

intention to confine the operation to the occupation of Kassala and a small part of Eritrea and to consider whether I should carry out a large scale operation into Eritrea with the intention of capturing Asmara. This would prevent my withdrawing troops from the Sudan for Egypt as early as I had intended, but operations were going very well in the Western Desert, there was no immediate need of additional troops in Egypt and there seemed a possibility that the enemy could be rushed over the mountain passes on to the Asmara plateau. I therefore instructed General Platt, during a visit I paid to the Sudan towards the end of January, to continue his pursuit and to press on towards Asmara. I also approved his proposal to use some Free French troops which were arriving at Port Sudan, together with the British and Indian troops already there, to advance along the Red Sea coast and into the hills towards Asmara.

13. I also visited Kenya at the end of January where General Cunningham informed me that in view of the success of the operations in the Western Desert, which was bound to have a considerable effect on Italian morale, and the fact that he had discovered additional supplies of water on the southern front, he was prepared to make an attempt to capture Kismayu early in February instead of waiting till after the rains in May. I instructed him to proceed with his intention and told him that if the operation against Kismayu was successful he should endeavour at once to cut the Mogadiscio-Addis Ababa road by which the enemy drew a considerable proportion of his supplies.

14. On 12th February, after I had received the Cabinet decision to send all available troops from the Middle East to the assistance of Greece, I had to decide whether or not to continue operations against Italian East Africa or to withdraw troops from that theatre to replace those who had been ordered to Greece. In view of the complete defeat of the Italian forces in Cyrenaica, I decided to allow the operations against Italian East Africa to continue for the present at any rate. I issued instructions to General Platt to endeavour to capture Asmara and Massawa and to General Cunningham to continue his operations against Kismayu. I told General Platt that he was to confine his operations to the occupation of Eritrea and was not to advance south from Eritrea into Abyssinia and that I should withdraw two or three brigade groups from him as soon as possible after his capture of Eritrea. I told General Cunningham that if he was successful in capturing Kismayu, he should advance on Mogadiscio if possible, but I warned him that I should probably require the withdrawal of the 1st South African Division at an early date.

15. Early in 1941 the Union Government had offered a second South African division for service in East Africa. I considered however that I had at that time sufficient troops in East Africa and asked that the division might be reserved for use further north.

16. On 24th February, in view of the rapidity with which General Cunningham's operations had progressed and the apparently complete disorganisation of the Italian forces in the south, I instructed General Cunningham that after the capture of Mogadiscio he should

if possible advance on Harrar to cut the communications between Addis Ababa and Jibuti, and told him that I proposed to initiate operations for the reoccupation of Berbera and British Somaliland, in order to open up a short line of supply to the forces which advanced on Harrar. General Cunningham pressed on his operations with the greatest vigour and was usually a little ahead of my proposals and intentions.

17. About the third week of March I had cause to reconsider the operations against Italian East Africa. At this time signs of an enemy counter-offensive in Cyrenaica were becoming apparent, practically the whole of my trained reserves were in Greece or on their way there and my need of troops to form a fresh reserve in Egypt was urgent. The 4th and 5th Indian Divisions were held up in front of the strong Keren position which they had failed to carry in spite of very gallant efforts. I had to decide whether to make another effort to capture the Keren position and reach Asmara or to adopt a defensive attitude in Eritrea and begin withdrawing troops. The position we held opposite Keren was not well situated for defence and the Italians, who were still in very superior numbers, might begin a counter-offensive if we accepted failure at Keren; and General Platt considered that a fresh attack might succeed. I therefore authorised him to continue his attempts to storm the Keren position, which he successfully accomplished on March 27th. The capture of this natural stronghold which the Italians had defended with such determination was a fitting climax to the great work in Eritrea of the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions, ably commanded by Major-General N. M. de la P. Beresford-Peirse and Major-General L. M. Heath respectively.

After the fall of Keren the Italians made little further effort to defend Eritrea, their oldest colony.

18. About the same time I had to decide whether to authorise General Cunningham to go on to Addis Ababa. I had originally intended to halt the operation after the capture of Dire-dawa and the reoccupation of British Somaliland, since I had urgent need of the 1st South African Division and some of the large quantities of transport which General Cunningham's operations were employing. Also it seemed to me that the occupation of Addis Ababa would confront us with an embarrassment of very large numbers of Italian civilians and would have no very great strategical object. I found, however, that General Cunningham was quite confident of capturing Addis Ababa and of dealing with the civilian problem and decided to allow him to continue his advance.

Addis Ababa was occupied on 6th April. In a remarkable campaign of two months General Cunningham's forces had captured over 50,000 prisoners and had occupied some 360,000 square miles at a cost of only 500 casualties, of whom under 150 were killed. His leaders in these operations were Major-General A. R. Godwin-Austen (12th African Division), Major-General H. E. de R. Wetherall (11th African Division) and Major-General G. E. Brink (1st South African Division).

19. Meanwhile a very skilfully conducted operation from Aden under the A.O.C., Air Vice-Marshal G. R. M. Reid, had resulted in