

Italy, to be carried out early in 1941 if the necessary reinforcements could be made available from Egypt; this depended mainly on the success of the Desert offensive.

(b) To maintain pressure in the Gallabat area where a minor attack had been made early in November, but to undertake no large scale operations on that line.

(c) To further the rebellion in Abyssinia by all possible means.

In Kenya:

(a) In the south to advance to the frontier on the line Kolbio-Dif as soon as possible.

(b) On the northern frontier west of Moyale to maintain pressure on the enemy by means of small mobile columns.

(c) In May or June, after the rainy period, to advance on Kismayu; I had hoped for an advance on Kismayu before the rainy season but General Cunningham at this meeting informed me that after careful examination he did not consider it possible owing to water difficulties and lack of sufficient transport.

(d) In the spring and summer of 1941 to penetrate into south-west Abyssinia in conjunction with operations from the Boma area of the Sudan.

6. The ruling idea in my mind in the decisions taken at this conference was that the fomentation of the patriot movement in Abyssinia offered with the resources available the best prospect of making the Italian position impossible and eventually reconquering the country. I did not intend at the time a large scale invasion either from Kassala towards Asmara and Massawa, or from Kismayu to the north. The two operations to Kassala and Kismayu were designed to secure our flanks and I intended that our main effort should be devoted to furthering and supporting the rebellion by irregular action. I intended after the capture of Kassala and Kismayu to withdraw as many troops as possible from the Sudan and East Africa for the theatres further north. I had carefully examined the possibilities of an invasion of Italian East Africa in force during the period before Italy entered the war. I had come to the conclusion that the only two lines of invasion which offered a good prospect of success for a regular force were from Jibuti on Addis Ababa or from Kassala on Massawa; and of these the advance from Jibuti offered the better prospect of success, since it seemed that the natural difficulties of the Kassala-Asmara route would require too great a force for the single road by which it would have to be supplied. The French collapse and the Italian occupation of British Somaliland in August 1940 ruled out the possibility of the Jibuti advance.

7. During a visit to the Sudan in November with the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Anthony Eden, I had discussed at length the requirements for the development of the rebellion in Abyssinia and had made arrangements to do everything possible to assist the patriots. I appointed Lieut.-Colonel O. C. Wingate as staff officer for patriot activities and his energy and initiative was an important factor in the means by which the patriot movement gained so great an impetus in the succeeding months. Towards the end of November he had flown into Abyssinia and met Brigadier Sandford who

was already there with a small mission to prepare the way.

8. There were thus three separate lines of operation against Italian East Africa: in the north from the Sudan by Kassala into Eritrea, in the centre from the Sudan and later from East Africa into Abyssinia, and in the south from Kenya against Italian Somaliland.

9. The success of the offensive in the Western Desert of Egypt decided me to transfer the 4th Indian Division to the Sudan to enable the Kassala operation to be carried out. The decision for this transfer had to be made at very short notice, while the battle in the Western Desert was still in progress, since otherwise shipping would not have been available for some time and it would not have been possible to stage the attack on Kassala early in 1941 as I intended. Part of the 4th Indian Division was actually moved practically straight from the battlefield of Sidi Barrani to ships which conveyed them to the Sudan, and they were in action again in the Sudan very shortly after their arrival.

The 4th Indian Division moved partly by sea to Port Sudan and partly by railway and boat up the Nile Valley. The whole division was due to complete its arrival in the Sudan about the middle of January. General Platt originally fixed the date for the advance early in March but I issued orders to him that he was to attack early in February at the latest. Eventually the date, 9th February was fixed for the operation. I had sent one squadron of infantry tanks to the Sudan for the operation; these were the only tanks I could spare in view of the operations in the Western Desert against Marshal Graziani's army.

10. Meanwhile the preparations for the rebellion in Abyssinia were pushed on with great energy. The chief objective was to place a sufficient quantity of food and stores into Abyssinia beyond the escarpment before the rain rendered further movement of transport impossible. A small force of one battalion of Sudanese and a number of specially selected British officers and N.C.Os. were also sent forward. The Emperor, Haile Selassie, himself crossed the frontier and entered his kingdom on 20th January. The subsequent operations of the small force which cleared the Gojjam of large Italian forces was a very remarkable achievement, due largely to the energy and initiative of Brigadier Sandford, head of 101 Mission, Colonel O. C. Wingate, who commanded the regular forces taking part, the British officers and N.C.Os. who assisted him, and the fine fighting qualities of the Sudanese battalion.

11. During the winter a small mobile force, known as Gazelle Force, under Brigadier Messervy, continually harassed the Italian communications with Kassala and caused them great inconvenience and considerable losses. Early in January there were indications of the enemy's intention to withdraw from Kassala; and while on a visit to Khartoum I instructed General Platt to be ready to advance his operation to prevent the enemy withdrawal. Before he could get his troops into action, however, the enemy had evacuated Kassala and commenced his retreat.

12. This enemy withdrawal and the rapid and effective pursuit which General Platt at once initiated caused me to review my original