

From Tamatave the troops pushed on by rail and road to Brickaville, and thence towards Tananarive, in the face of difficulties from road-blocks and demolitions but with practically no fighting.

Entry into Tananarive.

On the late afternoon of 23rd September, after an engagement at Mahitsy necessitating the employment of the whole of the leading battalion supported by artillery and armoured cars, 22nd (East African) Brigade entered Tananarive, which had been declared an open town. They were received enthusiastically by all classes of the population who cheered and threw flowers at the passing soldiers.

During the fourteen days since the first British soldier set foot on shore at Majunga to our entry into the capital, 360 miles distant, the same battalion group was in the lead; it comprised 1/1 (Nyasaland) King's African Rifles, 28 Field Battery, 9th Field Regiment R.A., and South African Armoured Cars, and was under Lieut.-Colonel J. McNab.

Patrols were at once sent southwards to maintain contact with the withdrawing French forces, and eastwards to gain touch with 29th Brigade. The latter was effected on 25th September.

Events subsequent to the occupation of Tananarive.

The distances covered in converging on the capital from the West and from the East had been a severe drain on our resources, especially petrol, of which less than fifty miles per vehicle remained; a short pause was necessary to consolidate our administrative arrangements before any further major move could be commenced.

Fortunately, the railway, with the serious exception of two adjacent bridges just north of Brickaville, was undamaged and in good condition, and a large proportion of the rolling-stock had fallen into our hands. This enabled me to transfer my base from Majunga with its poor harbour facilities, long road carry, and broken Betsiboka bridge, to Tamatave. From this new base troops and stores could be moved by rail to Tananarive in a comparatively short time with only the one break over the bridges destroyed near Brickaville. The construction of diversions to circumvent them was estimated at, and accomplished within, six weeks.

In addition to military considerations, the machinery of Government in the capital had to be restarted. Some of the officials, notably the Secretary-General, were unwilling to co-operate and had to be removed. In a few days a successor was found who carried the support of the heads of the Political, Economic and Financial departments, and a form of Government was set up which kept the administrative machine working. The knowledge and tact of my Chief Political Officer, Major-General Lord Rennell of Rodd, were responsible for effecting this solution.

On the 26th September I moved my Headquarters from Majunga to Tananarive and on the 11th October I handed over command to Major-General Smallwood, General Officer Commanding Islands Area, who was responsible on the spot for operations subsequent to that date.

The Advance Southwards.

At the end of September the advance South from Tananarive was resumed. Antsirabe was

occupied on 2nd October and Fianarantsoa on the 29th. A few engagements took place but again opposition was mainly from road-blocks and demolitions.

On 18th October what appeared to be serious opposition was encountered at Andriamanalina. 1/6 (Tanganyika) King's African Rifles made a twenty-four hour march, all on foot without any form of transport, to the rear of the enemy. 5th (Kenya) King's African Rifles moved similarly, but a shorter distance, to one flank. At dawn on 19th October these two battalions, with perfect timing and good execution, attacked, supported by fire from 20th Field Battery R.A. of 9th Field Regiment, and by 56th (Uganda) Field Battery, East African Artillery, the whole under command of Brigadier W. A. Dimoline, O.B.E., M.C. Seven hundred prisoners, two 75 mm. guns, one 20 mm. A.A. gun, 7 mortars and 16 heavy machine-guns were captured. Such was the effect of the artillery fire, and the attack from unexpected directions, that we suffered no casualties.

On 4th November, Monsieur Annet again sent a Plenipotentiary to obtain terms for an Armistice. Our terms, the same as had been offered on 17th September, were accepted. Hostilities ceased at 1400 hrs. on 5th November exactly eight weeks from the day, and 660 miles from the place, of landing at Majunga.

The casualties in 22nd (E.A.) Brigade Group were British officers 4 killed and 4 wounded, British other ranks 5 killed and 9 wounded, Africans 21 killed and 77 wounded.

Throughout the operations air support by bombing and reconnaissance was given by the Air Component under Colonel S. A. Melville, O.B.E., S.A.A.F., consisting of:—

Special Squadron Fleet Air Arm.

1433 Flight Royal Air Force.

16 Squadron South African Air Force.

For the landing at Majunga and Tamatave air cover and reconnaissance was provided by H.M.S. *Illustrious*.

On many days, especially in the second half of October and in November, weather was bad for flying with frequent thick, low cloud. Smoke-haze from countless grass fires hampered observation. The greater part of the Island was "inhospitable," offering few chances for a forced landing. Despite these difficulties the Air Component carried out all tasks asked of them with zeal and efficiency and gave effective support to the advancing troops. I am grateful to Colonel Melville and to the officers and men of the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and South African Air Force who took part.

PART VII.—CAPITULATION OF JIBOUTI.

At the end of the Italian East Africa campaign, French Somaliland still adhered to the Vichy Government, and the Port of Jibouti, the terminal of the Addis Ababa-Jibouti railway, could not be used by us.

In the Autumn of 1941, after negotiations had failed to persuade the Government of French Somaliland to give us port and rail facilities, a land and sea blockade was imposed. On the entry of Japan into the war in December the sea blockade was lifted. Jibouti was able to obtain food supplies by dhow from the Yemen, and by submarine and escorted ship from Madagascar. As a land blockade without a sea blockade was useless, that also was lifted.