

earliest possible moment. The enemy's distaste for this weapon was known.

The difficulties at the road-block were still considerable. It needed good driving and excellent traffic control if serious delays were to be avoided.

7th Indian Infantry Brigade Group had been ordered to clear mines from the road leading into Keren from the north and to make touch with 5th Indian Division, but only to employ the minimum of troops for this task. The remainder of the brigade was to concentrate back at Chelamet preparatory to operating along the Red Sea littoral against Massawa. The French troops who had come over the hills and cut the road east of Keren, arrived without rations or water, and very tired. They were collected in M.T. and taken back to Chelamet.

Arresa Front.

There was no longer any need to keep mobile forces tied up, attempting to break through to Arresa. Two mounted Infantry Companies S.D.F. were left in that area with instructions to make their way through to Adi Ugri and cut the Gondar road south of Asmara. Skinner's Horse and No. 2 M.M.G. Group S.D.F. were withdrawn via Barentu and Agordat to Keren so that they would be ready to take up the pursuit as soon as the enemy was forced from the Ad Teclesan area.

Action at Ad Teclesan.

The enemy had made three effective road-blocks on the road below Ad Teclesan. Each of these was covered by machine-gun and artillery fire. Out-flanking tactics were necessary; these took time. The mules used at Keren had not caught up. Maintenance of troops operating off the road was difficult. 29th Indian Infantry Brigade succeeded in forcing their way past the first two road-blocks and nearly to the top. Simultaneously, two companies of 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, with a detachment of Skinner's Horse and one M.M.G. company S.D.F., moved along the railway threatening the enemy's flank. Finally 9th Indian Infantry Brigade moved forward through 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, and, after hard fighting, cleared the last road-block on the early morning of 1st April. At 0630 hours on the same morning, the leading troops of 5th Indian Division were met by emissaries of the enemy, who stated that they had been ordered to cease resistance and asked that Asmara should be treated as an open town. Our leading troops entered Asmara at 1315 hours.

Though troops in Asmara itself had been ordered to cease resistance, there was no indication that resistance would cease in other areas. Air reports confirmed that the enemy were withdrawing troops and guns to the south of Asmara. These columns were successfully attacked by the air. By 0655 hours on 1st April, orders had already gone out directing that the operations by the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade and the Free French against Massawa should commence. Special instructions were given to these forces to prevent sabotage of the port of Massawa.

Immediately after the fall of Asmara, the main object became the capture of Massawa, if possible undamaged, and with the shipping known to be there intact. The plan was for 7th Indian Infantry Brigade Group to move

eastwards from Chelamet over an unknown track, which proved to be extremely difficult. The troops had to work hard in a high temperature to get their vehicles over bad going, varying from boulder-strewn tracks to soft desert sand. Preparations were made to open a port at Mersa Cuba for the supply of this force when it reached the sea.

Further Pursuit by 5th Indian Division.

At the same time pursuit of the enemy was organised along both the main roads leading south from Asmara. The limits of pursuit were defined as the River Tacazze on the way to Gondar, and on the eastern route, the position which the enemy were known to be preparing at Amba Alagi. 5th Indian Division was directed to send one brigade group from Asmara down the main Asmara-Massawa road to co-operate with 7th Indian Infantry Brigade in the capture of Massawa. A road-block was encountered between Asmara and Nefasit, but it was not covered by enemy fire, and imposed no great delay. Later 144 Field Regiment and 68 Medium Regiment, less one battery, reinforced 10th Indian Infantry Brigade.

Dealings with Italian Civil Authorities.

On 2nd April it was made clear to the civil authorities that the future welfare of the civil population depended to a large extent on the degree of co-operation afforded by them. As communications to the Sudan were long and difficult, transport of all kinds was limited, and the needs of the fighting forces necessarily came first, it was to their own interests not only to prevent sabotage, but to repair the railway, roads and teleferica at the earliest possible moment. It was most strongly stressed that unless the port and port facilities at Massawa were surrendered intact, together with the shipping lying in the harbour, the British authorities could not guarantee to feed the civil population of whom so many were women and children. The civil authorities agreed to assist in reopening communications and in keeping order in the city, but said they could not answer for the military authorities in Massawa.

Situation in Asmara.

The population of Asmara at the time was approximately 40,000 Italians and 40,000 natives. The problem of administering this large mixed population, mostly armed, with limited staff to deal with civil problems, no police and no surplus of troops, was one which taxed all resources severely. Natives, particularly units still in existence as such, had to be disarmed before the Italian population.

Surprisingly little difficulty was encountered. There was some shooting by natives, but no major disorders occurred, nor were there any serious attempts at sabotage.

Communications with Italian Commander, Massawa.

Telephonic communication with Massawa was still open on one line. By this the Italian commander at Massawa was warned that the British would accept no responsibility for the feeding of the Italian population of Eritrea and Abyssinia if any of the ships in the harbour were scuttled, or of the harbour or its facilities were damaged. On 2nd April, the Italian commander of Massawa opened communications with Commander 10th Indian Infantry