

Chater received similar assurances from General Legentilhomme both on 18th June and on 3rd July. On 6th July I cabled to Colonel Chater that he should prepare a scheme for evacuation, as I considered that our position in Somaliland would be untenable, if the French at Jibuti ceased to fight. At this time there were in Somaliland one battalion K.A.R. (Northern Rhodesia Regiment) and one Indian battalion (1/2 Punjab Regiment), which had been sent from Aden a few days previously, besides the Camel Corps. Another battalion and a battery were on their way from Kenya, and I was considering diverting them to Aden if it was decided to evacuate Somaliland. Colonel Chater replied that when the additional battalion and battery arrived he did not consider his position untenable, even if Jibuti gave in. As General Legentilhomme continued to assure me of his determination to fight on, whatever happened, I allowed the battalion and battery to be landed at Berbera.

17. On 15th July General Germain, who had been sent by the French Government by plane to Italian East Africa to take over command from General Legentilhomme, arrived at the outposts of Jibuti. He was refused admittance by General Legentilhomme, who was still determined to continue the fight. On 22nd July, however, General Legentilhomme was overruled at a Council at which he announced his intention to the Civil authorities, and found himself unable to enforce his decision without bringing on an internal armed conflict. On 23rd July General Germain entered Jibuti and assumed office as Governor and Commander of the troops. On 27th July the French detachment which held the Pass of Jirre was withdrawn.

18. This collapse of French resistance released the whole of the Italian Eastern Army for operations against British Somaliland. This Italian force amounted to some twenty Colonial battalions, four Blackshirt battalions, four groups of Pack Artillery, two groups of Medium Artillery, about thirty tanks, two sections of Armoured Cars and eleven groups of Banda (native irregulars).

19. The garrison of British Somaliland now comprised the Camel Corps, the Northern Rhodesian Regiment, K.A.R., the 1st Battalion 2nd Punjab Regiment, the 2nd Battalion King's African Rifles and 1st East African Light Battery, which arrived from Kenya on 12th July. On 1st July the 2nd Battalion The Black Watch had been sent to Aden by cruiser, at the request of General Legentilhomme, who considered that the support of British troops might assist him to resist an attack on Jibuti, and that this assurance of British support would be a powerful factor in persuading the garrison of Jibuti to continue the struggle. This battalion was therefore also available to reinforce Somaliland.

20. When the French at Jibuti decided to accept the armistice, I had to decide whether to evacuate British Somaliland forthwith or to continue to hold it. After consultation by cable with Colonel Chater, who had now been appointed Brigadier, I decided that we should continue to defend the approaches to Berbera for as long as possible. Brigadier Chater reported that if the force was increased to five battalions he considered that there was a good prospect of holding his positions; also with-

drawal without fighting at all would, I considered, be more damaging to our prestige than withdrawal after attack. The French had consistently reported that the morale of the Italian forces in the Harar area was low, and that they were unlikely to attack fortified positions with any vigour. Our patrol encounters on the frontier of the Protectorate seemed to confirm this estimate. I reported accordingly to the War Office, and ordered the 3/15 Punjab Regiment which was already under orders to proceed to Aden from India to go to Somaliland. Two 3-inch A.A. guns were sent from Aden to Berbera, where A.A. protection had always been sorely needed, but the great shortage of A.A. equipment in the Middle East had made provision impossible. Now with the increased force in Somaliland, it was essential to take risks elsewhere and these guns were sent from Aden, where they were replaced by guns from Port Sudan, which in its turn was reinforced from Port Said. Our general shortage and the movement of convoys made necessary this rather complicated shuffle.

21. On 1st August, 1940, the disposition of the forces in Somaliland was as follows:—

Covering Troops.

(a) Dobo area, one Company Somaliland Camel Corps less one Troop;

(b) Hargeisa area, Motor Company Somaliland Camel Corps less one Troop; One Troop Somaliland Camel Corps; One Company Northern Rhodesia Regiment, K.A.R.;

(c) Burao, one Company and one Motor Troop Somaliland Camel Corps.

An Officer's Patrol with wireless was on the coast road between Zeilah and Berbera. A large number of Illalos were working in the forward areas, mostly under the control of the District officers, to provide information of enemy movement.

Tug Argan Position.

(a) Northern Rhodesia Regiment less one Company, Machine-Gun Company, B Company Somaliland Camel Corps, and 1st East African Light Battery, held the main position.

(b) The left flank of the Tug Argan position was covered by 2nd King's African Rifles with Headquarters at Mandera.

(c) The 3/15 Punjab Regiment was concentrating at Laferug. On the arrival of the 2nd Battalion, The Black Watch, on 7th August, the 3/15 Punjab Regiment extended the right flank of the Tug Argan position by holding the approaches through the hills between the position and the Shell Gap defile on the coast. The Black Watch became Force reserve at Laferug.

Other Positions.

The 1/2 Punjab Regiment held the Sheikh Pass, the Shell Gap (on the coast road from Zeilah), the Bihendi Gap on the East of Berbera, and the Base at Berbera.

IV.—ITALIAN ATTACK ON BRITISH SOMALILAND.

22. On 1st August, reports of an Italian concentration began to be received. On 5th August an Italian force of an estimated strength of two battalions with 30 motor vehicles entered Zeilah through the Jirre Pass. On the same day the Camel Corps detachment at Dobo was forced to withdraw by a superior enemy force.