

the Navy had been unable to land those commodities on the beach near Gobuen, it would have been necessary for our forces to return to the Italian Somaliland border as I would have been unable to maintain them forward.

49. Under the policy laid down before I decided to attack the Giuba, the initial forward moves to the frontier of Italian Somaliland commenced on 15th January, and by 11th February the forward troops of 11th (A) Division were at Badada, and those of the 12th (A) Division had attacked and taken Beles Gugani. The 22nd Infantry Brigade and attached troops carried out the advance on 12th (A) Division front to Beles Gugani with speed and determination, and their rapid advance over tracks which quickly became dust pans, was in all probability instrumental in causing the Italians to make the decision, which became known later, to evacuate Chisimaio without fighting.

50. On 11th February 22nd Brigade Group, 12th (A) Division, attacked Afmadu which was in our hands by 0700 hours, the bulk of the enemy garrison having withdrawn during the night. 24th Gold Coast Brigade Group were passed through Afmadu that night directed on Bullo Erillo and Gobuen respectively. At this period it was thought advisable to carry out all moves at night, both to conceal our lines of advance, and to avoid air action against our columns.

On the morning of 13th February 24th Gold Coast Brigade Group attacked Bullo Erillo. This attack met with considerable resistance on the part of the enemy, who was entrenched behind strong wire, and used armoured cars. After severe fighting the enemy was driven out leaving a number of prisoners, 5 armoured cars and some artillery and other weapons in our hands. The attack was led by the 2nd Gold Coast Regiment, with great gallantry. Although the leading troops of this Battalion had practically all their white personnel killed or wounded, the attack was pressed home with unabated vigour and courage.

51. On the evening of this day (13th) information reached me which indicated that some or all of the enemy were evacuating Chisimaio. Although every effort was made to accelerate the advance of 1st S.A. Brigade and cut off the withdrawing enemy, they succeeded in eluding our advance. On the following morning (14th) 1st S.A. Brigade attacked Gobuen supported by 12 Light Tanks. The village was held by weak enemy rear guards which were rapidly driven in, retreating across the river Giuba and burning the bridge behind them. During this action the enemy developed considerable shell fire from Giumbo on the far bank of the river against our forward troops. Consequently the crossing of the river was not accomplished at once as I had hoped.

Meanwhile I received information that Chisimaio harbour in front of the oil tanks was covered with oil; that aircraft flying low drew no fire, and that Commander "Force T" had gone in with H.M.S. Shropshire to bombard the forts at point blank range and had drawn no reply. I was therefore convinced that Chisimaio had been wholly evacuated. In consequence I ordered 12th (A) Division to send 22nd Brigade from Afmadu to occupy Chisimaio immediately as, in accordance with my original plan, 11th (A) Division

were too far back for the purpose. This was safely accomplished by 1700 hours 14th February, and the forts in Chisimaio Island were occupied by 1900 hours. All the white population had been evacuated and considerable demolition done. That the evacuation was hurried, however, was proved by the fact that we were able eventually to put into commission three of the eight 4.9 C.D. guns, and ten of the sixteen 77 mm. A.A. guns. Quantities of stores and ammunition were abandoned by the enemy.

The capture of Chisimaio was completed six days before the date I had given in the time table for the operation.

52. A remarkable feature of the operation up to this period was the almost complete lack of enemy interference from the air. The fighter ground attacks at Gobuen and Afmadu aerodromes, and in the air, preceding the opening of the campaign had resulted in driving the enemy out of the air practically altogether. At this stage enemy aircraft were seldom seen by day and he confined himself to bombing on moonlight nights. I was therefore able to remove all restrictions on daylight movement and henceforth our columns moved almost entirely by day.

53. At that time it became apparent that there was considerable apprehension and disorganisation amongst the enemy forces. It was clear therefore no time was to be lost in forcing a crossing over the river, a fact which I impressed on the Commander of 12th (A) Division. The river was 580 feet broad at Gobuen, and tidal for 14 miles, but narrowed and became shallower northwards. At Gelib, and in some places north of this point, it could be waded. On both banks was a belt of tropical growth of varying thickness, north of Gelib continuous, south of Gelib sometimes broken by cultivation. The enemy had disposed the greater part of his forces along the river bank defending all the more obvious crossing places, but my information was that he had one fully motorised brigade (15th) in reserve behind Gelib.

54. I realised that it was quite impossible for the enemy to defend the whole river and that to effect a crossing could only be a matter of time, the only danger being immediate counter-attacks delivered from the rear. I urged the Commander of 12th (A) Division to tap in all along and seize possible bridgeheads, and it was my intention, had he not been successful in doing so with his own resources, to bring up the 11th (A) Division and place the force on a two-divisional front so as to increase the chances of finding a suitable crossing place quickly. On the night of 17th/18th February however, the 1st S.A. Brigade managed to effect a crossing at Ionte. During that night they were counter-attacked by a force of the enemy from Giumbo; the counter-attack was successfully beaten off with great loss to the enemy. On 19th February the Gold Coast Brigade also succeeded in forcing a crossing at Mabungo. This crossing entailed cutting a track for three miles through the tropical jungle belt mentioned above, which work was successfully and rapidly carried out.

To cover the movement to Mabungo and to delude the enemy into thinking that a frontal attack was intended, a concentration of field and light guns was directed against the defences