

12th (A) Division had head of 21st EA Brigade at about Soroppa advancing north with great difficulty on account of the rains, 3rd GC Regiment were patrolling north from Neghelli to Uaddara, and also experiencing difficulty due to the weather but not to such a great extent. The 24th GC Brigade less 3rd GC Regiment were clearing up in Italian Somaliland. The important bridges at Dolo, Lugh Ferrandi and Melka Guba were being continually broken by the floods, the latter being the only one by which troops could be sent from one line of advance to the other, i.e., from the Iavello road to the Neghelli road and vice-versa. This was a great handicap as it eventually proved very difficult to send supporting arms from one Brigade Group to the other, a procedure which the shortage of guns etc. made very necessary.

25th EA Brigade (12th (A) Division) were undertaking operations against Maji with the object of handing it over to the Equatorial Corps in the Sudan when captured. It was thought that the capture of Maji would have a stabilising influence on the turbulent tribes of the Ilembe triangle.

16. The enemy Order of Battle south and west of Addis Abeba was as follows:—

Uaddara front	...	24th Division
Giabassire front	...	21st Division
Sciasciamanna	...	25th Division
Gardulla-Soddu	...	101st Division
Gimma-Bonga	...	22nd Division
Lechemti } front	{	26th Division
Ghimbi }		23rd Division

It should however be remembered that many of the units had been heavily engaged, and no reinforcements were available. The divisions were therefore considerably below strength. Nevertheless they were strong in guns (about 200 exclusive of AA), possessed armoured cars, and between 20 and 30 medium and light tanks.

17. My instructions to Commander 11th (A) Division were to attack Gimma as early as possible and to operate southwards from Ponte Malcasa against the tail of the column retreating south through Aselle under General de Simone, who had been commanding the Italian troops since the Giuba. I impressed on Major General Wetherall the importance of ensuring proper protection of Adama and Moggio on his L or C, which would have been very vulnerable to attack by a determined enemy.

A battalion of 1st SA Brigade with supporting arms was immediately despatched down the Gimma road, and steps were taken to move up 23rd Nigerian Brigade to relieve the remainder of 1st SA Brigade so that they could carry out the attack on Gimma.

18. On 11th April I received a cable from C-in-C, which has already been mentioned, to the effect that he considered it imperative for me to attack Dessie and open up the road north to the Sudan. I therefore countermanded the orders for the attack on Gimma and directed 1st SA Brigade Group on Dessie.

23rd Nigerian Brigade relieved 1st SA Brigade who had two battalions in Addis Abeba, and one on the Omo River where the Gimma road crossed it. The bridge at this point had been blown by the enemy.

1st SA Brigade commenced their march on Dessie on 13th April. The account of the operations carried out by the Brigade Group is given later.

19. It was now apparent that with only two brigades in the Adama-Addis Abeba area I could not expect to accomplish any great success against the enemy in Gallo-Sidamo from the north. It was known that a considerable force of the enemy in the Quoziyam area on the Blue Nile had been cut off by our occupation of Addis Abeba, and west of that town, at Lechemti and Ghimbi, strong forces existed. Although the presence of the large number of Italian civilians in Addis Abeba was a cogent form of protection in itself, I could not leave the Fiche and Lechemti roads entirely open. It was therefore necessary for both local defence and internal security reasons to keep two battalions in Addis Abeba. 11th (A) Division was left therefore with only three battalions for operations southwards. One of these battalions, 3rd Nigerian Regiment, was located on the Omo with instructions to rouse local patriots and direct them against the rear of the Abalti position on the other side of the Omo River. 22nd EA Brigade with the remaining two battalions advanced southwards from Ponte Malcasa on Aselle and Cofole with the object of maintaining maximum pressure on Sciasciamanna in conjunction with the advance of 12th (A) Division northwards. My object at this time was to effect a junction of the two divisions on the Addis Abeba-Dalle road.

On 16th April the 22nd Brigade Group advanced successfully to Bocoggi taking some prisoners on the way, but here found that the road ceased to exist. As rain had already commenced falling it was decided to abandon the Aselle road and transfer the 22nd Brigade effort to the Moggo-Adamitullo road where it was hoped the going was better. Steps were taken to repair the bridges blown by the enemy on that road, and by 24th April 22nd Brigade were advancing south of Ponte Machi.

20. About this time I received information that a mechanised enemy column of a brigade group with tanks, armoured cars and six batteries, was assembling near Sciasciamanna under General Bertello with the avowed intention of attacking the L. of C. at Noggio. Considerable M.T. movement at night with headlights had been seen on the roads, and heavy A.A. fire was encountered by our aeroplanes whenever they approached the woods north of Sciasciamanna. These woods were bombed by the Air Force with what was known afterwards as considerable effect. It was considered advisable until the situation was cleared up to arrest the southward movement and be ready to occupy a defensive position between the Lakes Lagana and Algato. Nevertheless a small column operating west of Lake Algato towards an enemy position at Ficche continued with its attack, captured the position, and took 8 guns and 100 prisoners. It seems probable that this small attack upset the enemy's plans for counter-attack as the only northward movement of the enemy appeared to be carried out by a few tanks which advanced up the road from Sciasciamanna as far as the Auada River and then returned; no counter-attack materialised.

21. Meanwhile 12th (A) Division had concentrated the whole Gold Coast Brigade on the Neghelli road and both this Brigade and 21st Brigade on the Iavello road were advancing slowly northwards. Two positions on these roads at Uaddara and Giabassire respectively had been responsible for holding up the Italians