

6. During the whole period after passing Harrar my commanders were receiving continual requests from civilians in outlying districts all round Addis Abeba and along the lines of communication to rescue them from the threats, either real or imaginary, of attack by Ethiopians. The answering of these calls for assistance was hampering the real effort of the fighting troops, and I felt the time had come to make another approach to H.R.H. Duc D'Aosta and to tell him that I could no longer be responsible for any civilians not in our hands. Therefore on 9th April I telegraphed to General Wavell asking him if I could make an approach on these lines, and received permission from him to do so by return.

I thereupon had the following message dropped from the air at both Gimma and Dessie.

"To His Royal Highness Amedeo of Savoia, Viceroy of Ethiopia, Duke of Aosta or to his representative of the Supreme Command, from General Cunningham, Commanding British Forces in East Africa.

"In view of present military situation have further communication to make to Supreme Command on the subject of the safety of Italian women and children in Ethiopia which is now precarious. If in the interests of Italian civilians the Supreme Command wishes to receive this communication arrangements will be made as before for a representative to land by aeroplane on Chinile aerodrome between the hours of 9 and 10 returning between 2 and 3 on the 14th or 15th April."

7. In due course an Italian aeroplane landed at Dire Dawa satellite aerodrome between 0900 and 1000 hours on 15th April. I met the envoy myself and explained the situation to him verbally, namely that all the Rases who had worked with the Italians had submitted to the Emperor and Ethiopians everywhere were flocking to his standard; moreover the whole country was swarming with armed deserters from the Italian army who were turning into marauding bands, which were attacking Italian civilians and property; if I were to answer all requests for protection which I was getting, military operations would be hampered, and that neither myself nor my Commanders would be fulfilling our military duty of waging war against the Italians to the utmost degree; only on one condition could we accept any responsibility for civilians not in our hands and that was the unconditional laying down of arms, when we would be in a position to undertake the protection, feeding and evacuation of Italian nationals. The envoy asked me to confirm that we would look after the civilians already in our hands. I said I would to the best of my power, but took the opportunity of impressing upon him that incidents such as shooting of Abyssinians in Addis Abeba by Italian police made my task extremely difficult. I gave the envoy until 1000 hours on 17th April to reply. On that day an aeroplane again landed at the same aerodrome with a message to the effect that, in view of the importance of the proposals and the grave responsibilities they carried, they would have to be referred to Rome. Furthermore they were required in writing. I thereupon sent the following message

"In the interests of humanity, and in view of the perilous military situation in

which the Italians in Ethiopia are now placed, I am authorised by the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to send the following message:—

"Unless the Italian troops in Italian East Africa lay down their arms, no responsibility for protecting and succouring Italian nationals can be accepted except in places already occupied by forces under British Military command.

"It is the duty of the British Military Commanders, with all the forces at their disposal, to prosecute the war against the Italian army with the utmost vigour, and nothing will be allowed to interfere with this object as long as fighting continues.

"A reply may be sent on 9700 K/cs British call YNC, Italian call YNI, between the hours of 0515 and 0815 GMT, and 1215 and 1515 hours GMT up to inclusive 20th April."

That very morning the BBC made an announcement to the effect that H.R.H. Duc D'Aosta had sent an envoy over to ask for peace terms. It was quite clear to me that such a premature announcement, which was in fact an iniquitous misrepresentation of the real facts, could only result in prejudicing any chance there was of getting the Duc D'Aosta to agree to the terms. Up to that time his attitude, as shown through his envoys, had been courteous and displayed a willingness to listen. The announcement could only have the effect of stiffening him, more particularly as it would prejudice him in the eyes of the Fascist Chiefs with whom he was reported already to be on bad terms.

On 20th April I received the reply given in full below.

"With reference to your letter do not take into consideration your proposals of military character. Stop. The responsibility concerning white population passes on to you when your troops or natives armed ordered by your officers or whoever under your orders occupy the places in which the white population is.

di Savoia."

8. In order to understand the background against which operations by my troops were being undertaken, it is necessary here to explain the activities of the Ethiopian patriots. The Emperor, by his presence in the Gojjam, had rallied most of the leaders in that province to his cause. The notable exception was Ras Hailu, who had been working in co-operation with the Italian forces in Debra Marcos. When forces under the Kaid occupied this place and the submission of Ras Hailu to the Emperor had been obtained, the Patriot movement grew in momentum and it became possible to direct forces to specific tasks under instructions from the Emperor.

On the arrival of the Emperor at Addis Abeba on 5th May he re-established personal contact with the leaders from other provinces and fresh impetus was given to the movement in different parts of the country.

On the same day, all irregular troops which had entered Ethiopia from the Sudan came under my command, except for certain Sudanese units, which were gradually being withdrawn to the North.

9. In the Gojjam it had been found that the formation of "operational centres" was a good method of enlisting and directing patriot