

90. On 4th April I received from Troopers direct a wire to say that the Defence Committee did not endorse the conditions put forward by General Wavell and that no offer to assume responsibility for feeding and protecting enemy civil population should be made without mentioning the unconditional surrender of Italian armed forces. Terms should be included also that ships in Massawa harbour were to be handed over to us intact for the evacuation and feeding of the Italian civilian community. It appeared to me that it was not clear to the Defence Committee that the conditions were to cover Addis Abeba only, a town which was necessary to me for the continuance of military operations, being the junction of all the main roads in Abyssinia.

If I had made demands as outlined above, in the event of refusal, the only action I could have taken was to stop short of Addis Abeba. In fact, I had nothing to bargain with. There was no direct threat to Addis Abeba, with which the Italians were not in a position to deal, by any forces other than my own. Nevertheless, as the Italian Military Command in their reply had not accepted the terms I had laid down in full, I cabled C.-in-C. Middle East offering to delay my advance and reopen negotiations.

As I had no reply in 24 hours I removed all restrictions and allowed the troops to continue their advance.

91. While these negotiations were taking place the advance of 22nd Brigade on to the Auasc was continuing, and our troops were in contact on the river on 2nd April. Both the road and railway bridges were found to be blown. The enemy put up some resistance to frontal attacks, but about half a mile from his main position a place was found where the river could be waded, and as soon as he discovered his flank was being turned he withdrew. A new road bridge was built and the advance was continued next day, 3rd April. The 22nd E.A. Brigade reached Adama that day, and were instructed to try to cross the river Auasc at Ponte Malcasa, and attempt to cut off the enemy column which was known to be withdrawing by Sire. The bridge had been destroyed and the enemy offered considerable resistance. A large part of the enemy column therefore escaped, though the capture of the road junction south of Ponte Malcasa some days later resulted in the cutting off of some units.

92. On 4th-5th April a series of combined bomber and fighter attacks were carried out by the Air Force on Addis Abeba aerodrome. The results of these attacks were the most successful yet attained. It was estimated that the enemy lost 32 aircraft, 3 destroyed in the air, 17 on the ground, and 12 damaged. The shambles on Addis Abeba aerodrome was apparent to our troops after entering the town, and further increased their confidence in the efficiency of the Air Force in aiding their advance.

93. During this time the 1st S.A. Brigade was being moved up to occupy Addis Abeba, which was entered by a mixed force officially at 10.30 hours 6th April.

On the evening before, while at Adama, the 22nd Brigade had received a request from the Italian officials in Addis Abeba to send some troops in to prevent looting. A few armoured cars and infantry were duly despatched.

During the period between the commencement of the advance from Harrar and the entry

into Addis Abeba a further 15,000 of the enemy were calculated to have become non-effective. Millions of pounds worth of war material of all sorts was found in the city and captured on the way there.

94. It is interesting to note that although during the whole period of the advance from the Giuba 11th (A) Division consisted of three brigades, only on one occasion, namely, at the Babile Pass engagement, was it found necessary to use more than one at a time. At the Babile Pass only one extra battalion was employed. I consider the greatest credit is due to Major-General Wetherall, Commander 11th (A) Division, for his cool-headed judgment, drive and daring acceptance of risks throughout the advance.

95. It was not found possible immediately to use the railway line from Dire Dawa to Addis Abeba, as the Italians had not only removed all the serviceable engines and the spare parts and machinery from Dire Dawa to Addis Abeba, but had also completely destroyed the railway bridge over the Auasc River.

Eventually with the assistance of some Greek mechanics, one engine at Dire Dawa was made sufficiently serviceable to go out along the line and bring in others from which one engine was then made available for drawing a train. This train conveyed 100 tons of supplies and stores to Auasc on 9th April, only three days after the occupation of Addis Abeba.

D. Operations in British Somaliland

(16th March to 5th April, 1941.)

96. As already referred to, a force from Aden was landed in British Somaliland and captured Berbera on 16th March. By previous arrangement with Aden, it was my responsibility to relieve one of the two Indian battalions sent over from there, and to take over command of Berbera and administration of British Somaliland as soon as possible after the landing.

In view of the importance of my L. of C., of the presence of formed but isolated groups of the enemy still in that area, and the necessity for a senior military commander on the spot, I decided to move the personnel of the H.Q. and two battalions 2nd S.A. Infantry Brigade by sea from Kenya to Berbera, the remaining battalion and all the transport proceeding by march route.

Brigade H.Q. and 2nd F.F. Battalion and 1st Natal Mounted Rifles duly arrived at Berbera on 23rd March. The transport proceeding by road did not arrive until 5th April. In spite of this, by the use of twenty 30-cwt. lorries sent over from Aden, and some hired transport procured through the offices of Lieut.-Colonel R. H. Smith the Senior Political Officer, Brigadier F. L. A. Buchanan, M.C., V.D., commanding 2nd S.A. Brigade was able to do valuable work in cleaning up isolated pockets of the enemy and establishing political control over the country.

97. On 8th April Brigadier A. R. Chater, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., who had been appointed Military Governor British Somaliland under my general direction took over from Brigadier Buchanan.

Immediate steps were taken to re-raise the Somaliland Camel Corps, the Illalos and the police force, many of the personnel of which