations with ground troops, both by bombing and low-flying attack. Long distance raids were made from Khartoum as far as Gondar, Gura and Asmara, and into Ethiopia in support of Patriot activities.

Enemy Action.

On the other hand, this period was not without anxiety, for the enemy forces concentrating between Gondar and Metemma were considerable. Reports of the enemy strengthening his garrisons at Kurmuk in the Upper Blue Nile sector and of improving the motor road from