

Support Group (two Battalions).

3rd R.H.A. (Anti-tank regiment), and
4th R.H.A.

(b) 4th Indian Division—comprising:

Two Regiments of Artillery.

Two mixed Infantry Brigades (5th and
11th).

(c) Part of New Zealand Division—com-
prising:

One Cavalry Regiment (less one
squadron).

One Field Regiment New Zealand Artil-
lery.

Three Infantry Battalions.

One Machine Gun Battalion (incomplete
in training and equipment).

(d) Fourteen British Infantry Battalions.

7th Medium Regiment R.A.

31st Field Regiment R.A.

Total about 36,000.

Sudan (with 1,000 miles of frontier with
Italian East Africa).

Three British Battalions and
Sudan Defence Force.

Total about 9,000.

Kenya (with over 700 miles of frontier with
Italian East Africa).

Two East African Brigades.

Two Light Batteries.

Total about 8,500.

(Two Brigades from West Africa had been
ordered to Kenya and arrived during July.)

British Somaliland.

H.Q. and five Companies Somaliland
Camel Corps.

One King's African Rifles Battalion.

Total about 1,475.

Palestine, Aden Protectorate and Cyprus
were also liable to attack. Their garrisons
were:

Palestine.

1st Cavalry Division (incomplete in train-
ing and equipment).

Two British Cavalry Regiments.

One Brigade of three British Infantry Bat-
talions.

Two British Battalions.

6th Australian Division—comprising:

Two Brigades.

Two Artillery Regiments.

Divisional Recce Unit (incomplete in
training and equipment).

Total about 27,500.

Aden.

Two Indian Battalions.

Total about 2,500.

Cyprus.

One British Battalion.

Total about 800.

15. Very little equipment had been sent to
the Middle East and no single unit or formation
was fully equipped. There was a dangerous
lack of A.A. guns, A.Tk. guns and other
artillery.

16. The enemy also had a very considerable
numerical advantage in the air. This was
countered by the superior technical qualities of
our machines and by the higher training and
morale of the pilots of the R.A.F. and
S.A.A.F., who quickly established an ascend-
ancy over the Italians which they have main-
tained ever since.

17. The shortest route by which the Middle
East could be reinforced, through the Mediter-
ranean, now became too precarious; over 7,000
badly needed reinforcements which were ready

for despatch in May, and of whom some were
actually waiting at Marseilles, were held up and
did not reach the Middle East till the end of
August. It was even uncertain whether the
long sea route via the Cape might not also
be rendered unsafe by the action of the enemy
air forces and naval forces in Italian East Africa
operating in the narrow waters of the Red Sea.
Alternative routes via Basra, Baghdad, Haifa
and via Mombasa and the Nile Valley were
reconnoitred. Up to date, however, convoys
have used the Red Sea route without loss,
in spite of enemy attacks.

18. The position on the Western Frontier of
Egypt was that our foremost defended positions
were at Mersa Matruh, over 200 miles west of
Alexandria and about 120 miles from the
Egyptian frontier with Libya. There was a
railway and road as far as Matruh and a good
metalled road from Matruh to Sidi Barrani,
about 50 miles from the frontier. Between
Sidi Barrani and the frontier there was no
good road. The small harbour of Sollum on
the frontier offered no facilities for the supply
of a force and had no water supply. It was
therefore impossible to maintain any large num-
ber of troops on the frontier, even had they
been available, and our policy had always
been to allow the enemy to advance on our
defences at Matruh before meeting him in any
force.

It was decided, however, to place a small
covering force on the frontier; and I ordered
that this force should, as soon as possible after
the outbreak of war, attack the Italian frontier
posts.

19. In the Sudan it was obviously impos-
sible, with the very small force available, to
cover the long and vulnerable frontier, but I
directed that small mobile forces should occupy
the principal places on the frontier until attacked
by superior forces. Although these small forces
could obviously not resist any attack which the
greatly superior Italian forces could make, I
considered it desirable that they should fight
a delaying action against the enemy rather than
abandon the frontier posts without any fighting
at all, as had been the previous policy.

The small mobile forces of the Sudan Defence
Force made several most successful raids on the
Italian frontier posts in the earlier days of the
war, and when finally attacked at Kassala on
4th July and at Gallabat on 6th July by greatly
superior Italian forces fought successful delay-
ing actions and inflicted heavy loss on the
enemy, who did not follow up his success in
spite of the great disparity in numbers.

20. In Kenya a similar policy of holding the
frontier posts for as long as possible was fol-
lowed. The principal engagement took place
at Moyale, where a company of the King's
African Rifles held the small fort on the British
side of the frontier for several weeks against
an Italian force which amounted to about a
brigade. It was not until a second Italian
brigade was brought up that it was decided to
withdraw the Company, which was successfully
done on 15th July, although the enemy had by
this time practically surrounded the post.

21. Enemy propaganda exaggerated these
small successes, obtained by sheer force of num-
bers, so loudly that they succeeded in causing
them to be accepted in some quarters as British
defeats.

22. Such preparations as possible had been
made with a view to assisting the patriot leaders