

was also ambushed and forced to retire. Another relieving column from Debra Tabor succeeded in extricating the Italians at the cost of six ammunition lorries, 80 killed and 200 Italians wounded. The patriots fought gallantly, and, from this time onward, the enemy made no more attempts to reach Debra Tabor with M.T. from the north, with consequent far-reaching effects on local morale. Whole sections of the province declared themselves for the Emperor, including the large districts of Gaint and Dera, and the Italians evacuated all outlying posts in Beghemder on Gondar, Debra Tabor, Ifag and Taragadam. Debra Tabor was in effect isolated, for mining and sabotage operations to the south had cut it also off from Dessie, and, in conjunction with the operations of Imperial forces at Amba Alagi, rendered retreat impossible for the garrison of Dessie when 1st South African Brigade broke through the defences of that town.

On 3rd May, the day after the capture of Bahrdar Giyorgis, the commander of Frontier Battalion moved 3 Company across the Blue Nile into Beghemder, leaving 4 Company at Bahrdar Giyorgis with orders to collect animal transport and follow to Debra Tabor. H.Q. Frontier Battalion reached the outskirts of Debra Tabor on 7th May and from then until arrival of 4 Company on 16th May, in spite of continual rain, inadequate clothing and cover, and much lameness caused by jigger sores, they maintained systematic nightly bombing attacks on the Debra Tabor garrison, which consisted of two Blackshirt and two Colonial battalions and a regular Banda group. 4 Company continued the work with mortar support until 20th May, when the battalion was ordered to Dessie, much to the regret of the commander, who, after an exchange of correspondence with Colonel Angelini, commanding the Debra Tabor garrison, believed, that in spite of his instructions to hold out to the last man, Angelini would have surrendered with a little more pushing. Major Simonds was withdrawn at the same time. Debra Tabor did not fall until the beginning of July 1941, but it remained isolated throughout the intervening period as a result of the work of Beghemder Force and the Frontier Battalion.

Operations North and West of Gondar.

As stated above, an early decision was taken to stop the supply of arms and ammunition to the quarrelsome patriot chiefs of Armacheho, among whom, hampered at the same time by the incompetence of the Emperor's representative, Major Count Arthur Bentinck had now to keep the peace. The withdrawal, with the loss of all their M.T., of the Italian garrison from Walkait and northern Tsegede, however, gave a fillip to patriot activity at the beginning of February, and Major Bentinck was able, without the support of an operational centre or a single British officer or other rank to occupy Colle Chek a few miles north-west of Gondar, and so to draw off part of the enemy's reserves during the battle of Keren.

Meanwhile the various patriot and former pro-Italian chiefs in Walkait and Tsegede assembled in conference, and, under the influence of Major Ringrose, who was later to lead the patriots in this area, and of an able Abyssinian priest Abba Qirqos, at length resolved their differences and decided to go to war. Part of them, without a British representative, went

east to the main crossing of the Tacazze on the Gondar-Adowa road; but although they captured two Italian posts there and caused some anxiety to the Italian command, which is reflected in the war diaries for March of General Frusci, G.O.C. Northern Command, they were unable to stop the flow of reinforcements from Gondar to Keren and Asmara at a crucial moment of the Keren battle. Major Ringrose meanwhile marched south with the rest of the chiefs and eventually occupied Dabat and Debarech and a large part of the road between Gondar and the main Italian defence position on the Wolchefit Pass. Though later driven out of Debarech by a break-back of the beleaguered Wolchefit garrison, with loss of his transport and wounds to himself, his forces still threaten the road joining Gondar to its outlying northern forts and have recently carried the position at Cianch.

Part of the Eastern Arab Corps and the whole of 3 Ethiopian Battalion had meanwhile destroyed 27 Colonial Battalion on the hills near Chelga, but the despatch of a reserve Colonial Brigade by the Gondar Command and the flooding of the communications at the Gandwa crossing obliged this force to withdraw to the Sudan along its only L. of C., the earth road from Gondar to Metemma.

FIRST REPORT BY LIEUT. GEN. SIR ALAN CUNNINGHAM, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., ON EAST AFRICA FORCE OPERATIONS COVERING THE PERIOD FROM 1ST NOVEMBER 1940 TO THE FALL OF ADDIS ABEBA, ON 5TH APRIL, 1941.

PART I.—INTRODUCTION

When I took over command of East Africa Force on 1st November 1940 the military policy, which of necessity had had to be one of passive defence, was assuming a more offensive character. Owing to the few troops which had been in existence in Kenya when the Italians came into the war, to the fall of Moyale, and to the evacuation of British Somaliland, the morale of the civilian population was at a low ebb, and schemes had even been worked out for the evacuation of women and children from Nairobi. The recent arrival of 1st S.A. Brigade, which preceded the remainder of 1st S.A. Division, marked the turn of the tide for the local morale.

2. At the beginning of November 1940 the force consisted of 11th and 12th (African) Divisions each containing one East African and one West African Brigade. 1st S.A. Brigade had been attached temporarily to 12 (A) Division. The force was on a two divisional front with 11th (A) Division on the right holding a line from Malindi, thence to Bura on the river Tana and along the river to Garissa. The right of 12th (A) Division was at Wajir whence, westwards, Marsabit and Lokitaung were held. The military boundary between the Sudan forces and the E.A. forces was the political boundary between the Sudan and Kenya, a fact which was made necessary for administrative reasons, but was not really satisfactory from the military point of view because any general advance would entail both E.A. and Sudan forces operating in the same area. The distance from Malindi to Lokitaung was 650 miles as the crow flies. It will be