

throughout the night, attention was switched to Mankusa fort on the enemy's line of retreat. Mankusa was harassed and set ablaze by mortar and Vickers fire and by the cries and conjurations of the propaganda unit. Considerable desertions were suffered by the Italians, morale was at a low ebb, and this final threat to his only communications persuaded Natale to break out to the south on 4th March, screened by low-flying Italian aircraft.

The retreat was followed up and skilfully harassed in camp at night with light machine-gun fire from two companies of the Frontier Battalion, who inflicted losses on the enemy later reported as four lorry-loads of wounded. The enemy was thus pushed through Jigga fort, and, on 6th March fell into an ambush laid by the 2 Ethiopian Battalion (some 400 men) in a river-bed west of Dambacha. Here some 1,000 casualties, including 180 killed, were inflicted on the enemy column and two of his armoured cars were captured before he had been able to smother 2 Ethiopian Battalion by sheer weight of numbers. The losses of this Ethiopian Battalion were surprisingly light—one British Officer, 90 men and the whole of the battalion camel transport—but the disorganisation that they suffered in this gallant action was such as to render them practically valueless for the rest of the campaign. Attacked at the same time from the rear by companies of the Frontier Battalion and on the flank by patriot bands, which were always more active when he was on the move, the enemy was thoroughly scared. On 8th March he evacuated Dambacha, and, on the 10th, burned down and abandoned Fort Emanuel east of the river Tamcha, thus giving up his original plan of defence of Eastern Gojjam. The commander of Gideon Force and the Frontier Battalion pressed hard on his heels, and on 13th March were in contact with him on the Gulit Hill position just west of Debra Markos. He had concentrated here all the remaining forces of Gojjam except for the garrison of Bahrdar Giyorgis, and a battalion at Mota. Ras Hailu was also called in with his Banda to help in the defence of the town.

#### *Operations round Debra Markos.*

As the enemy withdrew deeper into Gojjam his forces naturally increased and the British and Ethiopian regular forces diminished, since it was necessary, if only for the protection of valuable stores, to garrison positions such as Emanuel and Dambacha, to reform 2 Ethiopian Battalion, and to protect the L. of C. used by the few lorries captured at Burye, on which supply now depended. At Debra Markos the disparity of the forces opposed had reached something fantastic; 12,000 Italians and Colonial troops were contained by two companies of the Frontier Battalion, supported by the mortar platoon (four mortars) of 2 Ethiopian Battalion, totalling 300 men. The enemy's illusions as to our regular strength were at last beginning to be dispelled; Natale was disgraced by General Nasi and replaced by Colonel Maraventano, and the enemy broke back on 17th March and re-occupied Fort Emanuel with some 1,500 troops.

In this predicament, which synchronised with a heavy enemy counter-attack for Bahrdar Giyorgis, the commander of Gideon Force had to decide whether to withdraw to the Tamcha

river and take up a position defending the Emperor's Headquarters, which were now outside Burye, or to advance boldly and by continuous manoeuvre pin the bulk of the enemy's forces to the perimeter forts of Debra Markos. The latter course was rightly taken, and after a small Ethiopian regular force, accompanied by a British engineer, had been detached to interrupt the road between Debra Markos and the Blue Nile and to contact the chief Lij Belai Zelleka, whose help, it was thought, might be useful in that area, a series of new attacks was launched on the enemy defences north and north-west of Debra Markos.

In view of our great poverty in numbers, a new technique had to be thought out for these attacks, which were strikingly successful in inflicting casualties upon the enemy and in lowering his morale. The country was well covered, and our forces were thus able to lie up in the day-time, only a few miles from the enemy's positions without detection by his air or his native cavalry. Action was taken only at night, when approach marches reconnoitred during the day were carried out by parties which rarely exceeded a hundred men for a single operation, and usually numbered forty to fifty. The alternative methods used were to lay light machine-guns from close range on the enemy's camp fires when they were still burning, or (more commonly, for the enemy soon adjusted himself to this ruse) to approach, armed simply with bomb, rifle and bayonet, bomb his positions from ten yards range, carry them with the bayonet, beat off counter-attack, and withdraw before dawn. The hour chosen for these attacks was usually when the enemy was sleepest, and his customary reaction was to continue firing with machine-guns and artillery until dawn, thus waging a war of nerves upon himself. Naturally the most absolute discipline of silence, fire-control and sense of direction was demanded of the troops who took part in these attacks, and it was here that the natural fighting qualities of the Sudanese and the training of the Frontier Battalion and its officers were demonstrated. Between 19th March and 3rd April, when the Ethiopian flag was raised by Ras Hailu over the citadel of Debra Markos and the last Italian troops had abandoned the town, attacks of this kind were made with success on Abima Fort, Addis Fort, and all the Gulit positions. The most impressive of these took place on Gulit on the night of 24th March, when four of the main positions were entered by our men. The effect of these guerilla methods could be judged by the stream of desertions coming at the rate of over a hundred men a day from the enemy's forces in Debra Markos. On 1st April the enemy abandoned Gulit and the evacuation of Debra Markos began.

A small force of three platoons and the mortar section was detached to support the troops that had already joined Lij Belai Zelleka on the line of the enemy's retreat to the Blue Nile. They were accompanied by the irregulars of Azaj Kabada, the Emperor's representative. If it had not been for the treachery of Lij Belai, who abandoned the ambush by agreement with Ras Hailu (into whose noble family, he, a commoner, wished to marry), it is possible that the Maraventano column which was already shedding thousands of deserters, would