

Fascist officials and other undesirables, prisoners of war, police, Government officials, Municipal officials, professional and business men, artisans, etc. As the evacuation of the first four groups would take a considerable time there would be ample opportunity to decide in due course whether the process would have to be carried out to the full or could be halted at any particular stage. As an initial step 80 prominent Fascists with their families were evacuated from Addis Abeba to Diredaoua on 28th April.

Although the evacuation was mainly a political matter, it had to be carried out through military resources and hence required the closest co-operation between O.E.T.A. and the military authorities. An evacuation branch of O.E.T.A. was set up by the C.P.O. Middle East in Nairobi.

The implications of the use of Jibuti in connection with evacuation are set out in the following section dealing with French Somaliland.

French Somaliland.

88. With the reoccupation of British Somaliland and the taking of Diredaoua (thus cutting the Jibuti railway), connections between the Vichy French in French Somaliland and the Italians virtually ceased. The French had been to a great degree dependent on supplies of foodstuffs from Abyssinia which were now wholly cut off. Meanwhile a strict blockade was still being maintained by us of the French Somali Coast. As far as could be ascertained supplies existed in Jibuti for six weeks to two months only.

89. On 5th April I received instructions from Middle East to the effect that some detachments of Free French under General Le Gentilhomme were proceeding to British Somaliland to make an attempt to win French Somaliland over to the Free French cause, and that I was to give them facilities. I therefore instructed Brigadier Buchanan who was then commanding the troops in British Somaliland that facilities for approach to the frontier should be given to these parties. Nevertheless I told him that no form of direct military aid was to be given, his troops were not to get involved in armed clashes but Free French elements from French Somaliland could be allowed to rally on British soil.

90. About 15th April Colonel Brossett, Major Appert and Captain Majendie arrived at Berbera.

The plan was to drop leaflets from a Free French aeroplane inviting the French troops to cross the frontier and join the British at Zeilah and Daouenle. If and when the troops began to come over, leaflets were to be dropped on Jibuti asking the colony to join General de Gaulle to recover its prosperity by the intensive use of the harbour and railway by the British. Finally to give notice to the population that the Colony would be blockaded until surrender to the Free French forces.

The plan was duly commenced, but only a very few individuals came over. It was reported that the frontiers were strongly defended by pro-Vichy units who had orders to shoot anyone who tried to cross the border from any side. It was also reported that the port facilities were all mined and that the Governor through hatred of the British was

quite ready to blow them up, should any offensive action be taken against him. General Le Gentilhomme came to the conclusion that the Free French plan was likely to be ineffective and that reliance could only be placed on the results of the blockade.

91. It should be stated here that the Governor of Jibuti, besides being fanatically anti-British, was reported to be self-opinionated, obstinate and proud to an extent which precluded all reasonable thinking. He had established himself as a complete dictator and used the death penalty ruthlessly against any who showed any pro-Free French leanings or even were seen picking up Free French leaflets. Although it was reported that the railway and commercial elements in the town were at least more moderate in their outlook, there was no one of sufficient weight to stand up to the Governor whose power therefore appeared supreme.

92. On 1st May the Governor at Jibuti telegraphed to the Governor at Aden that he had received official instructions authorising him to deal direct with the Higher British Authorities to arrive at a temporary modus vivendi taking into account the local situation. He asked for names of delegates to attend a meeting on board ship or at the frontier. General Le Gentilhomme was very against such negotiations taking place, pointing out that if we used the port of Jibuti, he was convinced that the Italians would demand the use of Bizerta.

93. On 7th May, however, I received from Middle East an order to open up negotiations on the lines indicated in a previous wire. It was stated that arguments in regard to Bizerta did not carry weight as if the Italians wanted to go there, they would do so irrespective of what happened at Jibuti.

I was told to open up negotiations and to report the proposals made and received, but to enter into no commitments. Later I received another wire to say that I was only to receive proposals though I was at liberty to sound the Governor on lines of original instructions "without giving definite indications of our views".

The terms referred to were—

(a) Use of port and harbour for a partial raising of blockade to allow in necessities such as milk, etc.

(b) Blockade would only be lifted completely if Colony became Free French.

(c) Any troops wishing to join Free French should be permitted to do so, but we would consider evacuation of remainder to some other French Colony, e.g. Madagascar.

About this time it did not appear to me that we had very strong reasons for maintaining the blockade. The Colony was almost completely cut off from the Italians, except in the north, south of Assab. In this area there were only very unimportant Italian military forces, cut off from the remainder in Abyssinia.

Again there was no doubt that all the important officials in Jibuti were strongly Vichy French and the presence of the Free French on the borders of the country was serving to inflame them.

Therefore I did not then consider the conditions favourable to a satisfactory agreement.

94. I made arrangements for preliminary conversations to take place near Zeilah on 18th May. On 17th May however, the news of the