

# SECRET

R.A.F. NARRATIVE

THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS

1940-1941

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH(1)  
AIR MINISTRY

# SECRET

## THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS

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## MAPS

General Map (showing British and Italian Air Bases and Aerodromes)

The East African Campaign, January-April 1941

showing { The Attack from the North  
          { The Emperor's Route  
          { The Attack from the South.

The Assault on Amba Alagi, May 1941

The Battles of the Lakes, April-May 1941

Gondar Area, Air Campaign, November 1941 *missif*

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

1. Officers of the Army and the Royal and South African Air Forces are referred to by the rank which they held at the time of the Campaigns.
2. The spelling of Place Names is as usually shown on British Official Maps; the Italian equivalents are not used (e.g. "Kismayu" not "Chisimayo").
3. Distances mentioned in the **text** and footnotes are "as the crow flies" (unless stated otherwise).
4. Bomber Sorties. The types of bombs used and the heights from which they were dropped are given in those cases where such details are recorded.  
(The heights of bomb dropping by No.47 Squadron, R.A.F. must be regarded as approximate, as the figures recorded by that Squadron are A.M.S.L.<sup>1</sup> and therefore the height of the target - as far as can be ascertained from the maps available - has in each case been subtracted in order to give the height of the aircraft above ground level).

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1. i.e. Above Mediterranean Sea Level

THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS  
, CHRONOLOGY OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

1939

26 May- Anglo-French Conversations  
3 June. re defence of British and  
French Somaliland in the  
event of War with Italy.

1940

March. Visit by Gen. Wavell to  
South Africa and Rhodesia  
re defence of East Africa,  
in the event of War with  
Italy.

10 June. Italy declared War.

DEFENSIVE PERIOD

THE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN

1 June Strength of the R.A.F.  
Nos. 14, 47 and 223 (B)  
Sqdns. (under No. 254  
Wing, Khartoum)

June R.A.F. reinforced by  
"K" (F) Flight and No. 430  
(A.C.) Flight.

7 June H.Q. No. 254 Wing moved  
from Khartoum to Erkowit

11 June R.A.F. bombed port of  
Massawa (Eritrea)

KENYA

1 June Strength of the Air  
Forces.  
No. 12 (B) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
No. 237 (AC) Rhodesian Sqdn.  
Three Flights of the Kenya  
Aux. Units (under Air H.Q.  
Nairobi - later, Air H.Q.  
East Africa).

4-10 Arrival of No. 12 (B)  
June Sqdn. and Detachment of  
No. 1 (F) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.,  
from South Africa.

11/13 S.A.A.F. bombed Italian  
June Moyale

15 June Evacuation of British  
Moyale (Kenya)

16 June S.A.A.F. bombed Yavello,  
Moga and Neghelli  
(Abyssinia) aerodromes.

20/23 Arrival of No. 40 (A.C.)  
June Sqdn. S.A.A.F., from South  
Africa.

24 June Arrival of No. 1 (Survey)  
Flight (known later as  
No. 60 (Survey) Sqdn.)  
S.A.A.F. from South Africa.

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

1 June Strength of the R.A.F.  
(a) Brit. Somaliland Nil  
(b) Aden:- Nos. 8 and 39  
(B) Sqdns. No. 94 (F)  
Sqdn. and No. 203  
(GR) Sqdn. (under Air  
H.Q., Aden).

11 June Attacks by R.A.F. (Aden)  
- on enemy aerodromes etc.  
19 Aug. in Eritrea and Abyssinia  
15 June R.A.F. (ADEN) reinforced  
by No. 11 (B) Sqdn. from  
India.

25 June Armistice obtained by  
the French, and French  
Somaliland then con-  
trolled by Vichy.  
(Defence Scheme of  
British Somaliland there-  
fore disrupted).



THE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN

KENYA

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

1 July Arrival of 1st South  
African and 23rd  
Nigerian Brigades

3 July Arrival of the Emperor  
Haile Selassie at  
Khartoum

July Assistance by Mission  
"101" to the "Patriots"  
Co-operation by R.A.F.

4 July Italians occupied Kassala  
and Gallabat

29/30 July R.A.F. reinforced by No.45  
(B) Sqdn. from Egypt.  
(recalled in August but  
returned to the Sudan in  
September)

8 Aug. R.A.F. reinforced by  
Detachment of No.1 (F)  
Sqdn. S.A.A.F.

14 Aug. No.223 (B) Sqdn. moved to  
Aden.

17 Aug. No.203 Group, R.A.F.  
formed at Khartoum

22 Aug. No.223 (B) Sqdn.  
returned from Aden.

19 Aug. S.A.A.F. attacked Afmadi,  
Gobwen, Yavello, Neghelli,  
Lugh Ferrandi, Isha Baidoa,  
Merka and Mogadishu aero-  
dromes

21 Aug. S.A.A.F. bombed Mogadishu  
aerodrome (3 enemy aircraft  
destroyed and 6 damaged and  
some 800 M.T. vehicles  
destroyed).

14 July R.A.F. (Aden) rein-  
forced, by Free French  
(B) Flight.

5 Aug. Italian attack on  
British Somaliland.  
(R.A.F. support cur  
ground forces).

8 Aug. R.A.F. bombed Addis  
Ababa (5 enemy a/c  
destroyed)

14 Aug. R.A.F. (Aden) reinforced  
by No.223 (B) Sqdn.  
from the Sudan.

15 Aug. R.A.F. (Aden) rein-  
forced by Detachment  
of No.84 (B) Sqdn. from  
Egypt (for a short  
period).

18 Aug. Evacuation of British  
Somaliland and occupa-  
tion thereof by the  
Italians.

20 Aug. R.A.F. bombed Dessie,  
and Dire-dawa (Abyssinia)  
aerodromes.

22 Aug. No.223 (B) Sqdn.  
returned to the Sudan.

THE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN

KENYA

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

2-5 & } R.A.F. bombed port of  
12-15 } Assab (Eritrea)  
Sept., }

8-18 Arrival of 5th Indian  
Sept. Division

20 Sept. R.A.F. reinforced by  
No.237 (Rhodesian)  
Sqn.

23 Sept. R.A.F. bombed Caproni  
a/c works at Mai Edaga.

16 Oct. Italian Air Force attacked  
R.A.F. L.G. near Gedaref  
(10 R.A.F. a/c destroyed)

6 Nov. 5th Indian Division and  
R.A.F. attacked Gallabat and  
Metemma.  
(Aircraft losses:  
R.A.F. - 6 destroyed  
Italian - 6 destroyed and  
2 damaged)

3 Sept. S.A.A.F. bombed Yavello  
aerodrome (3 enemy air-  
craft destroyed)

4 Sept. S.A.A.F. bombed Isha  
Baidea aerodrome (6  
enemy aircraft destroyed).

9 Sept. S.A.A.F. bombed Shashamana  
(Abyssinia) aerodrome (3  
enemy a/c destroyed and 1  
damaged).

20 Sept. No.237 (Rhodesian) Sqn.  
moved to the Sudan.

1 Oct. Formation of No.2 (F) Sqn.  
S.A.A.F. in Kenya.

2 Oct. Arrival of 2nd and 5th  
South African Brigades.  
Formation of 1st S.A.  
Division and 11th and  
12th (African) Divisions  
(commanded by Maj.Gen.  
Cunningham).

21/23 Arrival of No.3 (F) Sqn.  
Oct. S.A.A.F. from South Africa.

3 Nov. Formation of No.41 (A.C.)  
Squadron S.A.A.F. in Kenya.

7 Nov. S.A.A.F. dropped 10,000  
pamphlets (in Amharic) on  
Gardulla (Abyssinia).

28 Sept. R.A.F. bombed Konbolcha  
(Abyssinia) aerodrome

18/19 R.A.F. bombed Diredawa  
Oct. (1 enemy a/c destroyed)

Nov. R.A.F. bombed Assab  
(various  
dates)



THE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN

KENYA

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

1-31 R.A.F. assisted the  
Dec. "Patriots" by attacking  
enemy positions in  
Abyssinia.

16 Nov. 12th (A) Division and  
S.A.A.F. destroyed El  
Wak (Italian Somaliland)

29 Nov. Nos. 11 and 39 (B)  
Sqn's moved to Egypt

2 Dec. Gen. Wavell's Conference with Maj.-Gens. Cunningham and Platt\*  
re offensive operations in Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and  
Abyssinia.

Dec. Formation of No. 34 (S)  
Flight S.A.A.F. (Coastal  
Patrols) and beginning of  
formation of No. 14 (B)  
Sqn. S.A.A.F.

11/13 R.A.F. bombed Dire-dawa.  
Dec.

1941

OFFENSIVE PERIOD

1 Jan. "Glen Martin Flight" of  
No. 14 Sqn. S.A.A.F. took  
over Recon. and Survey duties  
under Air H.Q.

Jan. R.A.F. bombed Assab.  
(various  
dates)

7 Jan. Arrival of 4th Indian  
Division  
(\* N.B. 4th and 5th  
Indian Divs. placed under  
command of Maj.-Gen. Platt)

15 Jan. Advance of 11th (A) and  
12th (A) Divisions into  
Jubaland (Italian  
Somaliland)

16 Jan. Capture of El Yibo  
(Abyssinia) by 1st S.A.  
Division.

18 Jan. Capture of Mege (Abyssinia)  
by 1st S.A. Division.

19 Jan. Opening of Eritrean campaign:  
capture of Kassala.

21 Jan. S.A.A.F. bombed Shashamana  
aerodrome (3 enemy a/c  
destroyed).

20 Jan. The Emperor Haile  
Selassie flew from  
Khartoum to the  
Abyssinian border.

22 Jan. Capture of Kori

28 Jan. R.A.F. attacked Keren and  
Asmara

29 Jan. R.A.F. bombed Gura (Abyssinia)  
aerodrome (3 enemy a/c  
destroyed)

THE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN  
(The Britrean Campaign)

KENYA  
(The Italian Somaliland-Abyssinian Campaign)

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

	1 Feb. Capture of Barentu and Agordat.		
	3 Feb. R.A.F. attacked Azoza aerodrome (6 enemy a/c destroyed and 1 damaged).	2/3 S.A.A.F. bombed Afmau, Feb. Dif and Gobwen aerodromes (10 enemy a/c destroyed)	
6 Feb. The Emperor Haile Selassie reached Belaya			4 Feb. R.A.F. bombed Makale (Abyssinia) aerodrome (2 enemy a/c destroyed and 4 damaged)
7 Feb. R.A.F. (in support of the "Patriots") bombed Dangila			7 Feb. R.A.F. bombed Kombolcha aerodrome (8 enemy a/c destroyed)
	10 Feb. Capture of Mersa Taklai		
	12 Feb. Opening assault on Keren - with R.A.F. support.	11 Feb. Capture of Afmau )	
	14-16 R.A.F. bombed Caproni Feb. aircraft works at Mai Edaga	14 Feb. Capture of Kismayu )	
	19 Feb. R.A.F. bombed Asmara aerodrome (8 enemy a/c destroyed).		
21/28 Feb. R.A.F. bombed Burye			11th (A) Division
	23 Feb. R.A.F. attacked Makale aerodrome (8 enemy a/c destroyed and 3 damaged)	22 Feb. Capture of Jelib	
		24 Feb. Capture of Brava	
		25 Feb. Capture of Mogadishu	
		26 Feb. Capture of Bardera	
27 Feb. "Gideon Force" attacked Burye		28 Feb. Capture of Isha Baidee	12th (A) Division
		3 Mar. Capture of Lugh Ferrandi.	
4 Mar. Capture of Dombacha			
Mar. R.A.F. attacked enemy (various positions - Burye - dates) Debra Markos area.			



THE EMPEROR HAILLE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN  
(The Eritrean Campaign)

KENYA  
(The Italian Somaliland -  
Abyssinian Campaign)

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

4 Apl. Capture of Debra Markos

14 Mar. R.A.F. bombed ammo. train  
near Keren and destroyed  
20,000 shells.

16 Mar. R.A.F. made 87 sorties on  
Keren

27 Mar. Capture of Keren -  
intensive attacks by  
R.A.F. on enemy positions.

30 Mar. Formation of Free French  
(B) Flight (under R.A.F.)

1 Apl. Capture of Asmara.

3 Apl. R.A.F. destroyed 3 enemy  
Destroyers in Red Sea.

8 Apl. Capture of Massawa.

8 Apl. No. 14 (B) Sqdn. moved to  
Egypt.

10/12 No. 1 (F) Swdn. S.A.A.F.  
Apl. No. 223 (B) Sqdn. "K" (F)  
Flight and No. 430 (AC)  
Flight, R.A.F. moved to  
Egypt.

Apl. 4th Indian Division moved  
to Egypt.

21 Mar. Capture of Neghelli)

25 Mar. Capture of Harrar )

29 Mar. Capture of Diredawa)

4/6 Apl. S.A.A.F. bombed Addis Ababa  
aerodrome (18 enemy a/c  
destroyed and 10 damaged).

6 Apl. Capture of Addis Ababa by  
11th (A) Division.

6 Apl. S.A.A.F. bombed Kombolcha  
aerodrome (4 enemy a/c  
destroyed and 8 damaged).

10 Apl. S.A.A.F. attacked Shashamana  
aerodrome (4 enemy a/c  
destroyed).

10 Apl. S.A.A.F. bombed Jimma  
aerodrome (8 enemy a/c  
destroyed).

18 Apl. No. 14 (now No. 24) Sqdn.  
S.A.A.F. moved to Egypt.

12th (A)  
Division

11th (A)  
Division

16 Mar. Recapture of Berbera  
with R.A.F. support  
(resulting in re-occupa-  
tion of British  
Somaliland.)

21/23 R.A.F. bombed Addis  
Mar. Ababa - Jibuti Railway  
causing considerable  
damage to trains, track,  
etc.

9 Apl. No. 94 (F) Sqdn.  
moved to Egypt.

15 Apl. No. 203 (GR) Sqdn. moved  
to Egypt.

THE EMPEROR HAILLE SELASSIE  
AND THE ABYSSINIAN "PATRIOTS"

THE SUDAN  
(The Eritrean Campaign)

KENYA  
(The Italian Somaliland -  
Abyssinian Campaign)

BRITISH SOMALILAND  
AND ADEN

5 May The Emperor Haile Selassie  
entered Addis Ababa.

23 May Large enemy force (from  
Debra Markos) surren-  
dered at Agibar.

24 May No.237 (AC)  
Rhodesian Sqdn.  
moved to Egypt.

July R.A.F. bombed Gondar area  
(various  
dates)

20 Apl. No.2 (F) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
moved to Egypt.

20 Apl. Capture of Maji by 12th  
(A) Division.

22 Apl. Capture of Kombolcha )  
Pass. ) 11th (A)  
Division

26 Apl. Capture of Dessie )

1 May Formation of No.16 (B) Sqdn.  
S.A.A.F. equipped with a/c of  
No.12 (B) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
(which moved to Egypt on 26  
May).

Battles of the Lakes { 10 May Capture of Wadara } 12th (A) Division  
{ 11 May Capture of Giabassire }  
{ 14 May Capture of Shashamana } 11th (A) Division  
{ 17 May Capture of Dalle }

17 May Capture of Amba Alagi by  
1st S.A. Bgde and 5th  
Indian Division:  
(Surrender of Duke  
D'Aosta).

24 May Capture of Suddu by 11th (A)  
Division (Battles of the the  
Lakes).

1 June No.11 (B) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
evacuated from forward  
areas and No.15 (B) Sqdn.  
formed with No.11 Sqdn.'s  
a/c.

1 June No.40 (AC) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
disbanded and its a/c taken  
over by No.41 (AC) Sqdn.  
S.A.A.F.

21 June Capture of Jimma by 12th  
(A) Division - with R.A.F.  
support.

29 June No.60 (S) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
moved to Egypt.

8 July Surrender of Gen. Gazzera  
at Gambela.

11 June Capture of Assab -  
with R.A.F. support.

SECRET

(GONDAR OPERATIONS)

4/19 R.A.F. bombed Wolchefit  
Aug. and Debarech.

16 Aug. Free French (B) Flight  
moved to Damascus.

4 Aug. S.A.A.F. began intensive  
operations in Gondar area  
(which continued until the  
capture of Gondar on 27  
Nov.).

22 Aug. No.16 (B) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
taken over by No.35 (B)  
Flight, S.A.A.F.

25 Aug. No.15 (B) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
withdrawn (as a/c now  
unserviceable).

25 Sep. S.A.A.F. took over opera-  
tional control of No.47  
(B) Sqdn. R.A.F., Sudan  
Command.

30 Sep. No.35 (B) Sqdn. moved to  
Aiscia.

30 Oct. No.16 (B) Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
withdrawn.

1/26 S.A.A.F. and R.A.F. in-  
Nov. tensive attacks on Gondar  
area.

27 Nov. Final assault on Gondar -  
with S.A.A.F. and R.A.F.  
support.

27 Nov. Capture of Gondar.



# SECRET

## PREFACE

The part played by the Royal and South African Air Forces in the East African Campaigns<sup>1</sup> from the entry into the War by Italy in June 1940 until the final overthrow of the Italian "African Empire" in November 1941 constituted a vital factor in the successful outcome of our conflict with the Axis European Powers. It should, however, be borne in mind that the East African Campaigns formed a part only of the vast theatre of War which included the campaigns in Libya, Greece, and Crete, and which necessitated a close and constant scrutiny of the political situation in Egypt, Palestine, Iraq and the neighbouring countries of the Middle East.

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1. Comprising the Sudan, British Somaliland, Kenya Colony, Italian East Africa (Abyssinia), Eritrea and Italian Somaliland.

# SECRET

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## INTRODUCTION

### Political Situation, Winter, 1939 - 1940.

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch  
Aug. '39 to  
Nov. '40. (A.H.B.  
II. J1/9/2)

Owing to the fact that Italy did not enter the War with her ally Germany the Middle East was not immediately engaged in operations, but preparations were made against this contingency. The G.O.C., Middle East, General Sir Archibald Wavell, K.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., felt, however, that his preparations in the event of War with Italy were hampered by the Home Government's instructions that nothing was to be done to impair our relations with Italy, and the civil authorities in the countries concerned interpreted these instructions as precluding any attempts to establish an Intelligence service in any of the Italian territories, to contact the "patriot" chiefs in Abyssinia, or to counter hostile Italian propaganda.

### Military Situation, June 1940<sup>1</sup>

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch,  
Aug. '39 to  
Nov. '40.  
(A.H.B. II  
J1/9)

In March 1940 General Wavell visited the East African Command (under Major-General D.P. Dickinson, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C.) and he then went to South Africa and Southern Rhodesia for discussions with the military authorities. As a result of his representations the Union Government sent a Brigade and a contingent of the South African Air Force to Kenya Colony which arrived early in June. Meanwhile Southern Rhodesia had already sent (in September 1939) thirty-seven officers and N.C.Os to British Somaliland, and in April a further reinforcement of nearly 700 officers and men to Kenya.

Ibid

On the entry of Italy into the War on 10 June the military situation was, briefly, as follows:- the Italians were estimated to have 200,000 troops in their East

/African

1. For the purposes of this monograph the Military (and Air) situations are concerned with the countries and territories named in the footnote to the Preface.

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African territories<sup>1</sup> while our forces were approximately 19,000<sup>2</sup>, or one-tenth the number of the enemy. In addition to this great disparity of forces it may be mentioned that the Sudan-Italian East African frontier extended for some 1,000 miles, and the Kenya-Italian East African and Italian Somaliland frontiers some 700 miles.

Air Situation, June 1940.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch, May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B.II J1/7).

As with the Army, the Royal Air Force in the Middle East (under command of Air Chief Marshal Sir A.M. Longmore, K.C.B., D.S.O., A.O.C.-in-Chief, Middle East) was in a considerable numerical minority to the Italian Air Force. Until the end of May the British Air units in Kenya consisted only of No.237 (Rhodesian) (Army Co-operation) Squadron (Hardys - of an obsolete type - Harts and Audaxes) and the Kenya Auxiliary Air Units (consisting of three Flights of various types of machines), but at the end of May and early in June these had been augmented by a contingent of the South African Air Force comprising two Bomber Squadrons (No.11 - Hartbees<sup>3</sup> - and No.12 - JU.86s<sup>4</sup>).

/and a

1. i.e. Italian East African (Abyssinia), Italian Somaliland, and Eritrea.  
(The total Italian forces in the whole of the Middle East approximated 415,000 as against 86,000 British troops).

2. Our forces were distributed thus:-

General

Wavell's	Sudan (approx:)	- 9,000	comprising 3 Brit. Bns. and the Sudan Defence Force.
Despatch			
Aug. '39	Kenya (approx:)	- 8,500	comprising 2 East African Brigades and 2 Light Batteries
to Nov. '40			
(A.H.B.II	Brit: Somaliland (approx:)	- 1,475	comprising 3 Companies Camel Corps and 1 Bn. King's African Rifles from Kenya. (A second Bn. K.A.R. and a battery arrived subsequently on 12 July from Kenya).
J1/9)		<u>18,975</u>	

There were also 2 Indian Bns., approximating 2,500 men, at Aden.

3. No.11 Sqdn. was then armed with 24 Hartbees and 1 Fairey Battle. On 29 June the Hartbees were handed over to the newly-arrived No.40 Army Co-operation Sqdn, and No.11 Sqdn. was re-equipped with Fairey Battles. (Information supplied by War Diaries Officer of the S.A.A.F.). It arrived at Nairobi on 4 June (S.A.A.F. Records - No.11 Sqdn.).

4. No.12 Sqdn. arrived at Nairobi before 25 May (S.A.A.F. Records, No.12 Sqdn.).

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and a detachment of No.1 Fighter Squadron (Furies and Gladiators). In The Sudan there were three R.A.F. Medium Bomber Squadrons (Nos.14, 47 and 223 - all Wellesleys) and at Aden there were two R.A.F. Medium Bomber Squadrons (No.8 - Blenheims and Vincents - and No.39<sup>1</sup> - Blenheims), one General Reconnaissance Squadron (No.203 - Blenheim IVs<sup>2</sup>) and one Fighter Squadron (No.94 - Gladiators<sup>3</sup>).

Excluding the Hardys, Harts and Audaxes of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron and the K.A.A.U., the total of these units approximated 86 Wellesleys and Blenheims, 9 Vincents, 24 Hartbees, 15 JU.86s, and some 30 Gladiators and Furies<sup>4</sup>, while the Italian Air Force was estimated to consist of 170 Bombers, 51 Fighters and 18 Reconnaissance aircraft<sup>5</sup>.

## Types and Markings of Italian Aircraft.

No.203 Group  
"Notes on Air  
Ops. in Eritrea"  
File 2036/206/INT  
(10 Feb. 41) and  
A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan" (A.H.B.II  
J7/2).

The types of Italian aircraft operating in

Abyssinia, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland were as follows:-

### Fighters

C.R.32 and C.R.42 (Fiats)

Both of these types were small biplanes, quite fast and very manoeuvrable. They were armed with one  $\frac{1}{2}$ " machine-gun.

### Bombers

(Caproni) C.A.133  
(Savoia) S.79 and S.81.

### The C.A. 133

(the so-called "Colonial Bomber") was a three-engined monoplane with non-retractable wheels. Its bomb load was approximately half a ton.

/The S.79

- 
1. No.39 Sqdn. had recently arrived from India.
  2. These Blenheims had been converted to four-gun fighters (Air H.Q. Aden - Form 540 - Entry of 7 June '40).
  3. No.94 Sqdn. was incomplete but was augmented later.
  4. The location of R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. units in The Sudan, Kenya, and Aden, as on 11 June 1940, is contained in Appendix "A" (excerpted from Appendix "B" of A.C.M. Longmore's Despatch of 1 Feb. 41, with some amendments).
  5. No.254 Wing Op. Instruction No.1, (Appendix "A" to Form 540: Entry of 8 June 1940). The location and estimated strength of the Italian Air Force (excerpted from No.254 Wing Op. Instruction No.1) is contained in Appendix B.

The S.79 was a three-engined monoplane with a retractable undercarriage. Its bomb load (up to 1,000 miles) was nearly one ton.

The S.81 was a three-engined heavy bomber with a fixed undercarriage. Its bomb load was slightly under two tons on short raids.

There were also a few Reconnaissance aircraft (Romeo) R.O.37, which, on occasion, were used as Fighters.

R.A.F. Review of  
Events Sudan.  
File 176/INT.  
(Aug.-Nov. '40)

The normal markings were three black fascas on a white background within a black circle. (Various white crosses superimposed on the normal rudder markings were reported occasionally).

Location of Italian Aerodromes.

Before hostilities began the location of several of the more important Italian aerodromes in Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia was known to our Air Forces<sup>1</sup> and from time to time information was received of the existence of other aerodromes and landing grounds (and also fuel dumps). Such information was sometimes obtained from statements by native "agents" and native deserters from the Italian forces, and from the interrogation of prisoners of War. On the receipt of such information aerial reconnaissance were made of the locality, and if the suspected aerodrome or landing ground was discovered it was usually photographed by the reconnaissance aircraft. This procedure was generally adopted throughout the East African campaigns as a whole.

Agent's Reports,  
Deserters, etc.  
File 172/INT.  
and  
Information and  
reports re P.O.W.  
File 126/INT.

In Eritrea and northern Abyssinia the Italians changed the location of some of their aerodromes with reasonable skill, but on the whole they did not develop "new" landing grounds to any great extent. Nor did they carry out the distant dispersals of their aircraft which became their practice in the later stages of the campaign when they had been thrown back on the defensive.

Communicated by  
A.M. Sir L. Slatter

/Role of the

1. See Appendix "B".



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## Role of the Royal Air Force in the Middle East.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch of  
1 Feb. '41.  
(A.H.B.II J1/7)

The primary role of the Royal Air Force in the Middle East (as communicated to the A.O.C.-in-Chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, in the instructions from the Air Council dated 11 June 1940) was the defence of Egypt and the Suez Canal, and the maintenance of communications through the Red Sea. The A.O.C.-in-Chief therefore decided that the Royal Air Force should assist in implementing this policy by:

- "(a) Offensive action against enemy air bases with a view to reducing their numerical superiority in aircraft and to destroy their repair organisation.
- (b) Offensive action against enemy ports to destroy or damage submarines, shipping and port facilities.
- (c) Destruction of resources of all sorts in Italian East Africa as it was anticipated (that) no replenishment could be made<sup>1</sup>.
- (d) Full support of (the) British Army in whatever operations (were) in progress.
- (e) Strategical reconnaissance for Naval, Army and Air information."

To achieve these objectives the Royal Air Force policy on all points was to "maintain an active offensive, any defensive measures being reduced to the barest minimum".

When Italy entered the War, and after the collapse of France, our sea communications through the Mediterranean ceased, and the Red Sea route thus became

/of the

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1 Unfortunately this did not in fact apply to aircraft, for the Italians flew long-range bombers - and dismantled fighters inside large transport aircraft - from landing grounds on the southern borders of Libya across the Sudan into Eritrea. (See P. Guedalla's "Middle East 1940-42 - A Study in Air Power").

of the first importance. Several enemy submarines were known to be in the Italian Red Sea ports and these, together with the Italian bombers which could operate from their coastal aerodromes, constituted a grave menace to our shipping. This meant that in co-operation with the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force was now responsible for the safe convoying of our ships along the Red Sea route.

Bases for the East African Campaigns.

There were two main bases for the East African campaigns, namely Khartoum (Sudan) and Nairobi (Kenya Colony). From Khartoum came the forces which were to conquer Eritrea and liberate Northern Abyssinia, and from Nairobi came those which were to conquer Italian Somaliland<sup>1</sup>, re-conquer British Somaliland<sup>2</sup> and capture Addis Ababa (the capital of Abyssinia). The essential factor for these operations - as also for our campaign in North Africa with Cairo as its base - was that the Red Sea should be kept inviolate as a supply route. The campaign from Khartoum was fought, from a strategical aspect, with this end in view - the liberation of Abyssinia being indeed a prominent political, but not a strategical, feature of the conflict.

Opening of the Campaigns.

At the opening of the campaigns in East Africa our land forces were, of necessity, mainly on the defensive owing to their great numerical inferiority and to the great length of our territorial boundaries which had to be covered. In the Sudan the small force available was unable to cover the long and vulnerable frontiers and

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch Aug. '39  
to Nov. '40.  
(A.H.B. II J1/9)

General Wavell

- 
1. This included the province of Jubaland - formerly part of Kenya Colony which was handed over to the Italian Government in 1924 as compensation to the Italians for their participation in the war of 1914-1918 as our allies.
  2. British Somaliland was overrun by the Italians in August 1940 - as will appear hereafter.

# SECRET

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General Wavell therefore directed that small and mobile forces should occupy the principal places and fight delaying actions. In Kenya, a similar policy of holding the frontier posts as long as possible was adopted. The position of British Somaliland (with its capital of Berbera through which supplies and reinforcements could be shipped from Aden and outlying parts of the British Empire - a circumstance of the utmost importance) was of a different category as it depended on certain arrangements made with the French Government for co-operation should Italy enter the war. These arrangements (which had been discussed at Anglo-French Staff conversations at Aden on 26 May - 3 June 1939) provided inter alia that if war broke out with Italy both French and British Somaliland should remain in the first instance on the defensive, but that French Somaliland would be the most suitable from which to attack Italian East Africa and should therefore be retained in any

A.F.C.36 (Section II)  
Para.5

Extracts from A.F.C.  
36 (Section VI).

event. In August 1939 at a conference held in Paris between the Inspector General of African Colonial Forces and the French General Staff a revised Somaliland Defence Scheme was discussed, and it was recommended that the British Somaliland Camel Corps should co-operate with the French in the defence of Jibuti<sup>1</sup> and be placed under command of the French G.O.C. It was also decided that an offensive from Kenya into Abyssinia would not be possible until British and French reinforcements had arrived, and that probably there would then be three offensives, one from the Sudan, one from Jibuti, and one from Kenya. Unfortunately these projected combined operations between the British and

/the French

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1 The capital and chief port of French Somaliland from which the railway runs to Addis Ababa.

the French were to prove abortive, for following the entry by Italy into the war the French Government obtained an armistice on 25 June (1940), and although General Legentilhomme (the French commander at Jibuti) refused to surrender he was overruled by General Germain (who had been flown out from France to supersede him) at a Council held on 22 July, and the French resistance thereupon collapsed. This untimely debacle released the whole of the Italian Eastern Army for an attack on British Somaliland, which was begun on 5 August.

Meanwhile there was yet another sphere of operations -

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch "Ops.  
in Somaliland"  
1939-1940.  
(A.H.B.II J7/3)

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch, May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B.II J1/7)

the importance of which cannot be stressed too highly - namely, the safeguarding of the Red Sea route for our shipping. On the collapse of France the Royal Air Force undertook air escort work, the greater portion of which was the responsibility of the Squadrons based at Aden, but further north No. 14 Squadron (based at Port Sudan) took it over. Between 5 July and 31 December (1940) No. 203 (G.R.) Squadron (Aden) escorted more than fifty convoys of which on only two occasions were ships sunk or damaged by bombs during passage<sup>1</sup>. During this period the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy assisted the Royal Air Force on several occasions by taking over R.A.F. air responsibilities.

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch  
Aug. '39 to  
Nov. '40.  
(A.H.B.II J1/9)

In the meantime, in Abyssinia preparations had been made to assist the "patriot" leaders, and a Mission - known as "101" - in charge of Colonel D.A. Sandford, D.S.O. - had been formed with this object in view. Early in July (1940) the unexpected arrival in the Sudan of the Emperor Haile Selassie created some considerable embarrassment as the time was not yet considered ripe for his appearance, and, moreover, the Emperor entertained most exaggerated ideas regarding the amount of military support which could be provided. Arrangements were therefore made for him to be

/accommodated

1. One ship was sunk and one was damaged.

# SECRET

accommodated at Khartoum where he remained for the next five months. During the Emperor's residence at Khartoum, Mission "101" accomplished stirring work among the "patriots" in the Gojjam area of Abyssinia.

Outline of the Nature and Extent of the Campaigns.

Before proceeding with the narrative of events it will be convenient at this point to give a brief outline of the nature and extent of the campaigns which, though forming in the broad perspective a single "East African campaign", were in fact a series of contemporaneous operations; for purposes of clarity these several operations will be examined separately.

The East African campaign as a whole may be divided into three phases, namely the period from Italy's entry into the War (10 June) to the beginning of November 1940 when our forces were on the defensive, the period from December 1940 until April 1941 during which time our forces broke the enemy's military power in Italian East Africa, and the period from May to the end of November 1941 when the disintegrated forces of the Italians were captured or annihilated and Mussolini's much vaunted "African Empire" ceased to exist.

During the first phase the enemy conquered British Somaliland and attacked our outposts on the Sudan and Kenya frontiers<sup>1</sup>, but, with the exception of this temporary<sup>2</sup> occupation of British Somaliland, they achieved few results of importance. In the second phase the initiative passed to our forces and by a great

/"pincer"

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1 The narrative of the attacks on the Sudan, Kenya and British Somaliland are contained under the general heading "First Phase" and are sub-headed:-

- The Attack on the Sudan.
- The Attack on Kenya.
- The Attack on British Somaliland, and Operations of the R.A.F., Aden Command.

2 As will appear hereafter (on pages 157 and 158) this Protectorate was re-captured by our forces in March 1941.

"pincer" movement of attack the enemy was shattered irretrievably. The northern arm of this "pincer" consisted of forces based in the Sudan under Major-General W. Plat, C.B., D.S.O., and the southern arm of forces based on Kenya under Major-General A. Cunningham, D.S.O., M.C., (who had taken over the command in East Africa from Major-General Dickinson on 1 November 1940). The northern arm conquered Eritrea and smashed the kernel of the enemy's resistance at Keren, while the southern arm conquered Italian Somaliland, was the operative factor in the re-conquest of British Somaliland, and captured Addis Ababa. While the arms of the "pincer" were in operation the Emperor Haile Selassie crossed into Abyssinia from the Sudan, and ultimately entered his capital after its capture by our forces. The northern and southern attacks of the "pincer", and the return of the Emperor, were the primary events of the campaign: they were followed by secondary movements which liquidated the remnants of the enemy's scattered forces.

**SECRET**

FIRST PHASE

ON THE DEFENSIVE

# SECRET

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## I. THE ATTACK ON THE SUDAN

The British position in the Sudan appeared to be very hazardous. Along the 1,000 miles of the frontier the Italians had excellent avenues for attack at Karora, Kassala<sup>1</sup>, Um Hagar, Metemma, Guba, Kurmuk, and on the Boma plateau. Our military forces, commanded by Major-General Platt, consisted of only three British Battalions<sup>2</sup>, and the Sudan Defence Force composed of twenty companies including six motor-machine gun companies and eight (armoured) Bren-carriers.

### Role of the R.A.F. Sudan Command during Phase I.

The role of the Royal Air Force during the attack on the Sudan (as also in subsequent stages of the campaigns) can be classified thus:-

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc."  
(A.H.B.II J7/2)

- (a) Maintaining the security of shipping through the Red Sea.
- (b) The provision of air defence of Port Sudan, Atbara, and Khartoum.
- (c) The provision of air support to our ground forces on the Sudan eastern border.
- (d) The provision of air support to the "patriot" Movement in Abyssinia.

Ibid

#### (a) Security of the Red Sea.

As already stated<sup>3</sup> the R.A.F. Units in the Sudan were three Medium Bomber Squadrons (Wellesleys - Nos.14, 47 and 223) based in the Port Sudan area, and operations were directed against enemy Naval units based on the Eritrean sea-port of Massawa and on enemy aerodromes in Eritrea. At the end of July a Flight of

/bombers

1. Kassala is in fact in the Sudan; it was captured by a strong Italian force (estimated at 8,000 troops and 18 tanks) from two machine-gun companies of the Sudan Defence Force in July.
2. i.e. 2nd West Yorkshires, 1st Worcesters, and 1st Essex Regiments.
3. See page 3 supra.



bombers (Shortnose Blenheims) from No.45 Squadron was sent to the Sudan from Helwan (Egypt) as a reinforcement. This was recalled in August, but in September the whole of No.45 Squadron was sent to the Sudan and remained there until the end of November. These aircraft carried bomb loads of 2,000 lb. and proved a most effective bombing force: not only were enemy aerodromes damaged severely but the activities of the enemy's Naval units were so much restricted that the safe passage of shipping in the Red Sea was secured to a remarkable degree.

(b) Defence of Port Sudan, Atbara and Khartoum.

The problem of defence in the Sudan was of considerable difficulty owing to the limited number of fighter aircraft available for that purpose. The enemy realised the importance of Port Sudan and attempted to bomb that port and its aerodrome, and attempts were also made to bomb Khartoum and the important railway junction of Atbara. To cope with these threats a Flight of six Gladiators of No.112 Squadron<sup>1</sup> (known thereafter as "K" Flight) was sent to the Sudan early in June. An Army Co-operation Flight of Vincents detached from No.47 Squadron (and known as No.430 Flight), was also sent to the Sudan in June for a purpose which will be stated hereafter<sup>2</sup>. These two Flights and Nos.14, 47 and 223 Squadrons (and, later, No.45 Squadron) - and one Valentia aircraft, detached from

No.254 Wing  
Form 540 Entry of  
7 June '40 and  
Appx. A thereto.

No.70 Squadron - formed No.254 Wing<sup>3</sup> (originally the Air

/Headquarters

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>No.254 Wing<br/>Op. Instruc.<br/>No.1 dated<br/>8 June '40<br/>Appx. A to<br/>Form 540<br/>Entry of<br/>10 June '40.</p> | <p>1. No.112 Sqdn. was based at Helwan (Egypt).<br/>2. See (c) on page 13 <u>infra</u>.<br/>3. The number of aircraft of the Sqdns. and Flights in June (i.e. excluding No.45 Sqdn.) approximated:-</p> |
|---|---|

- 45 Wellesleys (Bombers)
- 6 Army Co-operation Vincents (Bombers)
- 1 Valentia (Bomber)
- 6 Gladiators (Fighters)

The Army Co-operation Flight (detached from No.47 Sqdn.) was under the operational command of the G.O.C. Troops, Sudan.

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Headquarters of the Sudan) which was moved on 7 June from Khartoum to Erkowit on the Red Sea (some 60 miles south-west of Port Sudan) under command of Group Captain S.D. Macdonald D.F.C., a new Air H.Q. Sudan being formed at Khartoum under command of Group Captain C.E.V. Porter.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

In August the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, decided that an Air Commodore for the Sudan was necessary, and on 17 August the H.Q. at Khartoum was renamed No.203 Group and placed under command of Air Commodore L.H. Slatter, O.B.E., D.S.O., D.F.C., as Air Officer Commanding.

## (c) Air Support to our Ground Forces on the Sudan Border.

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan" etc.  
(A.H.B. II J7/2)

The provision of air support for our ground forces on the eastern border of the Sudan was very meagre, the only unit permanently available for this purpose being No.430 (A.C.) Flight of six Vincents, augmented later by six Gauntlets. This Flight had a very wide front to cover: it operated against enemy forces occupying British outposts on the Sudan - Eritrean and the Sudan - Abyssinian borders.

## (d) Air Support to the "Patriot" Movement in Abyssinia.

Ibid.

The question of air support for the "patriot" Movement in Abyssinia was of great importance, for the Abyssinians had learnt to their cost in their conquest by Italy the great value of air operations. The fact that the Royal Air Force was now to challenge the Italian Air Force was therefore a circumstance of great significance to the Abyssinians, and with this in view a considerable number of air attacks were made on enemy strongholds in the Gojjam area. These resulted in large mass desertions among the enemy's Colonial (native) troops, many of whom joined the "patriot" forces. On one occasion a Vincent had to land on an improvised landing /ground in

ground in order to make contact with Col. Sandford, the Head of "Mission 101". This landing was accomplished successfully and greatly impressed the Abyssinian Chiefs; this Vincent also conveyed a quantity of Maria Theresa dollars (the currency of Abyssinia) which were needed for the conduct of the "patriot" operations.

Warning System Against Enemy Air Attacks.

Ibid.

On the entry into the War by Italy the Royal Air Force set up a warning system against enemy air attacks in the Khartoum, Atbara, and Port Sudan areas. For Khartoum and Port Sudan an efficient Outer circle warning system was inaugurated. This embraced the whole of the Sudan Railways whose telephones and telegraphs were placed at the disposal of the air raid warning system, reports of aircraft being given first priority.

An Inner warning system was also set up for Khartoum. This consisted of a number of listening posts located on a radius of approximately 45 miles from Shendi<sup>1</sup> in the north, eastwards to Wad Medani<sup>2</sup> in the south. These listening posts were provided with Wireless Telegraphy and remained in direct contact with the A.R.P. Control room at Khartoum.

For Port Sudan listening posts were located at Suakim and Tokar<sup>3</sup>, and later a Radio Direction Finding station was set up at Port Sudan to cover the approach of hostile aircraft from the sea.

The Italian Offensive.

The odds against us in the Sudan at the opening of the enemy offensive were, as regards ground forces, nearly ten to one, and it is said that the Italians were

/confident that

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1. Shendi is situated on the Nilo approx: 97 miles north-east of Khartoum.
  2. Wad Medani is approx: 113 miles south-east of Khartoum.
  3. Tokar is approx: 85 miles south of Port Sudan.

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C.R.M.E.  
196/42/G(P)  
J.P.S. Paper No.22  
Defence of the Sudan  
and Kenya

confident that they would capture the Sudan in the early stages of the operations. This would have dealt a serious blow to our position and prestige in the Middle East, the air reinforcement route from Takoradi<sup>1</sup> to Khartoum would have been cut; the Italians would thereby have gained control of the Nile waters; and our Red Sea communications would have been liable to air attack over almost their whole length. But our forces, though few in number, were equal to the occasion and they succeeded in keeping the enemy guessing both as to their strength and dispositions. Moreover, on the very day that Italy entered the War the Royal Air Force took the initiative by bombing the enemy's aerodromes and fuel tanks at the port of Massawa when 780 tons of fuel were destroyed; this operation was carried out by nine aircraft of No.14 Squadron with 250 lb., 40 lb, and 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries from heights ranging from 3,500 to 600 feet. Over the target our aircraft were subjected to heavy fire from nine anti-aircraft batteries, but except for three machines being slightly damaged no casualties were sustained. Next day a reconnaissance flight by one aircraft obtained photographs which showed from the damage that the operation had been successful.

"The Abyssinian Campaigns"  
(H.M.S.O., 1942)  
and Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch Aug. '39  
to Nov. '40.  
(A.H.B. II J1/9)

A few days later our ground forces made raids across the border in the Kassala area, and by maintaining a succession of offensive patrols they held off the enemy for some weeks.

On 4 July the enemy attacked Kassala (situated on the Railway which links El Obeid and Port Sudan) and on 6 July they attacked Gallabat (situated on the /frontier

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1 See page 60 infra.

frontier some 175 miles south of Kassala and directly opposite the Italian post of Metemma). These attacks were made by greatly superior forces and although our troops fought delaying actions they were forced to evacuate both Kassala and Gallabat; nevertheless the enemy failed to follow up the advantages which he had gained.

#### Operations of the R.A.F.

In the meantime the Royal Air Force maintained bombing attacks on Italian ports and troop centres including Asmara (the capital of Eritrea), Tessenei, Gura, and again Massawa, but owing to very bad weather conditions several intended raids had to be cancelled. In the first weeks of July Wellesleys of No.37 Squadron attacked the enemy's camp at ~~Motomma~~ scoring several hits with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries, and also carried out a successful low level bombing raid on the aerodrome at Gondar<sup>1</sup> where hits were registered on the hangars and dispersed aircraft. No.14 Squadron attacked Zula<sup>2</sup> aerodrome obtaining direct hits on aircraft buildings and petrol dumps with 250 lb. bombs, 40 lb. anti-personnel bombs and incendiaries from 600 to 500 feet, and in the following week the same Squadron bombed successfully the aerodrome at Massawa for the loss of one of our aircraft. On 19 July five Wellesleys of No.14 Squadron bombed three S.8ls and buildings at Agordat aerodrome with 250 lb, 40 lb and 20 lb bombs and incendiaries from heights ranging from 2,500 to 1,000 feet causing considerable damage to the buildings and probably to the S.8ls (the total weight of bombs dropped was 3,240 lbs.). On the same day five Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron attacked dispersed aircraft

/at Barentu

- 
1. Situated approx. 25 miles north of Lake Tana (Abyssinia).
  2. Situated approx. 30 miles south of Massawa.

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Barentu<sup>1</sup> with the same types of bombs from 3,000 feet obtaining several near misses. On 20 July five Wellesleys of No.14 Squadron carried out a successful low level bombing attack on Asmara aerodrome with 250 and 20 lbs. from 3,000 feet in the face of heavy ground machine-gun fire, and scored many hits on hangars and workshops<sup>2</sup>. On 30 July Nos.14, 47 and 223 Squadrons, "K" Flight, and No.430 (Army Co-operation) Flight attacked Kassala: 500 lb. and smaller bombs and incendiaries were dropped on the fort, the railway station, and the perimeter defences, in the face of very slight opposition. This attack was - for those days and in that country - a very heavy one, in which some twenty-five tons of bombs were dropped. On the following day (31 July) No.14 Squadron and No.430 Flight repeated the attack. On 1 August No.45 Squadron bombed fuel storage tanks at Acico scoring hits with H.E. and incendiary bombs, and next day the same Squadron repeated the raid on the fuel tanks causing a series of explosions which were seen for forty miles on the return journey.

On 17 August six Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron attacked the fort at Kassala scoring hits with eight (out of twelve dropped) 500 lb. bombs from 3,000 feet which caused complete demolition of half the fort (this was confirmed by photographs).

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of Air  
Ops. in the Sudan"  
etc.  
(A.H.B. II J7/2)

Space does not permit the recording of the almost ceaseless reconnaissances and bombing attacks made by the R.A.F. during this opening phase of the campaign<sup>3</sup>,  
/but, as

1. Agordat and Barentu are in Eritrea.
2. This attack was made in close formation, 3 aircraft in V formation and 2 in line astern; the approach being made from out of the sun in a gradual dive to 900 feet. The total weight of bombs dropped was 3,920 lbs.
3. This is also true with regard to operations of the R.A.F. and the South African A.F. throughout the East African campaigns: it is not possible within the confines of this monograph to give more than an outline of their work with mentions of some of the more important actions in which they participated.

but, as already mentioned, in addition to these activities the R.A.F. defended successfully our shipping in the Red Sea and provided air escorts as circumstances required. The port of Massawa was attacked on many occasions<sup>1</sup> and on 4 August No.45 Squadron bombed two enemy Submarines in Massawa harbour, and on 6 August this Squadron repeated the raid scoring a direct hit on a Destroyer. On 9 August, **five** Wellesleys of No.14 Squadron bombed Massawa from 14,000 feet scoring hits on buildings with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries (over 2 tons of bombs being dropped), and on 15 August No.14 Squadron raided the enemy Naval and Air Force quarters on Abdel Kaden Peninsular at Massawa when direct hits with 500 lb and 250 lb bombs from 16,000 feet<sup>2</sup> in the target area were observed, and on 9 September two aircraft of Nos.47 and 223 Squadrons repeated this attack. In addition to its bombing activities and its numerous convoy escorts in the Red Sea No.14 Squadron also carried out many anti-submarine patrols. On 21 October three Blenheims of No.45 Squadron bombed an enemy Destroyer off Massawa scoring direct hits; the ship was reported later to have been scuttled.

Nevertheless the enemy Air Force with its superiority in numbers inflicted many casualties on our units, and on 9 August, during a raid on Gura by No.47 Squadron, several of our aircraft were badly damaged by five enemy C.R.42s and three C.R.32s. This reduced No.47 Squadron to only three serviceable aircraft.

/Meanwhile

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1. An account of the method of these bombing attacks on Massawa is contained in Appendix "C" (taken from A.C. Slatter's "Brief Summary of Air Ops. in the Sudan" etc.). (A.H.B. J2/7)
  2. This height of 16,000 feet (and of 14,000 feet in the attack on 9 August) appear to be exceptional.

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A.C. Slatter's "Brief  
Summary of Air Ops.  
in the Sudan" etc.  
and No.203 Group  
Form 540 Entry of  
8 Aug. '40.

Meanwhile the enemy had given indications of bombing the Khartoum area, and on 8 August a detachment of nine Gladiators of No.1 Squadron South African Air Force was sent from Abu Sueier to Khartoum as an added defence for that city. Of these, two aircraft were detached to defend Atbara<sup>1</sup>.

During the month of August the P.A.F. made numerous raids including attacks on Massawa, Barentu, Kassala and Agordat; these attacks assisted considerably in holding back the enemy's troops from further incursions into the Sudan, and early in September the arrival of the 5th Indian Division altered the general situation very materially.

On 3 September No.47 Squadron bombed the Fellata Quarter of Kassala (believed to be occupied by enemy troops) scoring hits on the target, and then made a reconnaissance on both sides of the railway, and next day No.223 Squadron bombed a petrol dump and bomb store in Kassala (scoring hits) and dropped a number of propaganda leaflets. On 9 September two Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron bombed Asmara aerodrome at night with 250 lb. bombs and 25 lb. incendiaries from 3,000 feet, the bombs dropping among the buildings. On 13 September, Nos.14, 45, 47 and 223 Squadrons bombed Gura<sup>2</sup> aerodrome with 500 lb. and 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries from heights of 3,000 to 2,000 feet; bombs fell among the buildings and numerous fires were started. On 18 September three Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron bombed the Sudanese Quarter of Kassala obtaining hits in the target area, and three

Wellesleys

1. As already stated on page 3 supra a Detachment of No.1 Sqdn. S.A.A.F. had been sent to Kenya in June. The remainder of this Sqdn. went to Abu Sueier from which place the nine Gladiators were sent to Khartoum, two of which were stationed at Atbara. On 30 September a Detachment of eight of these aircraft was sent to Azaza (near Gedaref). S.A.A.F. Records. No.1 Sqdn. (Short History of).
2. Situated approx. 70 miles south of Massawa.



Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron repeated the attack: many enemy casualties resulted from these raids. On the night of 22/23 September six Wellesleys of Nos.14, 47 and 223 Squadrons bombed targets at Mai Edaga<sup>1</sup>, Gura and Zula from 3,000 feet with 500 lb., 250 lb., 40 lb., and 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries. It was later reliably reported that 3,500 tons of ammunition were destroyed, and a subsequent photographic reconnaissance showed that an ammunition dump south of Mai Edaga was completely obliterated. On 23 September three Wellesleys of No.45 Squadron dropped bombs on the tarmac in front of the Caproni works at Mai Edaga and also attacked dispersed aircraft at Gura aerodrome setting two enemy fighters on fire.

During the months of September and October several raids and photographic reconnaissances were carried out on enemy troop concentrations and aerodromes, and continual bombing attacks were attempted on Gura and the numerous fuel and ammunition dumps in this area. Presumably for this reason the enemy based their main fighter defence there, and the R.A.F. made several attempts to draw off the enemy's fighter strength by attacking dispersed targets in the area north of the Agordat - Massawa railway while continuing as far as possible to carry out bombing raids on Gura. These raids were frequently made at night in order to avoid the enemy's fighter opposition. They included successful attacks by Blenheims of No.45 Squadron on the fort and a suspected fuel dump at Mai Edaga, the railway yards at Agordat, and the aerodrome at Asmara, and by Wellesleys of Nos.14 and 223 Squadrons on the aerodromes at Gura and Asmara.

Meanwhile

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1. Mai Edaga, where the Caproni aircraft works were situated, is near Gura.

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Meanwhile on 13 October a detachment of eight Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron was moved to Gedaref to bomb troop and munition concentrations in the Metemma - Lake Tana area (Abyssinia) but on 16 October, before these operations had been begun, the Gedaref aerodrome was attacked by one S.79 and seven fighters (C.R.32s and 42s) while the Wellesleys (and two Vincents which had arrived the previous day) were on the ground. The attack came as a complete surprise and before our pilots had time to reach their aircraft the S.79 dropped a stick of bombs while the fighters made low flying machine-gun "strafes" with incendiary ammunition. In a few minutes all our aircraft were in flames and were all destroyed; none of the personnel were injured.

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the R.A.F. Sudan Command 11 June - 31 October 1940.

A.C. Slatter's "Brief Summary of Air Ops. in the Sudan etc." (A.H.B.II J7/2).

During the period of Phase I the Royal Air Force of the Sudan Command carried out 627 medium and 2 miscellaneous bomber sorties (total 629), in addition to numerous reconnaissances and patrols and convoy escorts to shipping. Although in a numerical inferiority in aircraft the R.A.F. Squadrons maintained determined and continued offensive operations which inflicted serious damage in relation to the effort involved on the Italians' aerodromes, aircraft, railway and fuel dumps and on their chief Eritrean seaport of Massawa. As an indication of the success of the bombing sorties it may be mentioned that the Commanding Officers of Nos.14 and 223 Squadrons (Wellesley Bombers) were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in recognition of their services.

No.254 Wing Form 540  
Entry of Aug. '40.

/Aircraft Losses

Aircraft Losses Sudan Command 11 June - 31 October 1940.

The losses to our aircraft in the Sudan during the period of Phase I were:-

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan" etc.  
(A.H.B. II J7/2)

Eighteen Bombers in the air  
Ten Bombers on the ground, and  
Five Bombers from other causes -  
totalling thirty-three aircraft in all.

The losses to the enemy in the Sudan during the same period were as follows:-

Ibid

(a) Confirmed

Eleven Bombers and eight Fighters in the air  
Thirteen Bombers and three Fighters on the ground -  
totalling thirty-five aircraft in all.

(c) Probable

Three Bombers and seven Fighters in the air  
Two Bombers and two Fighters on the ground -  
a total of fourteen aircraft.

## II. THE ATTACK ON KENYA

### The Strategical Implications.

C.R.M.E./98/42/G(P)  
J.P.S. Paper No.22  
Defence of the  
Sudan and Kenya.

A successful Italian offensive against Kenya would have had serious repercussions on our prestige in Southern and Central Africa. Moreover, it would have cut the Mombasa - Cairo line of communication (although this would not have threatened the maintenance of the Sudan so long as the Red Sea remained open).

An advance into Northern Kenya would have enabled the Italians to establish advanced landing grounds from which air attacks against objectives in Kenya and Uganda could be developed. Possible objectives for such air attacks included Mombasa (and its port of Kilindini), the rail link from Mombasa to Soroti on the Mombasa - Cairo line of communication, and the staging posts of Nairobi and Kisumu on the air reinforcement route from South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

### The Forces Available.

As with the Sudan the position of Kenya in June 1940 appeared extremely serious. The only troops in the Colony were two (under strength) Brigades of the King's African Rifles<sup>2</sup>, two Light Batteries, and a Field Company of East African Engineers; upon these meagre forces depended the defence of the 1,000 mile length of the Kenya - Abyssinian and Kenya - Italian Somaliland (Jubaland) frontiers.

In May (1940) the Northern Brigade of the K.A.R.<sup>3</sup> (commanded by Brigadier W. Owen, M.B.E., M.C.,) had moved its Headquarters to Garissa on the upper waters of

1. See page 62 infra.

2. The K.A.R. are native African troops with White Officers.

3. Comprising the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Bns. K.A.R.

waters of the Tana River but it had detachments of its troops as far distant as the Turkana territory (to the west of Lake Rudolf) and Malindi on the Coast.

The Southern Brigade<sup>1</sup> (under the command of Brigadier C.C. Fowkes, C.B.E.,) had its Headquarters at Wajir (situated in the Kenya "Northern Frontier District") with a Company at Moyale<sup>2</sup> and detachments and patrols at other outposts along the Kenya - Abyssinian border and at Dif on the Kenya - Jubaland boundary. Against these small forces of troops - little more than half a Division in strength - the Italians had several thousands of troops comprising crack regular Regiments, Battalions of Colonial (Native) Infantry, excellent artillery, and local levies of natives known as "Banda" who were officered by Europeans. In addition to these ground forces the Italian Air Force had a large numerical superiority while the British Air Units in Kenya consisted of No.237 (Rhodesian) (A.C.) Squadron (Hardys, Harts and Audaxes) and No.11 (one Fairey Battle and Hartbees - replaced by Fairey Battles at the end of June) and No.12 (JU.86s) Bomber Squadrons, the Detachment of No.1 (Furies and Gladiators) Fighter Squadron of the South African Air

A.C. Sowrey's Draft Force, and three Flights of the Kenya Auxiliary Units<sup>3</sup>.  
Dispatch (Feb. -

May '41). File Of these the Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron proved to  
M.151/1.&"Report on be most efficient bombers when fighter escort was avail-  
Ops in East Africa" from 10 Feb to 5  
April '41 able, but they were handicapped by lack of air and oil  
(A.H.B. II J7/1) cleaners and developed engine trouble on this account.

/Their

- 
1. Comprising the 1st, 5th and 6th Bns. K.A.R.
  2. The British post at Moyale - on the Abyssinian border - was only a mile from an Italian post, referred to hereafter as "Italian Moyale".
  3. The K.A.A.U. was disbanded on 11 Nov. '40 but its No.1 (Communication) Flight with an Air Defence Unit of Tanganyika was formed into a Communication Squadron with its H.Q. at Nairobi and a detachment at Dar-es-Salaam (Air H.Q. East Africa Form 540, Entry of 1 Nov. '40).

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Their normal bomb load was four containers each of which held twelve 20 lb. bombs, but this could be raised to a load of four 250 lb. and four 20 lb. bombs. (If required the containers could carry 4 lb. incendiaries instead of the 20 lb. bombs). The JU.86s of No.12 Squadron were converted passenger transports which had been in use on the South African Civil Air Routes. They were German aircraft but the Germans had already ceased to use them as bombers. Their chief disadvantages were short range (600 miles) and the impossibility of varying their bomb load to meet requirements, the only feasible load which they could carry being four 250 lb. and eight 20 lb. bombs.

The provision for recognition of the JU.86s seems to have been inadequate, and on one occasion might well have led to a catastrophe when fighter aircraft of the S.A.A.F. at Archer's Post fired in error on two JU.86s in which Field-Marshal Smuts (then on a visit to the South African Forces in Kenya) and his staff were travelling<sup>1</sup>.

Before the end of June the South African Air Force was augmented by the arrival of No.40 (Army Co-operation) Squadron which was equipped with the Hartbee biplanes (Medium Bombers) of No.11 Squadron, and No.1 (Survey) Flight (later known as No.60 (Survey) Squadron) equipped with Ansons. All the Units enumerated above were placed under the orders of the Royal Air Force Headquarters at Nairobi.

S.A.A.F. Records  
War Diary,  
No.1(S) Flt,  
Entry of 24 June  
'40.

A.C.Sowrey's "Report  
on Air Ops." I.E.A.  
10 Feb. to 5 Apl.'41  
(A.H.B. II J7/1)

On their arrival the Squadrons of the South African Air Force suffered from a major disability, namely the lack of tactical and crew training of

/their personnel

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- 1 This incident is mentioned in the S.A.A.F. War Diary - Narrative of Northern Ops - and "It's a Long Way to Addis" by Carel Birkby - with Foreword by F.M. Smuts. (London: Frederick Muller Ltd. 1942). Mr. Birkby was an official War Correspondent in the Campaign.

their personnel<sup>1</sup>. This, however, did not deter them from commencing their operations when war broke out with Italy, and the assiduous attention which was given to training combined with the experience gained by their personnel in the somewhat spasmodic operations in which they were engaged during the period of Phase I enabled them to attain a high standard of bombing and air firing.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

The South African Air Force being a part of the Union Defence Force an arrangement was concluded on behalf of the Air Ministry by Air Chief Marshal Sir R. Brooke-Popham, G.C.V.O., K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C., with Field Marshal The Rt. Hon. J.C. Smuts, whereby it was agreed that the operational control of the S.A.A.F. should come under the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, Sir A. Longmore, who accordingly nominated Group Captain W. Sowrey, A.F.C., D.F.C., as O.C., Royal Air Force, East Africa, with Colonel H. Daniel, M.C., A.F.C., of the S.A.A.F. as his Senior Staff Officer. On the promotion on 1 October of Colonel Daniel to Brigadier, the appointment of O.C., R.A.F. East Africa was raised to that of A.O.C., Group Captain Sowrey remaining in command with the rank of Air Commodore.

Meanwhile until such time as new Battalions of the King's African Rifles could be trained and reinforcements from South Africa and West Africa could arrive, the fate of the Colony rested on the two Brigades of the K.A.R. and the units of the South African Air Force<sup>2</sup>.

Wajir, the Headquarters of the Southern Brigade of the K.A.R. (and also of "C" Flight of No. 237 (Rhodesian) Squadron) has been described as "The Clapham Junction of the Desert"<sup>3</sup>, for its wells are the meeting place of the

1. As regards pilots: many of these had been drawn from the Civil Air Services and had received some (flying) training in the S.A.A.F. Flying Schools. There was little training for observers and gunners in the Union. (Communicated by Capt. V.J. Finn, S.A.A.F. - attached to the S.A.L.O. London).
2. Including No. 237 (Rhodesian) Sqdn.
3. See "Its a Long Way to Addis".

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main caravan routes from Kenya, Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland. Here the Gallas, Borans, Somalis and nomads from the southern borders of Abyssinia have foregathered from time immemorial, for all must visit the wells in this waterless country. For this reason Wajir had long been an outpost of the Kenya Administration where a check could be kept on nomad Somali raiders and smugglers from the Italian frontiers of Jubaland.

The strategic importance of Wajir from a military aspect can be seen by a glance at the map: from Wajir three roads lead to the Italian frontiers, namely, a road to the south-east which forks at El-Tuli, one branch leading to Dif on the Jubaland border and thence to Afmadu and the port of Kismayu; a road to the north-east which leads to El Wak; and a road to the north-west which passes through Buna, Korondil, and Dobel to Moyale and Mega and thence ultimately to Addis Ababa. Each of these three roads could be utilized by an invading force from Abyssinia or Jubaland to capture Wajir - which is itself the gateway to Kenya, for from Wajir the roads to Archer's Post via Kittermaster's Camp, and Isolo via Garba Tula lead through Nanyuki and Nyeri to Nairobi and the settled highlands of the Colony.

#### Opening of Hostilities.

The first operation of the war in Kenya occurred on 11 June when the South African Air Force took the initiative by bombing Italian Moyale with four J.U.86s of No.12 Squadron. At dawn on 13 June while the JU.86s were on their way to Moyale to repeat their attack the enemy bombed Wajir with three C.A.133s causing some casualties among the K.A.R., severely damaging two aircraft of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron, and setting

/on fire



on fire a dump of 5,000 gallons of aviation fuel.

On 16 June simultaneous bombing and strafing operations were carried out at Yavello, Mega and Neghelli<sup>1</sup> (Abyssinia). The attack on Yavello was made by two JU.86s of No.12 Squadron which surprised three C.R.32 fighters and ten C.A.133 bombers on the aerodrome. These aircraft were bombed with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries and machine-gunned; probably at least eight of the C.A.133s were rendered unserviceable and the C.R.32s were damaged. The attack on Mega was made by three Hartbees of No.11 Squadron which bombed a large enemy camp with 120 lb. bombs and incendiaries from a height of fifty feet demolishing the barracks and damaging the Wireless Telegraph station: considerable A.A. fire was encountered and our aircraft were all hit but not damaged seriously. The attack on Neghelli was made by two Ju.86s from a low altitude: four direct hits with 250 lb. bombs were registered on the office and a hangar on the aerodrome, and six grounded C.S.133s were bombed and machine-gunned, resulting in one being burnt out, one left in flames and one probably being burnt out.

During the first week of warfare the operations had been solely of an aerial nature, but on 17 June a patrol of the King's African Rifles made a surprise attack on El Wak<sup>2</sup> and burned the barracks; in this operation they were assisted by an Audax of No.237 Squadron which, however, was badly damaged by machine-gun fire and forced to land. An attempt to tow it from the scene was found to be impracticable and it was then set on fire by its crew and destroyed.

/On 26 June

1. Yavello is situated approx. 115 miles north-by-west of Moyale; Mega is approx. 60 miles north-west of Moyale, and Neghelli is approx. 90 miles east-by-north of Yavello.
2. Situated on the Kenya-Jubaland border (at the point where the boundary turns in a north-easterly direction).

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On 26 June two JU.86s made a photographic reconnaissance of the enemy aerodromes at Afmadu, Jelib and Jumbo<sup>1</sup>.

For the remainder of this month numerous sorties were carried out by the three Flights of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron<sup>2</sup> operating in the Northern Frontier and Coastal areas of Kenya.

Towards the end of June Brigadier Fowkes moved his Brigade towards the Abyssinian border and on 1 July he established his Headquarters at Buna on the Wajir-Moyale road. At dawn on the same day an enemy Brigade supported by artillery attacked British Moyale which was garrisoned by one Company of the 1st K.A.R. The attack was opened by a heavy artillery bombardment followed by an Infantry assault. Aircraft of No.237 Squadron made several sorties on the enemy troops obtaining hits with a salvo of four 20 lb. bombs on an enemy gun position and with a similar salvo on the enemy's "Banda" camp, and scoring hits on several machine-gun posts and houses in Moyale with 20 lb. bombs. The aircraft also attacked enemy positions with machine-gun fire. On the next day (2 July) three Hartbees bombed the enemy gun positions; four guns were believed to have been destroyed and a large explosion was presumed to have been an ammunition dump. Meanwhile a Hart aircraft of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron acted as an observer for a British Mountain Battery which had arrived earlier in the day and was shelling the enemy's camp. In the meantime a relief column of the K.A.R. had advanced from Buna but was unable to make contact with the garrison. During the next two days aircraft of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron

/made several

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1. All situated in the Kismayu area of the Jubaland Province of Italian Somaliland.

2. This Sqdn. was divided into "A", "B" and "C" Flights.

made several sorties and offensive reconnaissances on enemy troops attacking Moyale but on the night of 14-15 July the garrison was forced to evacuate the post on the failure of their water supply.

At the evacuation of Moyale our troops were unable to destroy their fuel and ammunition dumps, and to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy the Military authorities asked Air Headquarters Nairobi to destroy them. Accordingly on 15 July three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron S.A.A.F. raided Moyale and destroyed the dumps.

Meanwhile the general policy of the South African Air Force in Kenya included attacks on enemy aerodromes, meahanised transport concentrations and military buildings of all kinds (including Wireless Telegraph stations), and special reconnaissances which were generally of an offensive character. A scheme of alternative targets was drawn up in the following order of priority:-

- (a) Petrol, oil and bomb dumps.
- (b) Aircraft.
- (c) M/T concentrations.
- (d) Wireless Telegraph stations.
- (e) Hangars and other buildings.
- (f) Troop concentrations.
- (g) Barracks.

Attacks on Wireless Telegraph stations were of considerable importance, for in the vast areas of Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia many enemy strongholds and aerodromes were not linked to the existing land telegraph lines and were therefore obliged to rely on Wireless Telegraphy for communication with other centres.

In addition to these operations weekly reconnaissance flights were made over shipping in the Kismayu and Birikau (Port Durnford) roadsteads, and coastal patrols and channel sweeps were carried out at Mombasa.

/Observer

Air H.Q. East  
Africa. Entry  
of 6 Aug. '41.  
Appdx. B.

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## Observer Screen in Kenya.

H.Q. R.A.F., M.E.  
File DO/AML/14  
Part II (Aug. '40-  
May '41.)

Prior to June 1940 an organisation was established in Kenya to provide an Observer Screen against hostile air attacks. It consisted of 30 observer posts which provided an inner and outer screen to cover the most likely directions of approach to the towns of Kisumu, Nairobi, Nakuru, and the port of Mombasa. These observer posts were served by volunteers, native tribal police and other civilian personnel.

The organisation was controlled by the Civil administration, but the Civil authorities and the Army were anxious that the Royal Air Force should take over control. Accordingly the Royal Air Force took over the Nairobi centre on 19 June (1940) and the Mombasa reporting centre on 27 July (1940).

For various reasons the organisation was, however, found to be inadequate, and Air Headquarters, East Africa (with the concurrence of Air Headquarters, Middle East) decided that inner and outer observation lines equipped with W/T and supplemented by some 30 existing landline posts were necessary. It was also recommended that a number of British and African personnel should be recruited into the Royal Air Force to replace the volunteer observers. These recommendations were approved by the Air Ministry and the establishment of the Kenya Wireless Intelligence Unit was sanctioned on 31 October (1940).

File. S.5894.

Ibid.

Meanwhile the South African Air Force had inaugurated a system of Radio Direction Finding stations, and in June 1941, in view of the then changed military situation, the Kenya Wireless Intelligence Unit was disbanded.

/Operations of the

Operations of the S.A.A.F.

In pursuance of the general policy of the S.A.A.F. (as abovementioned<sup>1</sup>) three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron made a reconnaissance of the aerodrome at Lugh Ferrandi<sup>2</sup> on 3 July and bombed an enemy aircraft (the only one on the aerodrome), troops concentrations and stores, and on 7 and 8 July two JU.86s of the same squadron made offensive reconnaissance over Afmadu, Gobwen and Jelib<sup>3</sup> and the Wajir - El Wak - Derkali roads. On 18 July four JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed aircraft, M/T, and ammunition dumps at Neghelli aerodrome with 250 lb., 20 lb. and incendiary bombs when one enemy aircraft was destroyed and two more were probably damaged, and on 27 July two JU.86s of the same Squadron made photographic reconnaissance of the landing grounds at Afmadu, Gobwen and Jelib to ascertain if any of these landing grounds were in use or were being prepared for use in the near future. During this period the enemy Air Force showed some activity, two S.79s bombing and machine-gunning the K.A.R. encampment of Buna on 9 July, and three CA.113s bombing Wajir on 11 July. In neither of these raids were any casualties sustained. During the raid on 11 July two Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron intercepted and damaged one CA.133 which crashed near Derkali: another of the CA.133s was shot down by the K.A.R. at Buna. On 16 and 17 July Wajir was again attacked by two S.79s and three S.79s respectively but no casualties occurred. Three other S.79s and two CA.133s attacked Wajir on 17 July when one Audax of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron was destroyed. On 30 July two CA.133s bombed Wajir but no damage or casualties ensued, and on 29, 30 and 31 July No.40 (A.C.)

/Squadron

Air H.Q. Nairobi  
Entries of 9 and  
11 July '40.

Ibid

Entries of 16 and  
17 July '40.

1. On page 30 supra.

2. Situated on the Juba River approx. 20 miles south of the Abyssinian border.

3. These three places are situated in the lower Juba River area.

# SECRET

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S.A.A.F. Records  
No.1 Sqdn.  
(Short History of)

Squadron bombed and machine-gunned enemy troop concentrations at Funnaryatta and Dobel<sup>1</sup> destroying many transport camels and mules. Meanwhile on 27 July the Detachment of No.1 Squadron had been augmented by nine Gladiators from Abu Sueier.

On 1 August four JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed the aerodrome at Yavello with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries when three enemy aircraft and a hangar were damaged, and on the same day reconnaissances were made by single aircraft of Nos.40 (A.C.) and 237 (Rhodesian) Squadrons over Wajir, Buna and Garrissa, and an anti-submarine patrol was carried out by one JU.36 of No.12 Squadron off Dar-es-Salaam. On 8 August four JU.86s attacked Neghelli aerodrome destroying two Caproni aircraft and damaging two others, and setting five lorries on fire; direct hits were scored on buildings and a machine-gun post was destroyed; 16 x 250 lb., 15 x 20 lb. and 16 incendiary bombs were dropped. On 19 August the largest offensive yet undertaken was carried out when four simultaneous offensive reconnaissances were made on all enemy aerodromes within range of the Kenya border, as follows:-

- (a) Three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron attacked Afmadu, Jelib, Gobwen and Margherita. One 250 lb. bomb scored a hit on store houses at Afmadu and three 250 lb. bombs were dropped on an enemy camp at Jelib.
- (b) Three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron attacked Yavello, Neghelli and Mega, by low level bombing from fifty feet and 2,000 feet at Yavello and Neghelli and by dive-bombing from

/3,000 to

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(1) Situated on the Moyale-Wajir road, approx. 20 and 30 miles respectively south-east of Moyale.

3,000 to 500 feet at Mega. The total weight of bombs dropped in these attacks was 2,200 lbs. One Caproni aircraft was damaged at Yavello and slight damage was caused to buildings at Neghelli.

(c) Three Fairey Battles of the same Squadron attacked Lugh Ferrandi, Dolo, Isha Baidoa, and Wejit<sup>1</sup>.

(d) Seven Fairey Battles of the same Squadron attacked Merka<sup>2</sup> damaging one Caproni aircraft and Administrative buildings, and dive-bombed (from 1,000 feet) the aerodrome at Mogadishu: direct hits were scored on a hangar and the jetty. All our aircraft returned safely from these operations<sup>3</sup>.

On 21 August six Fairey Battles of No. 11 Squadron attacked the aerodrome at Mogadishu in two waves of three aircraft; 24 x 250 lb. bombs and 17 incendiaries were dropped in dive-bombing attacks from 4,000 feet to 1,000 feet and direct hits were registered on the Wireless Telegraph station, Motor transport, Administrative buildings, hangars and barracks, and three CA.133 aircraft on the ground were destroyed, and six others were damaged; all our aircraft returned safely. This operation was repeated on 28 August by ten Fairey Battles of the same Squadron (in waves of three aircraft - the extra aircraft being for photography only) by dive-bombing from 3,000 to 1,000 feet, 36 x 250 lb. bombs and 36 incendiaries being dropped. Direct hits were made on a large M/T concentration and it was estimated that eight hundred vehicles were destroyed; all our aircraft returned. In a signal letter to the

Chief of the General Staff, South African Forces, the Chief of the Air Staff (Air Ministry, London) stated

"Yesterday's

S.A.A.F. War  
Diary: Narrative  
of Northern Ops.  
Entry of 28 Aug.  
1940.

1. These three places are in the Lugh Ferrandi area.

2. Situated on the coast.

3. In all these four attacks our aircraft used 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries.

# SECRET

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"Yesterday's 'strafe' of Mogadishu by No.11 Bomber Squadron was outstanding".

During this month many coastal, escort and photographic patrols were carried out by aircraft of Nos.40, 237 (Rhodesian), 11 and 12 Squadrons..

The enemy's air activities were less in evidence; on 11 August three Savoias bombed Korondil<sup>1</sup> but inflicted no damage or casualties, and on 14 August three Capronis attacked the aerodrome at Wajir but were intercepted by three of our Gladiators and jettisoned their bombs before reaching their target. On 23 August an unidentified aircraft, believed to have been a Caproni, bombed the Garrissa area but no damage or casualties resulted.

## Arrival of Army Reinforcements.

Carel Birkby's  
"Its a Long Way  
to Addis"  
(Muller, 1942).

Meanwhile two Brigades of the Royal West African Frontier Force<sup>2</sup> and the 1st South African Brigade<sup>3</sup> had arrived in Kenya in July. The two Brigades of the R.W.A.F.F. were sent to support the King's African Rifles in the Northern Frontier District, one<sup>4</sup> at Buna and thence to Wajir, and the other<sup>5</sup> on the Tana River. The 1st South African Brigade was stationed for some weeks at Gilgil<sup>6</sup> where it completed its training before

/moving

1. Situated between Buna and Dobel.
2. i.e. 23rd Nigerian Bgde. (Brig. Smallwood, M.C.) comprising 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns. Nigerian Regt., and 24th Gold Coast Bgde. (Brig. Richards) comprising 1st, 2nd and 3rd Bns. Gold Coast Regt.
3. Commanded by the late Brig. Pienaar and comprising the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Rifles, 1st Transvaal Scottish and the Royal Natal Caribineers.
4. i.e. 24th Gold Coast Bgde.
5. i.e. 23rd Nigerian Bgde.
6. Situated on the Kenya Railway approx. 80 miles north-west of Nairobi.



moving into the Turkana and Habasswain-Wajir areas in September. In October the 2nd and 5th South African Brigades arrived and joined the training depot at Gilgil<sup>1</sup>. These, with the 1st South African Brigade, completed the 1st South African Division, commanded by Major-General G. Brink, D.S.O. It was, however, decided to recast the Brigades so as to include the King's African Rifles, and two new Divisions were formed - the 11th and 12th (African) - commanded by Major-General H.E. de R. Wetherall, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C. and Major-General Godwin-Austen respectively<sup>2</sup>.

#### Further Operations of the S.A.A.F.

In September the South African Air Force continued its offensive operations on enemy aerodromes and military positions. On 3 September three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron dive-bombed the aerodrome at Yavello with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries from 3,000 to 1,500 ft. (a total of 2,360 lbs. of bombs being dropped) and destroyed three Caproni aircraft: one of the JUs. was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and burnt out. Next day (4 September) four Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron reconnoitred the aerodromes at Afmau, Jelib and Gobwen but no enemy aircraft were seen. On the same day three Fairey Battles of the same squadron (with one for photography) bombed enemy aircraft at Isha Baidoa<sup>3</sup>

/dropping

1. 2nd S.A. Bgde. (Brig. Buchanan, M.C.) comprised 1st and 2nd Field Force Bns. and Natal Mounted Rifles. 5th S.A. Bgde. (Brig. Armstrong) comprised 1st South African Irish, 3rd Transvaal Scottish and 2nd Botha Regt.
2. The Brigades were recast thus:-
  - 1st S.A. Division (Maj.Gen. Brink)
    - 2nd S.A. Bgde. (Brig. Buchanan)
    - 5th S.A. Bgde. (Brig. Armstrong)
    - 25th E.A. Bgde. (Brig. Owen - formerly Northern Bgde, K.A.R.)
  - 11th (A) Division (Maj.Gen. Wetherall)
    - 21st E.A. Bgde. (Brig. A. McD. Ritchie, D.S.O. - 2 Bns. K.A.R. and Northern Rhodesian Regt.)
    - 23rd Nigerian Bgde. (Brig. Smallwood)
  - 12th (A) Division (Maj.Gen. Godwin-Austen)
    - 1st S.A. Bgde. (Brig. Pioneer)
    - 24th Gold Coast Bgde. (Brig. Richards)
    - 22nd E.A. Bgde. (Brig. Fowkes - formerly Southern Bgde. K.A.R.)
3. Situated approx. 100 miles south-east of Lugh Ferrandi.

# SECRET

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dropping 8 x 250 lb bombs and 9 incendiaries which damaged four Caproni aircraft two of which were probably destroyed; they also attacked the Wireless Telegraph station and barracks at Bardera<sup>1</sup> with 4 x 250 lb. bombs and 3 incendiaries but the effect was not observed. On 7 September three Fairey Battles again attacked Mogadishu<sup>2</sup> by dive-bombing from 10,000 to 1,000 ft. with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries, destroying one and damaging four other Caproni aircraft and scoring three direct hits on the store and Administrative buildings on the edge of the aerodrome. Three R.O.37s engaged one of the Battles over the target and one of the R.O.37s was shot down; all our aircraft returned. On 9 September six Fairey Battles bombed enemy aircraft at Shashamana<sup>3</sup> aerodrome on which 14 enemy aircraft were seen. The method of attack was dive and low level bombing from 7,000 to 2,000 feet, 24 x 250 lb. and 24 incendiary bombs being dropped. One Savoia was destroyed and four others severely damaged: one of the Battles failed to return.

On 12 September three Fairey Battles repeated the attack on Shashamana with low level and dive attacks, scoring a direct hit on the Headquarters building with a salvo of 250 lb. bombs and destroying one Savoia aircraft and seriously damaging another. During this operation four C.R.32s engaged the Battles, one of which crashed in flames and another was reported missing. On the same day four JU.86s of

/"A" Flight

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1. On the Juba River.

2. This was the 10th raid in 20 days on Mogadishu by No. 11 Squadron.

3. South of Lake Shala (Abyssinia)

"A" Flight No.12 Squadron attacked the aerodrome at Jimma<sup>1</sup> registering direct hits on a hangar and other buildings with 250 lb. bombs and destroying one Caproni aircraft and damaging at least one other; (a total weight of 5,400 lbs. of bombs was dropped). While these operations were in progress a JU.86 of "B" Flight, No.12 Squadron made three coastal patrols and two Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made two sorties in support of our ground troops who were engaged in an offensive patrol at Wel Garas on the Jubaland border south of El Wak.

As a result of a photographic reconnaissance of Birikau (Port Durnford) by one JU.86 of No.12 Squadron on 14 September, when a new landing ground was discovered, three JU.86s attacked the Wireless Telegraph station, buildings and the landing ground at this place (on 16 September) by dive-bombing from 3,000 ft. to 1,500 ft. 10 x 250 lb. 8 x 20 lb. bombs and 16 x 25 lb. incendiaries being dropped. Three buildings were hit, one of which was demolished but the Wireless station was missed. On 18 September two JU.86s made a night bombing attack on the aerodrome at Yavello by dive-bombing from 2,000 to 700 ft. and dropping 8 x 250 lb. and 16 x 20 lb. bombs. One grounded Caproni aircraft was damaged but no other results were observed. On 20 September six JU.86s of No.12 Squadron and three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron made three bombing attacks on Birikau. The first wave (JU.86s) dived from 3,000 ft. to 1,500 ft. with 52 lb. bombs and 25 lb. and 4 lb incendiaries scoring hits on buildings many of which were destroyed by fire. Eight 250 lb. bombs were also dropped but the damage was not observed. The second wave (JU.86s) dive-bombed individually from 1,500 to 800 feet and scored hits on a small factory with two 250 lb. bombs, and

/started

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1. Situated approx. 175 miles south-west of Addis Ababa.

# SECRET

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started fires among buildings with incendiaries. The third wave (Fairey Battles) carried out low level and dive-bombing attacks from 4,000 to 2,000 feet with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries obtaining near misses on buildings. Slight rifle or anti-aircraft fire was encountered but no damage or casualties were sustained by our aircraft or crews.

Other bombing attacks during September included Shashamana aerodrome, military (or administrative) buildings at Maji<sup>1</sup>, a military camp some six miles north-east of this place, a landing ground south-east of Maji, and a further attack on Birikau. During this month numerous offensive patrols were carried out in the coastal areas and Frontier districts.

Offensive activities by the enemy included the bombing by three Capronis of a ground reconnoitring party at El Tuli<sup>2</sup> but no casualties were sustained; and a high level attack near Archer's Post by three S.79's which were engaged by two of No.1 Squadron's Gladiators and made off in a northerly direction. On 23 September unidentified enemy aircraft attacked our encampments in the Wajir and Bura<sup>3</sup> areas causing casualties to three African other ranks.

A.H.Q. East Africa. Form 540 Entries of 2 and 19/20 Sept. '40.

Meanwhile on 2 September instructions had been received from Air Headquarters, Middle East, that No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron was to move to the Sudan, and on 19/20 September this Squadron left Kenya. This reduction in the Kenya Squadrons was compensated by the formation on 1 October of No.2 (Fighter) Squadron S.A.A.F. equipped with Furies, Gladiators and Hurricanes

/which was

- 
1. Situated approx. 40 miles north of Lake Rudolf.
  2. Situated 25 miles south-east of Wajir.
  3. Situated on the Tana River approx. 50 miles south of Garissa.

which was formed out of the Detachment of No.1 Squadron in Kenya.

During October the S.A.A.F. again attacked the aerodromes at Neghelli, Yavello, and bombed Jimma, an enemy camp at Hobok<sup>1</sup>, the Wireless Telegraph Station at Lugh Ferrandi, and the camp, workshops and petrol dumps at Maji. The attack on Neghelli was repeated on 16 and 17 October when hits were registered on the car park and on transport near the township.

During this month the usual coastal and frontier offensive reconnaissance were made by Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron and JU.86s of "C" Flight, No.12 Squadron, and shipping escorts and anti-submarine patrols were also carried out by this Flight. Enemy aircraft made a few bombing attacks, notably on 19 October when three Capronis bombed the aerodrome and a pontoon bridge over the Tana River at Garissa, inflicting a few casualties to our troops and exploding a gelignite dump. A Fury of No.2 Squadron shot down one of the Capronis. On 24 October two Savoia aircraft bombed the aerodrome at Malindi causing slight damage to the runway: three Hurricanes and two Gladiators of No.2 Squadron took off from Mombasa to intercept the Savoias but failed to overtake them. It may be mentioned that this half-hearted enemy attack on Malindi was the only occasion when a real township in Kenya was raided, all the other targets selected by the Italians being outposts such as Wajir, Burá, Garissa etc. in the barren Northern Frontier District.

Air H.Q. East  
Africa Form 540

Entries of 23 Oct. and 3 Nov. '40. been augmented by the arrival from South Africa of No.3

/(Fighter)

1. Situated approx. 40 miles east of Lake Stefanie.

# SECRET

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(Fighter) Squadron (Hurricanes)<sup>1</sup> on 22 October and No.41 (Army Co-operation) Squadron (Hartbees) on 3 November - increased its activities on all fronts.

On 3 November one JU.86 of "C" Flight No.12 Squadron made a coastal reconnaissance of the ~~Dar-Es-Salaam-Zanzibar~~ Pemba Channel, while Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made four reconnaissances in the Northern Frontier District along the Wajir - Dif road, the Wajir - Bura area, the Garissa - Liboi area - and the Garissa - Bura - Galma Galla<sup>2</sup> - Kolbio area. Next day (4 November) three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed fuel dumps and M/T concentrations at Neghelli by shallow dive-bombing from 4,500 to 4,000 ft. with 6 x 250 lb. 6 x 20 lb. and a container of 8 x 20 lb. and 20 x 4 lb. bombs, and incendiaries. This raid was unsuccessful as only one hit was registered on a building the remaining bombs making near misses. 4,000 "bombphlets"<sup>3</sup> were also dropped; one of the Battles was lost over the target. On the same day two JU.86s of "B" Flight No.12 Squadron made a photographic reconnaissance of Kismayu Bay and observed 13 ships in the harbour, one JU.86 of "C" Flight of the same squadron made a coastal patrol, and one Hartbee of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made a reconnaissance of the Garba Tula<sup>4</sup> - Marsabit - North Hor Road as far as Dukana<sup>5</sup>. On 6 November two JU.86s of "B"

/Flight No.12

1. No.3 Sqdn. was later augmented with some Gladiators. This Sqdn. adopted a "Fighting Wasp" as their Crest with the motto "Semper Pugnans" which were painted on all their aircraft. As will be seen hereafter from the exploits of this Sqdn. their motto was singularly appropriate. (No.3 Sqdn. S.A.A.F. War Diary, Entry of 1 Dec. '40).
2. Situated approx. 100 miles south-east of Bura.
3. Pamphlets were thus designated by the S.A. airmen.
4. Situated approximately 65 miles east of Isiolo.
5. Situated near the Abyssinian border approx. 70 miles east of Lake Rudolf.

Flight No.12 Squadron attacked rivercraft on the Juba River by dive-bombing from 3,000 to 2,000 ft. with 250 lb. bombs, one of which damaged 8 craft moored near the bridge at Gobwen. On 7 November two Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed the Administrative buildings at Shasha<sup>1</sup> from 4,000 to 1,500 ft. with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs making two near misses, and dropped 10,000 pamphlets (addressed to the Italians' native levies in Amharic) in the Maji area. The following day two JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed the Administrative buildings at Gardulla from 8,500 feet, a total weight of 2,260 lbs. of bombs being dropped. They also dropped 10,000 (Amharic) pamphlets.

A few days later information was received that a number of enemy aircraft were at Yavello aerodrome and on 14 November three Fairey Battles and three JU.86s were sent to destroy them. Five Caproni aircraft were seen dispersed on the aerodrome and our aircraft dive-bombed from 5,000 to 1,000 feet and dropped 12 x 20 lb. bombs and 2 sticks of 64 lb. incendiaries on the Capronis, destroying two and damaging the other three. Our aircraft then dive-bombed the aerodrome from 8,000 to 4,000 feet dropping 4 x 250 lb. bombs in two sticks followed by five sticks of incendiaries. Hits were obtained on the camp but no fires or explosions followed. (The total weight of bombs dropped during these operations was 6,535 lbs.).

During the remainder of November successful bombing attacks were made on the Wireless Telegraph station and Administrative buildings at Bardera and a Wireless Telegraph station on the Bardera - Wel Garas road, and a photographic reconnaissance was made of Afmađu, Gobwen and Kismayu. Meanwhile shipping escorts, patrols and offensive reconnaissances were made daily by

/JU.86s and

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1. Situated near Maji (Abyssinia).

# SECRET

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JU.86s and Hartbees of Nos.12 and 40 (A.C.) Squadrons in the coastal area and the Northern Frontier District.

During November the enemy made only three air attacks, namely an attack by two Savoias on Wajir on 2 November (from which no damage or casualties resulted), a bombing attack on 19 November by two unidentified monoplanes on Balessa<sup>1</sup> resulting in one native irregular being killed, and a bombing raid by three Capronis on Bura aerodrome on 22 November. In this attack three Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron engaged the Capronis and shot down one in flames and damaged the other two which jettisoned their bombs before reaching the aerodrome. The third Caproni had bombed a camp approximately 12 miles east of Bura but the bombs fell wide of the objective.

## Summary of the S.A.A.F.'s Operations, Kenya Command from 11 June to 30 November 1940.

During the period of Phase I<sup>2</sup> the South African Air Force more than held its own against Mussolini's "Regia Aeronautica". Although in an inferiority both in numbers and in efficiency of aircraft they had continually attacked enemy aerodromes, Wireless Telegraph stations, Administrative buildings, M/T and troop concentrations and had carried out an almost daily succession of offensive and photographic reconnaissances and patrols over the whole coastal area from Dar-es-Salaam and Zanzibar in the south to Mogadishu in the north, and over the great area of the Northern Frontier District along the Kenya - Abyssinia and Kenya - Jubaland borders. Compared with these achievements the operations of the Italian Air Force were remarkable

/for the

- 
1. Situated approx. 30 miles south of Dukana.
  2. Including the month of November when (in Kenya) our forces had not yet begun their offensive.



for the paucity of their number and (in the majority of cases) the ineffectiveness of their attacks, more especially when it is remembered that many of their pilots had seen service in the recent Spanish Civil War<sup>1</sup>. There can be no doubt that the spirit of the South African Airmen was responsible for many of their successes and led them, on occasion, to take inordinate risks both with their lives and their machines. This may be illustrated by the incident of the "home-made" bomb which the pilot of an old Valentia troop-carrier and a Sapper subaltern constructed out of a 40 gallon oil-drum which they filled with 130 lbs. of gelignite and pieces of scrap-iron. The bomb was carried by the Valentia (wedged on the sill of the cabin door as it was too big to go inside) over the enemy fort at Namoroputh<sup>2</sup> where it was heaved overboard as the aircraft skimmed low over the walls. It fell in the courtyard and exploded, killing nine Italians and sixteen native troops, the Valentia returning safely to its base after this unauthorised but effective operation<sup>3</sup>.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. East Africa  
Forms 540.  
10 June -  
30 Nov. '40.

From 10 June to 30 November 1940 the South African Air Force made 221 bomber sorties, and 988 reconnaissances, including several escorts to shipping and anti-submarine sweeps.

#### Enemy Aircraft Losses.

The enemy's losses in aircraft for this period have not been recorded separately, but from the outbreak of war with Italy (10 June 1940) to 9 February 1941 the number of enemy aircraft destroyed was fifty three and sixty three damaged. (A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Air Ops. I.E.A. 19 Feb. - 5 April 1941" of 31 May 1941. A.H.B. II J7/1)

/III. THE

1. There was at least one - if not more - "accs" of the Spanish war amongst the Italian Air Force pilots (see "It's a Long Way to Addis").
2. Situated on the north-western shore of Lake Rudolf.
3. This incident is related in "It's a Long Way to Addis".

# SECRET

-45-

## III. THE ATTACK ON BRITISH SOMALILAND AND OPERATIONS OF THE R.A.F. ADEN COMMAND

### Outline of the Attack.

As has already been stated<sup>1</sup>, the Italians attacked British Somaliland on 5 August. The only Gen. Wavell's Despatch Ops. in Somaliland 1939-1940. (A.H.B. II J7/3) troops for the defence of the Protectorate were two battalions of the King's African Rifles, the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Punjab Regt., the 1st East African Light Battery, and the Camel Corps. These were, however, reinforced from Aden by the 3/15 Punjab Regt. and two Anti-Aircraft guns, and on 7 August the 2nd Battalion of the Black Watch also arrived from Aden. A large number of native tribesmen - Illallos - were patrolling in the forward areas, under the control of District Commissioners, to provide information of enemy movement. Brigadier A.R. Chater D.S.O., O.B.E., commanded our forces.

The main body of the troops was posted at the Tug Argan Gap in the belt of hills on the road between Hargeisa and Berbera, and a small force at the Sheik Pass on the road from Buramo to Berbera: the Bihindi Gap on the east of Berbera was also held. H.M.S. Ceres patrolling the coast assisted by shelling the enemy and H.M.A.S. Hobart provided a 3 pr. naval gun which was sent up to the Tug Argan Gap.

The enemy attacked the Tug Argan position on 11 August in strength and on the night of 12/13 August the 2nd K.A.R., who were holding the hills on the left flank of the position, were driven back. Meanwhile on the evening of 11 August, Major-General A.R. Godwin-Austen had arrived from Palestine and had taken over the command from Brigadier Chater. On the night of 13/14 August a convoy consisting of one Company 2nd

/Black Watch

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Black Watch with ammunition and water for one of the forward defended localities was ambushed, and this incident showed General Godwin-Austen the danger of the line of retreat to Berbera being cut by enemy infiltration. By 15 August many of our defences had been destroyed by the overwhelming forces of the enemy, and the General decided that a retreat on Berbera and evacuation therefrom was the only course to save his forces from a dangerous defeat and possible annihilation. He telegraphed accordingly to G.H.Q. Middle East giving the alternatives of immediate evacuation or continuation of the action with probable loss of a very large proportion of his troops. Lieutenant-General Sir H.M. Wilson, K.C.B., D.S.O., (who was in temporary command of Middle East during General Wavell's absence in England) decided in favour of evacuation. This was carried out successfully during the next three days; and by the morning of 18 August the majority of the troops had been embarked in transports assisted by H.M.A.S. Hobart.

Operations of the R.A.F. Aden Command prior to and during the Attack.

The only assistance which the Royal Air Force was able to give for the protection of British Somaliland was

Appx. "A" (being a limited to certain units at Aden. The role of the R.A.F. report by the A.O.C.

Aden) to Gen. Wavell's in that area had been defined as follows:-

Despatch "Ops. in  
Somaliland" 1939-  
1940.

(A.H.B. II J7/3)

- (a) The protection of convoys.
- (b) The neutralisation of enemy Air Forces so as to achieve (a), and to protect the shipping at Aden. Permission was, however, obtained from H.Q., R.A.F., Middle East, for a Flight to give close support in British Somaliland, but it was not intended to utilise any more than this Flight in support of the Army, except in the case of emergency.

/It is

# SECRET

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Ibid

It is evident, therefore, that the R.A.F. in Aden could only provide "a measure of Air support" for the Army in the attack on British Somaliland, in view of the smallness of the available Air Forces and their prior commitments for the protection of convoys and for the defence of Aden itself. Nevertheless "the air effort expended in support of the Army in Somaliland was the maximum which could be given with the Air Forces available."

As mentioned previously<sup>1</sup> the units of the R.A.F. at Aden in the early days of June (1940) consisted of Nos.8 and 39 (Bomber) Squadrons, No.203 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron, and No.94 (Fighter) Squadron, but by 16 June these had been augmented by No.11 (Bomber) Squadron (Blenheim Is) from India (which had been originally intended for Egypt)<sup>2</sup>. On 14 August - during the height of the attack on British Somaliland - No.223

No.11 Sqdn. Form  
540 Entries of 10  
and 16 June '40.

No.223 Sqdn. Form 540  
Entry of 14 Aug. '40.  
Air H.Q. Aden.  
Form 540 Entry of  
15 Aug. '40.

(Bomber) Squadron was flown to Aden from the Sudan as a further reinforcement<sup>3</sup>, and on the following day six Blenheims of No.84 (Bomber) Squadron from Egypt also arrived at Aden. There was also by this time one Free French Flight of Bombers (Glen Martins). All these units were under the command of Air Vice-Marshal G.R.M. Reid, D.S.O., M.C., the A.O.C., Aden.

In the opinion of the A.O.C., the Royal Air Force at Aden was faced with the following difficulties:

Appx."A" (being a Report by the A.O.C. Aden) to Gen.Wavell's Despatch "Ops. in Somaliland" 1939-1940 (A.H.B. II J7/3)

- "(a) There was no protected aerodrome from which our Fighters or Bombers could operate in Somaliland. The two aerodromes - one at Berbera and one at Laferug - were quickly made untenable by enemy bombardment which was practically unopposed by ground defences. Two of our Fighters were destroyed in the initial stages on the ground

/owing to

1. On page 3 supra.

2. Nos.11 and 39 Sqdns. were known at Air H.Q. Aden as "The Indian Wing" as they had both come from India - (see Air H.Q. Aden, Forms 540 Entries for June '40 et seq).

3. No.233 Sqdn. only remained at Aden until 22 August, when it returned to the Sudan (see this Sqdn's Form 540, entry of 22 Aug. '40).

owing to lack of protection normally afforded by the Army.<sup>1</sup> Fighter aircraft therefore had to be withdrawn<sup>1</sup>.

- (b) In view of the above it was impossible to operate Fighters at all, and for this reason, and only this, the enemy had local air superiority.
- (c) Because there was no aerodrome in Somaliland from which to work, our Bombers were forced to operate from Aden which was a range of 200 miles over sea. At this range the air effort was greatly hampered and it was impossible to keep in close touch with the military situation.
- (d) Since the enemy had local air superiority our Bombers were continually being attacked by Fighter aircraft while the crews were trying to assist the Army and to get a grip of the fast changing military situation. This made our Bombers extremely vulnerable.
- (e) The aircraft with which we are equipped is a fast Medium Bomber which is excellent for its proper role but unsuitable for close Army co-operation work, especially when not protected by Fighters<sup>2</sup>."

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch "Ops. in  
Somaliland" 1939-  
1940.  
(A.H.B. II J7/3)

In spite of these disabilities and difficulties the Royal Air Force "afforded the utmost assistance that their resources permitted, and took very considerable risks in doing so". During the period from the outbreak of War with Italy until the commencement of the enemy's advance on.

Ibid Appx. "A"

British Somaliland the R.A.F. made forty four reconnaissances on the British Somaliland - Abyssinian frontier, while themselves subjected to counter attacks by the enemy. At dawn on 13 June four enemy aircraft made a bombing attack on Little Aden and Sheikh Othman, but little damage ensued, and one enemy aircraft was shot down in flames by a Gladiator of No.94 Squadron. A few hours later three more enemy bombers approached and dropped incendiary bombs at Isthmus. They were attacked by two fighters of No.94

/Squadron

1. With regard to paragraph (a), it may be mentioned that Maj.Gen. Godwin-Austen appended a Note to Gen. Wavell's Despatch to the effect that in normal circumstances A.A. Bofors guns would have been available for the defence of the aerodromes at Berbera and Leferug, but that none existed with the force. Further that these aerodromes were given ground and low altitude defences by a Pltn. of Infantry with two A.A.V.B. guns, the aerodrome at Berbera also having two 3" A.A. guns.
2. The reader may disagree with this but it was the opinion of the A.O.C. at the time.

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Squadron - one of which was reported as missing. On the same day a Blenheim of No.203 Squadron on reconnaissance discovered a satellite aerodrome south-west of Assab (Eritrea) on which some twenty five aircraft were located; this was attacked next day by No.8 Squadron from a height of 2,000 ft. when two of the enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground and many bomb craters were made on the aerodrome.

On 1 July enemy aircraft dropped bombs in open country 60 miles west of Aden, but no damage was reported, and on 28 July three S.79s attacked Aden and damaged a cargo vessel in the outer harbour.

During the whole of this period (10 June - 5 August) the R.A.F. made successful bombing raids which included Direedawa, Dessie<sup>1</sup> and Harar (in Abyssinia) and Assab, Biyo Cabola and Macaca (in Eritrea). Of these, Direedawa and Macaca were attacked repeatedly; the railway station and aerodrome hangars at Direedawa were seriously damaged and the aerodrome at Assab was temporarily abandoned by the enemy owing to the destruction caused by our bombs.

Appx. A to  
Gen Wavell's Despatch  
"Ops. in Somaliland  
1939-1940".  
(A.H.B. II J7/3).

In the two weeks from 5 August until the completion of the evacuation of the British forces (19 August) the R.A.F. carried out twelve separate reconnaissances, nineteen bombing-reconnaissances (employing 32 aircraft), and thirty-six bombing attacks on enemy troop concentrations and transport at the Tug Argan Gap, Hargeisa, and other localities. They also maintained fighter patrols (from Aden) over Berbera making thirty six sorties.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the above, No.223 Squadron carried out six long distance raids on enemy "back" area, one of them (on

/18 August)

1. In the attacks on Direedawa and Dessie No.8 Sqdn. was "Particularly prominent" (A.C.M. Longmore's Despatch of 1 Feb. '41).
2. On several days no enemy aircraft were encountered during these patrols.

18 August) being made in bad weather on the aerodrome at Addis Ababa; a total of 4,800 lbs. of 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries was dropped and direct hits were obtained on four hangars which destroyed four enemy aircraft (S.79s) and the Italian Viceroy's private machine (an S.75), seriously damaged two other S.79s and started a large petrol fire. During this operation accurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered and four British aircraft were hit (one severely), but all returned to their base. "This highly successful raid - as had been intended - had the effect of drawing the enemy's fighters from British Somaliland for the increased protection of the Addis Ababa area". This operation appeared to have led to a retaliatory bombing of Khartoum aerodrome which took place immediately afterwards. However, like two other air attacks on Khartoum this retaliatory raid was abortive.

It was a fortunate circumstance (no doubt largely due to the activities of the R.A.F.) that during the evacuation of Berbera by the British forces this port was reasonably free from air bombardment. Had it been otherwise the evacuation might well have been attended with unfortunate consequences.

During these operations of the R.A.F. Squadrons at Aden, some sixty tons of bombs were dropped and the total number of sorties was one hundred and eighty four. The R.A.F. casualties in personnel and aircraft were twelve killed and three wounded; seven aircraft lost, ten severely damaged and a number slightly damaged. The enemy casualties in aircraft (during combats) were one shot down and one severely damaged (by fighters) and two shot down in flames (by bombers).

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

Appx. "A" to  
Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch "Ops. in  
Somaliland 1939-  
1940".  
(A.H.B. II J7/3)

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## Results of the Loss of British Somaliland as Affecting the Air Situation.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch of May-  
December, 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

The loss of British Somaliland released a number of enemy aircraft for service on the north-west and southern frontiers of Italian East Africa. It also provided the enemy with an advanced landing-ground at Berbera, but they made little use of this advantage.

Air H.Q. Aden Form 540  
Entries of various  
dates Aug. - 1 Nov.  
and 1 Dec. 1940.

It would seem probable that the reason for this neglect was the proximity of Berbera to Aden, from whence the R.A.F. carried out attacks on enemy aerodromes and bases (including Berbera itself and the port of Assab).

## Warning System Against Enemy Air Attacks.

CS.1056 and  
DO/AML/h.

A radio Direction Finding System was established at Aden which proved to be the only reliable method of obtaining air raid warnings. Considerable technical difficulties due to climatic and geographical conditions were experienced, but by the beginning of August (1940) an R.D.F. Station was functioning which gave ranges of 30 to 50 miles but no height finding. The system was, however, improved and by October (1940) ranges of 60 to 70 miles were obtained.

H.Q. Middle East Air  
Defence East Africa.  
(File S.47095).

There were also a number of Coastal Wireless Telegraph Observation Posts (supplemented later by a few mobile W/T posts) between Aden and Perin Island which reported to the Operations Room at Air Headquarters, Aden.

/IV. OPERATIONS



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## VI. OPERATIONS OF THE R.A.F. ADEN COMMAND FROM 20 AUGUST, 1940 - 31 JANUARY 1941<sup>1</sup>

The chief aerodromes which the R.A.F. Squadrons at Aden attacked were Diredawa (and its satellite at Kinile), Kombolcha<sup>2</sup>, and Dessie. Regular reconnaissances were also carried out and No.203 Squadron performed many convoy escorts to shipping.

From about this time Perim Island (in the Straits of Bel El Mandeb) was used as an advanced fuelling base by the Aden Squadrons, and Kamaran Island (off the Yemen coast)<sup>3</sup> was also used as a fuelling base by No.203 Squadron when engaged on convoy duties. The enemy made several bombing raids on Kamaran but caused little damage.

On 20 August five Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron bombed Dessie aerodrome dropping 5,500 lbs. of 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries and scoring hits on buildings; and the same day five Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" bombed Diredawa aerodrome scoring hits on a hangar and damaging several aircraft: 2 C.R.42s attacked our aircraft shooting down one and damaging another. On 24 August six Blenheims of No.8 Squadron bombed Berbera and Hargeisa registering hits on the Wireless Telegraph station at Berbera. On 25 August six Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" bombed hangars and buildings at Dessie, and two days later twelve Blenheims of No.8 Squadron and the "Indian Wing" bombed Harrar and Dessie causing fires and explosions. On 1 September twenty three Blenheims of No.8 Squadron and the "Indian Wing" bombed the dock area at Assab with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries, scoring hits on

/buildings and

1. The account of the activities of the R.A.F. at Aden cannot be conveniently treated wholly with either Phase I or Phase II of this Monograph, and therefore for the purpose of continuity the operations of the Aden Sqdns. are here continued until the end of January 1941. Subsequent activities of these Sqdns. are narrated in Phase II after the British attack on Eritrea.
2. Kombolcha was a large Air base situated a few miles south of Dessie.
3. Almost opposite Massawa.

buildings and warehouses and on the jetty, and causing a large explosion from which smoke rose to 5,000 feet from a (presumed) copra dump. During these operations fairly heavy and accurate A.A. fire was encountered. On 2 and 3 September three Blenheims of No.8 Squadron and one of No.39 Squadron repeated the attack on the Assab dock area dropping bombs in the target area. On 5 September seven Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" again attacked Assab when the enemy's Naval ammunition dump was believed to have been destroyed.

No.203 Sqdn. Form 540  
Entry of 6 Sept. '40.

Meanwhile early in September "B" Flight (five aircraft) of No.203 Squadron was made into a bombing Unit with permission to operate with 1,000 lbs. of bombs, and on 6 September three Blenheims of this Flight bombed the iron bridge at Awash on the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway, from 1,500 to 800 feet, one aircraft scoring direct hits with four 250 lb. bombs on the eastern end of the bridge. On the same day three Blenheims of No.8 Squadron bombed troop concentrations at Hargeisa; on the return journey the Blenheims machine-gunned an S.79 on the Berbera landing-ground. On 11 September three Blenheims of No.8 Squadron bombed the aerodrome and European Quarter at Berbera encountering no opposition. On the four days 12-15 September nine Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" and No.8 Squadron bombed the docks and Naval barracks at Assab causing some damage, and on 15 September seven Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" and No.8 Squadron bombed the aerodrome and buildings at Dire Dawa and the port of Zeila (British Somaliland) from a height of 3,000 feet causing considerable damage and fires. On 28 September six Blenheims of No.8 Squadron bombed the aerodrome at Kombolcha scoring hits on the hangars

/and the

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and the barracks. Meanwhile during the preceding eleven days, further bombing raids had been carried out by Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" and No.8 Squadron on Diredawa, Assab, Berbera and Jijjiga (Abyssinia).

## Operations Against the Wahidi.

During the month of October (and the following three months), the R.A.F. at Aden was also engaged in punitive bombing operations against the Wahidi section of the Quetebi Tribe in the Aden hinterland who had attacked an R.A.F. ground party in that vicinity. These operations were carried out by Blenheims of No.8 Squadron and Vincents of a "General Purposes" Flight detached from No.8 Squadron, and were continued until early in February (1941) when the Wahidi at length fulfilled the conditions of an ultimatum. Meanwhile in October and November, Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" and No.8 Squadron continued their bombing raids on the aerodromes at Diredawa, Kombolcha and Assab; from 18 to 20 November a 36 hour bombardment by seventeen Blenheims of the "Indian Wing" and No.8 Squadron was carried out on the power-house, supply depot, oil and ammunition stores and the Naval barracks at Assab at heights ranging from 3,000 to 12,000 feet. 500 lb. and 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries were dropped and direct hits were obtained and fires were started. While these operations were in progress, two S.81s made a low level attack on Aden before dawn on 19 November. A Gladiator of No.94 Squadron endeavoured to intercept but without success; four H.E. bombs fell near the town and one in the harbour, but no damage or casualties resulted.

/Summary of

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the R.A.F. Aden Command, from 20 August 1940 to 28 November 1940.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. Aden. Forms 540.

During the period from the capture of British Somaliland (20 August 1940) until the departure of the two Squadrons of the "Indian Wing" (29 November 1940) 306 Bomber sorties and 211 reconnaissances were carried out by the Aden Squadrons against the Italians. In view of the fact that our aircraft were inferior in numbers to those of the enemy and that - as in the case of the R.A.F. in the Sudan - there were no fighter aircraft available to accompany our bombers<sup>1</sup>, the almost continuous bombing raids which the Aden Squadrons made against the Italians must rank as a noteworthy achievement, more especially as from 7 October to 28 November 157 bombing sorties were also made against the Wahidi.

Change in Operational Policy.

Air H.Q. Aden.  
Forms 540 Entries  
of 29 Nov. and 1 Dec.  
1940.

On 29 November the two Squadrons of the "Indian Wing" left Aden for Egypt<sup>2</sup>. This substantial reduction in the striking force of the R.A.F. at Aden necessitated a change of operational policy which the A.O.C., Middle East directed should be as follows:-

To implement the Naval blockade of Italian East Africa, and to endeavour to discover by reconnaissance, dumps of food, petrol and munitions, which if located, should be attacked; and to reconnoitre aerodromes on the western seaboard of the Red Sea and the northern coast of Somaliland with a view to safeguarding British convoys from attack.

/In accordance

1. The Gladiators of No. 94 Squadron were largely employed in defending Aden, and the Blenheim IV Fighters of No. 203 Squadron were mainly engaged in conveying shipping.
2. These two Squadrons (which had suffered considerably) were withdrawn to Egypt for the purpose of re-equipment and to act as a reinforcement for the Western Desert operations (A.C.M. Longmore's Despatch of 1 Feb. '40).

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In accordance with this policy, attacks were made on fuel and munition dumps at Assab and elsewhere, on power-stations at Assab and Diredawa, and on a pumping-station at Harseile. Attacks were also made on railways and bridges, especially the Jibuti-Diredawa section of the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway.

The Squadrons (and Flights) remaining at Aden to carry out these operations were No.8 (Bomber) Squadron, No.203 (General Reconnaissance) Squadron, No.94 (Fighter) Squadron, one Flight of Vincents (known as "the General Purposes Flight") attached to No.8 Squadron, and one Free French Flight of Glen Martins (which had been based at Aden since early in August 1940).

On 6 December three Blenheims<sup>1</sup> made a high level attack on Assab but caused very little damage. On 9 December, three Blenheims attacked the railway station at Duanle from a low level, dropping bombs among the main buildings and on the track. On the nights of 11/12 and 12/13 December two Blenheims bombed (presumed) M.T. sheds near Diredawa, scoring direct hits and starting a fire. Several other attacks were made on Assab, and the pumping-station at Harseile was straddled with bombs. During December and January, a number of bombing attacks were made on the Wahidi tribesmen by Vincents of the "General Purposes" Flight. On 11 January two Blenheims bombed the satellite aerodrome at Kinile from a low level, causing fires and explosions, and on the night of 14/15 January two Blenheims attacked Assab, one from high level, and one dive-bombing: bombs fell in the target area and a large fire was started. On 20 January two Blenheims repeated this attack scoring direct hits on buildings, and on the following day four Blenheims bombed the railway station

/at Aiscia

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1. The Blenheims in this and the subsequent attacks mentioned in this section of the text were of No.8 Squadron, unless otherwise stated.

at Aiscia from a low level with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries scoring a direct hit on a large building. This attack was repeated on 23 January by one Blenheim which dropped four delayed-action 250 lb. bombs, two of which fell in the Station. Meanwhile, on 22 January three Blenheims attacked (presumed) store buildings at Biyo Kaboba<sup>1</sup> causing some damage and starting two small fires.

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the R.A.F. Aden Command from 29 November 1940 to 31 January 1941.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. Aden, Forms 540.

During the period from the transfer of the two Squadrons of the "Indian Wing" (29 November, 1940) until 31 January 1941, the R.A.F. at Aden made 66 Bomber sorties and 140 reconnaissances against the Italians, and 236 Bomber sorties against the Wahidi. (Three further bomber sorties were made against the Wahidi at the beginning of February, and the operations against this tribe were then terminated).

/VI GENERAL SUMMARY OF

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1. Situated on the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway.

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## V. GENERAL SUMMARY OF FIRST PHASE

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch  
August 1939-  
November 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/9)

Ibid

The period which has been thus briefly reviewed occurred when (to quote General Wavell) "all available equipment and troops were being retained in the United Kingdom against the threat of invasion", yet it terminated with the loss of only a few unimportant frontier posts in the Sudan and Kenya Colony, and of the Protectorate of British Somaliland. In the face of the enemy's great superiority both in ground and air forces a far more serious situation might well have arisen, but the enemy failed to take advantage of their opportunities - a circumstance which General Wavell attributed "firstly to our Air Force, who in spite of inferior numbers everywhere took and kept the initiative". This was the crux of the matter, for without doubt the Royal and South African Air Forces accomplished far more than may appear from the limited operations which their all too few aircraft and lack of modern fighter aircraft enabled them to perform. By all the rules of warfare the Italian Air Force should have obliterated (or at least neutralised) their aerial opponents, but on the very first day of the war the R.A.F. in the Sudan and the S.A.A.F. in Kenya took the initiative by bombing the aerodrome and fuel tanks at Massawa and the fort at Italian Moyale; from that moment they never ceased to attack the enemy's aerodromes, military strongholds, troop concentrations and stores, and to harass their submarines and other vessels along the Red Sea littoral. Such pertinacity had its due reward for as a result the Italians exhibited a great lack of enterprise, and the few successes which they achieved were out of all proportion to the forces at their disposal and the opportunities which they possessed.

Although many of our aircraft (and notably the Wellesley Bombers of Nos. 14, 47 and 223 Squadrons) were

/obsolescent

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

obsolescent machines the personnel of the R.A.F. and the S.A.A.F. carried on "both by day and night, frequently in very bad weather over mountainous country and, in the case of their daylight raids, in face of strong Fighter opposition", and by their spirit and tenacity they had within the first five months of the campaign done much to establish local air superiority in East Africa. On one subsequent occasion the Italians wrested this superiority from them<sup>1</sup>, but this proved to be only a temporary achievement which brought no enduring advantage to the enemy.

Note: The location of R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. units in the Sudan, Kenya and Aden as on 31 December 1940 is contained in Appendix "D" (excerpted from Appendix "C" of A.C.M. Longmore's Despatch of May-December 1940 - A.H.B. II J1/7).

/VI. NOTE ON

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1 During the attack on Gallabat, 6 Nov. 1940 (as will appear hereafter on page 69 infra.)



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## VI. NOTE ON REINFORCEMENT AND MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS FOR THE AIR FORCES IN EAST AFRICA.

Before proceeding with Phase II of the Narrative it will be convenient to include a brief Note on the organisation adopted for the necessary reinforcement of aircraft for the Royal Air Force for the Middle East by which, inter alia, the Squadrons in the Sudan and Aden were served, and also on the Maintenance and Repair Units in the Sudan, Aden and Kenya. Reinforcement.

It is an axiom in air warfare that success depends upon the presence of efficient aircraft in sufficient numbers, and in this respect the Royal Air Force in East Africa was at a serious disadvantage in comparison with the Italian "Regia Aeronautica" which could obtain its reinforcements of aircraft across the Mediterranean direct from Italy. Direct approach from England for the Royal Air Force aircraft

Air H.Q. R.A.F., was impracticable (except for long-range aircraft which could M.E. File DO/AML/4.  
(June '40 - fly to Air Headquarters, Middle East, in Egypt, by way of April '41).  
Malta) and the only alternatives were to make the all-sea

passage round Africa, or else to cross Africa from west to east by air. The all-sea route via the Cape was full of hazards from German (and Italian) submarines and bombers, and shipping losses might well mean the loss of new aircraft which had never made a flight. The problem had already been foreseen before the outbreak of hostilities and when Italy

Air Ministry's  
Memo: "Organisa-  
tion for Ferrying  
Aircraft,  
Takoradi -  
Khartoum - Egypt"

and  
Notes for O.C.,  
R.A.F. Station  
Takoradi" (Appcs.I  
and II R.A.F. Stn.  
Takoradi. Entry of  
19 July '40).

entered the war the Air Ministry decided that reinforcement aircraft for the Middle East should be shipped to Takoradi on the Gold Coast, West Africa, where they would be assembled and flown from thence to the R.A.F. Headquarters, Middle East, via Kano and Khartoum; from Egypt the aircraft would then be sent, as required, to the different theatres of War.

This scheme was put in hand in July (1940) and the new Station at Takoradi (on the site of an existing  
/aerodrome

aerodrome equipped with one hangar) was inaugurated by Group Captain Thorold, D.S.C., D.F.C., A.F.C., as Officer Commanding on 14 July. The lay-out of the station was enlarged by two additional hangars, administrative offices, stores, and other buildings.

The route from Takoradi to Egypt lay across some 2,000 miles of Africa where the variable weather conditions were an unknown factor, and forced landings might have to be made in impenetrable forests and jungles or in remote stretches of desert. However, the West African Reinforcement Route (as it was called) was planned satisfactorily, and landing-grounds were established at the various "stages" of this new air Ferry Service which were as follows:-

Takoradi	-	Lagos
Lagos	-	Kano
Kano	-	Maiduguri
Maiduguri	-	Geneina <sup>1</sup>
Geneina	-	El Fasher
El Fasher	-	El Obeid
El Obeid	-	Khartoum
Khartoum	-	Wadi Halfa
Wadi Halfa	-	Abu Sueir

Detachments of the Royal Air Force were stationed at Lagos, Kano and Maiduguri of the West African Section of the W.A.R.R. and at Geneina, El Fahser, El Obeid and Wadi Halfa of the Sudan section, the whole organisation being placed under command of the A.O.C., Sudan (commanding No.203 Group, Khartoum).

R.A.F. Station  
Takoradi Form 540  
Entries of 20 and 23  
Sept. '40.

On 20 September (1940) the first flight of reinforcing aircraft, consisting of one Blenheim and six Hurricanes, left Takoradi for Egypt, followed on 25 September by a second flight of the same number and types of aircraft. By the end of December (1940) the following aircraft had been flown over the route in nineteen separate convoys:-

/ 27 Blenheims

1. From Maiduguri to Geneina the route crossed French Equatorial Africa and landings were prohibited in this territory; but by the end of August French Equatorial Africa was controlled by the Free French and landings could therefore be made without risk of political embarrassment.

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27 Blenheims  
68 Hurricanes and  
12 Fulmars -

a total of 107 machines.

Information supplied  
by the M.L.O. to the  
High Comm. for  
South Africa.

The units of the South African Air Force were in the main supplied by the Union of South Africa, the aircraft being generally sent by sea to Mombasa, a few - as some of the Hurricanes for No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. - were supplied from the R.A.F. Middle East Headquarters. There was also a reinforcement route from South Africa via Kenya which was used for the transport of spare parts etc. for the South African Air Force and also for the Middle East Headquarters, and over which reinforcing aircraft were sometimes flown. But, in the opinion of the A.O.C., East Africa, the supply of reserve aircraft and of spares for initial equipment was in fact quite inadequate.

A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
I.E.A. 10 Feb. -  
5 Apr. '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/1)

## Maintenance and Repairs.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

The supply of equipment of all kinds from England and of spares for new types of aircraft was very erratic and resulted in much unserviceability and delays.

The Maintenance and Repair Units of the Air Forces were located as follows:-

No.203 Group  
Appx. "U" to Form  
540 Entry of  
31 Dec. '40.

### The Sudan.

At Khartoum - Aircraft Repair Depot.  
At Port Sudan - No.251 Maintenance and Repair Unit  
At Wadi Gazouza and later at Kassala and Agordat<sup>1</sup>. - No.52 Repair and Salvage Unit.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7)

### Aden.

At Steamer Point - Equipment and Supply Depot.

### Kenya.

At Mombasa - No.218 Maintenance and Repair Unit.

/During the

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1. See page 99 infra.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. - May  
'41. (M.151/1).

During the advance of our forces into Italian  
Somaliland and Abyssinia Repair and Salvage Units were  
established at Mogadishu, Diredawa and Addis Ababa<sup>1</sup>.

/SECOND PHASE

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1. See page 196 infra.

SECRET

SECOND PHASE:

THE GREAT "Pincer" MOVEMENT

# SECRET

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## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

At the conclusion of the first phase of the East African campaigns the Italians had every reason to condemn themselves for their failure to utilize their great opportunities which had existed at the opening of the conflict. At the beginning of September (1940) the Italians were still in a very strong position; they had occupied British Somaliland, there was no opposition in French Somaliland, and they controlled the southern entrance to the Red Sea. A determined onslaught should have given them possession of the Sudan from whence an advance northwards could have crushed Egypt against the "upper mill-stone" of Graziani's army in Libya, and this, if coupled with a resolute attack on Kenya, would have secured to them almost the whole of Africa north of the Equator. But the opportunities once lost never recurred, for in the meantime the British Government's action in reinforcing the Middle East resulted in Graziani's defeat in Cyrenaica (by the British armoured units, the Australians and the 4th Indian Division), the arrival of the 5th (and, later, the 4th) Indian Divisions in the Sudan and of the South and West African forces in Kenya, and the addition of fresh Squadrons of the South African Air Force in that colony<sup>2</sup>. With the arrival of these reinforcements our forces took the initiative which they maintained in the face of every obstacle until the Italians were finally broken and defeated.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May -  
December 1940.  
(A.H.B. II J1/7).

## /II. PRELIMINARY

1. For purposes of clarity the narrative of Phase II contains three main sub-headings:-

The Attack from the Sudan.  
The Return of the Emperor  
The Attack from Kenya.

(The attacks from the Sudan and from Kenya formed the northern and southern arms of the "pincer" - see page 10 supra).

2. i.e. Nos. 2 and 3 (Fighter) Sqdns. (Gauntlets, Furies and Hurricanes) No. 41 (A.C.) Sqdn. (Hartbees); No. 60 (Survey) Sqdn. (for photomapping reccos. - Ansons); and No. 34 Flight (Ansons).

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## II. PRELIMINARY OFFENSIVE IN THE SUDAN

The Abyssinian Campaigns" and "The Tiger Strikes". (published under authority of the Govt. of India).

In the meantime, before the strategy which led to the "pincer" movement had been decided, the 5th Indian Division comprising two Brigades<sup>1</sup> (commanded by Major-General M. Heath, C.B., C.I.E., D.S.O., M.C.) had arrived in September at Port Sudan and moved up to the frontier. A third Brigade was formed by absorbing the three British Battalions already in the Sudan and three Companies of the Sudan Force<sup>2</sup>. The remaining ~~three~~ companies of the S.D.F. with Skinner's Horse and some mobile artillery were formed into a reconnaissance and pursuit Unit known as "Gazelle Force", commanded by Col. Messervy. The 5th Indian Divisional Headquarters were set up at Gedaref from whence offensives could be staged against Kassala - the gateway to Eritrea - and Gallabat<sup>3</sup> - the gateway for the "patriot" movement (now in process of formation through the efforts of "Mission 101")<sup>4</sup> to advance on Abyssinia.

As a counter to our forces the Italians began to reinforce their troops near the Sudan frontier in the Kassala - Sabdaret - Tessenei triangle, and further south at Um Hagar and Metemma. During the next few weeks a system of offensive patrolling was carried out by our troops which kept the Italians in a state of harassed uncertainty.

### The Attack on Gallabat and Metemma.

General Wavell's Despatch of 10 Dec. '40. (A.H.B. II J1/9).

Soon after the arrival of the 5th Indian Division General Wavell instructed Major-General Platt to make plans for minor offensive operations and indicated the

/recapture

1. Comprising the 2/5 and 3/5 Mahratta Infy, the 3/2 Punjabis, the 4/10 Baluchis, the 3/18 Garwhalis, the 3/12 Frontier Force Regt: the 6/13 Frontier Force Rifles and Skinner's Horse (motorised cavalry), and artillery.
2. The three Brigades were numbered the 9th, 10th and 29th, commanded by Brigadiers Mayne, Slim and Marriott respectively.
3. Gallabat (as stated on page 16 supra) had been evacuated by our forces in July.
4. See page 8 supra.

recapture of Gallabat as a suitable objective. Accordingly, at a conference held on 2 November Major-General Heath prepared a plan to attack the Gallabat - Metemma area at dawn on 6 November with the 10th Indian Brigade and a Squadron of the 6th Royal Tank Regiment (which had been sent to the Sudan early in September). The two frontier posts of Gallabat (in the Sudan) and Metemma (in Abyssinia) face each other across a ravine in a valley some two miles wide. The enemy's forces holding this area consisted of five Colonial Brigades, a Battery of artillery and a machine-gun Battalion, and a number of Irregulars, totalling in all about 5,300 men.

No.203 Group Appx."C"  
(dated 13 Nov. '40.)  
Entry of 4 Nov. '40.

The A.O.C. Sudan (Air-Commodore Slatter) attended the conference on 2nd November and agreed to provide air assistance, and to this end two new advanced landing grounds were constructed, one thirteen miles north-west of Gedaref (known as Blackdown) and the other in the area near Sherif Said, north-west of Gallabat. The main operational aerodromes used were at Azaza (some eighteen miles north-east of Gedaref) where six Gladiators of No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. and four Gladiators of "K" Flight were based, while at the new landing ground (Blackdown) were placed four Hardys of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron, six Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron and six Gauntlets and Vincents of No.430 (A.C.) Flight. The Air Plan was, briefly, to assist the ground forces in their attack<sup>1</sup>.

It was known that the enemy had received information that an attack was pending and that they had therefore concentrated at Gondar<sup>2</sup> eight C.R.42s,

/three S.79s

1. No.203 Group's Operational Instruction No.7 - Appx."A" to Form 540 Entry of 4 Nov. '40 - preliminary to the Action is contained in Appendix "E".
2. Gondar is situated some 25 miles north of Lake Tana and is approx. 100 miles from Gallabat.



three S.79s, and four C.A.133s, and at Bahr Dar<sup>1</sup> six CA.133s. There were also four CR.42s, seven C.R.32s, ten S.79s, five S.81s and five CA.133s at Gura and Asmara aerodromes<sup>2</sup> which might be used for reinforcements. Information had also been received that a large enemy convoy of some 90 lorries had left Gondar with troops and stores to reinforce Metemma, and (on 31 October) action was taken to hold up this convoy until after our attack on Gallabat had taken place. Aircraft of No.430 Flight and three Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron - escorted by Gladiators of No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. - were sent to reconnoitre and attack the convoy which was located near Chelga (some 30 miles south-west of Gondar). The Wellesleys attacked by individual shallow dive-bombing from 1,200 feet and machine-gunning, and then made way for the Gladiators which carried out an intense front-gun attack from low level. Many of the lorries were destroyed and damaged. On the following day our aircraft returned and found that the convoy had moved only 8 miles. They again attacked and inflicted severe casualties and damage and the whole convoy was disorganised. On their way to the action three of the Gladiators were intercepted by four C.R.42s one of which was shot down and another damaged; all our aircraft returned safely.

Air operations at Gallabat and Metemma were begun before dawn on 6 November when one Vincent of No.430 Flight successfully dive-bombed the Wireless Station at Metemma, but failed to locate a second Wireless Station which was known to exist. Meanwhile the two other Vincents of No.430 Flight bombed Gallabat Fort to cover the advance of the Army's mechanical units. At the same time three

/Wellesleys of

1. Bahr Dar is situated on the southern shore of Lake Tana and is approx. 130 miles from Gallabat.
2. Asmara is the capital of Eritrea; Gura is some 25 miles south of Asmara.

Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron bombed Metemma Camp from a height of 3,500 feet obtaining hits on enemy tanks and starting a large fire. Two other Wellesleys bombed the positions of the enemy's reserve Battalions at Jebel Miriam Waha, north-east of Metemma Camp, from 3,500 feet.

At 06.15 hours three Gladiators of "K" Flight made a defensive patrol over the Metemma area. This was the first time that "K" Flight had operated in an area where enemy fighters were expected, and, apparently, this patrol was watching the battle instead of searching the sky, with the result that it was surprised by an enemy formation of six or eight C.R.42s which shot down two of the Gladiators and forced the third to land near El Hasira (some 70 miles west of Gedaref).

Meanwhile at 05.00 hours the Army had opened an artillery barrage on Gallabat fort and Metemma, which was followed by an Infantry attack preceded by fourteen light and medium tanks. This attack was completely successful and the enemy began to burn their stores preparatory to evacuating the position. But on arrival at Gallabat Fort (at 0800 hours) most of the tanks had become disabled, three due to mines and the remainder from mechanical injuries from the rocky ground. Brigadier Slim was therefore obliged to hold up the advance on Metemma Fort while efforts were made to repair the tanks.

At 08.30 hours No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. engaged eight C.R.42s over Metemma: two of our aircraft were shot down, the Squadron Commander (Major Van Shalkwyk) and the Senior Flight Commander (Captain Boyle) being injured<sup>1</sup>. The A.O.C., Sudan thereafter personally /directed

No.203 Grp. Appx. "C"  
(dated 13 Nov. '40).  
to Form 540 Entry of  
4 Nov. '40. and  
"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns" p.27.

S.A.A.F. Records  
No.1 Sqdn.  
(Short history of)

1. Major Van Shalwyck died of burns on the following day.

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No.203 Group  
Appx "C" (dated  
13 Nov. '40) to  
Form 540 Entry  
of 4 Nov. '40.

directed this Squadron's operations. At 14.30 hours four Gladiators of No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. and one of "K" Flight while on defensive patrol over Metemma engaged six CA.133s which were attacking our Infantry in Gallabat Fort. Two CA.133s were shot down and a third was severely damaged, but during this action our aircraft were attacked by eight C.R.42s which were escorting the CA.133s. Two of the C.R.42s were shot down but the Gladiator of "K" Flight was also destroyed.

A feature of this stage of the action was the speed with which the enemy concentrated their air units in the area: by mid-day there had arrived at Gondar and Bahr Dar aerodromes fifteen C.R.42s, ten S.79s, five S.81s and twelve CA.133s - a total of forty two aircraft.

By 1700 hours the Army had made no further advance from Gallabat owing to the tanks being still immobilised.

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch  
August 1939 -  
November 1940  
(A.H.B. II J1/9)

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan" June 1940-  
May 1941, etc."  
(A.H.B. II J7/2)

By this time the morale of our infantry "was temporarily affected" by incessant attacks made by the enemy's bombers which came over in waves with full fighter support; these attacks could not be checked as our remaining fighters (the Gladiators of No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F.) were outnumbered and and were also inferior in speed to the enemy's C.R.42s. It was therefore decided to cancel the attack on Metemma and "in view of the enemy's continued command of the air and the target offered by Gallabat to withdraw the troops from that area."

Before dawn on 7 November five Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron (escorted by the remaining four Gladiators of No.1 S.A.A.F. Squadron) made a high level attack on an enemy reserve battalion near Metemma. A long stick of bombs was dropped on the target from a height of 6,000 feet; results could not be observed owing to surrounding woods and scrub but the Army reported that the bombing was effective. After the bombing was completed our

/fighters

fighters remained on defensive patrol and at 05.30 hours they attempted to engage six C.R.42s which, however, refused battle; one C.R.42 was eventually engaged and shot down. On the same day one Wellesley of No.47 Squadron attacked an M.T. column at the crossing of the Atbara River, bombing the road and machine-gunning the M.T. vehicles; and on the night of 10 November one Wellesley of the same Squadron bombed the fort at Bahr Dar with 250 lb. bombs starting large fires; this attack was reported by one Wellesley on the following night (11 November) when H.E. bombs (from a dive attack) started a fire on some sheds. Meanwhile on 8 November No.1 Squadron, S.A.A.F. had made a defensive patrol over the Metemma area, but no enemy was sighted.

#### General Results of the Battle.

Although the main objective of breaking the enemy's forces at Metemma had not been achieved their 27th Colonial Battalion had been virtually destroyed and their 25th and 77th Colonial Battalions had suffered severely. Our Army re-occupied the ridge on which Gallabat Fort had stood<sup>1</sup> but the assault on Metemma was abandoned and this area became a no-man's-land for the next two months. Nevertheless the re-capture of Gallabat was a timely stimulus to the rising "patriot" movement in Abyssinia from the fact that the Italians had been driven back across the Sudan border.

#### Summary of Air Operations at Gallabat and Metemma.

Owing to the greater number of their aircraft and the greater speed of their C.R.42 fighters over that of our Gladiators the Italians had secured - for the last time - local air superiority in East Africa. Our Units lost five aircraft shot down and one forced

"The Abyssinian Campaigns" and "The Tiger Strikes"

A.C. Slatter's "Brief Summary of Air Ops. in the Sudan etc. June 1940-May 1941" (A.H.B. II J7/2).

/to land.

1. The fort had been destroyed by our artillery barrage and the R.A.F. bombing attacks.

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to land<sup>1</sup>, but as the (known) enemy losses amounted to six aircraft shot down and at least two damaged<sup>2</sup> the laurels of the aerial combats must be awarded to our air Units.

## Dispositions of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. Units in the Sudan after the Action.

No.254 Wing  
Form 540 Entries  
3 and 6 Nov.

In the meantime on 3 November No.3 Group had ordered the removal of No.254 Wing from the advanced station at Erkowit to Port Sudan owing to the closing for the Winter of the buildings in which No.254 Wing's Headquarters were housed: the move was carried out on 6 November.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "C" (dated  
13 Nov. '40) to  
Form 540 Entry of  
4 Nov. '40.

On the morning of 10 November "K" Flight returned to Port Sudan, the Units remaining within striking distance of the frontier being disposed as follows:-

No.37 Squadron operating from Sennar<sup>3</sup>;

One Flight of No.237 Squadron,

4 Vincents and Gauntlets of No.430 (A.C.) Flight,  
and 5 Gladiators of No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. remaining  
in the Gedaref area<sup>4</sup>.

## /III. THE STRATEGIC

1. i.e. 3 Gladiators of "K" Flight and 2 Gladiators of No.1 Sqdn. S.A.A.F. shot down, and 1 Gladiator of "K" Flight forced down.
2. i.e. 4 C.R.42s and 2 C.A.133s shot down, and 1 C.R.42 and 1 C.A.133 damaged.
3. Sennar is situated on the Blue Nile some 135 miles west-by-south of Gedaref (on the railway linking Gedaref and El Obeid).
4. A Chart of No.203 Group's Command as during December 1940 is given in Appendix "F" - (No.203 Group, Appx. "U" to Form 540, Entry of 31 Sec.'40).

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## III. THE STRATEGIC PLANS FOR THE "PINCER"

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch on E.A. Ops.  
Nov. '40 to July '41.  
Enc. to C.S.18122

During the autumn and winter of 1940/1 General Wavell was concerned "with two conflicting policies which were urged on him from different quarters".

On the one hand he was being pressed to move forces from East Africa to Egypt, and on the other hand he was "made well aware of the feeling of nervousness not only in Kenya but also in Rhodesia, and even in South Africa, that the forces in East Africa were not sufficient to prevent an Italian invasion of Kenya and of the countries further south; in particular there was fear of an enemy occupation of the port of Mombassa" (Kenya). He had also to bear in mind that a South African Division sent by the Union of South Africa for service in Kenya had been originally provided "on the understanding that it was not to be used north of the Equator, while it was very doubtful whether the African troops for climatic reasons and their low scale of equipment would be suitable for operations in other theatres". For these reasons General Wavell decided not to reduce the forces in East Africa at least until the enemy had been driven further back.

Ibid.

On 2 December (1940) - on the eve of his offensive against Graziani's forces in the Western Desert - General Wavell held a meeting in Cairo with Major-Generals Platt and Cunningham<sup>1</sup> to consider the strategy for the campaigns against the Italian East African Territories. At this conference General Wavell formulated in the following policy:-

/1. In The Sudan

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1 Gen. Cunningham was now commanding in East Africa (see page 10 supra).

1. In the Sudan.

- (a) To recapture Kassala early in 1941 if the necessary reinforcements could be made available from Egypt (depending on the success of the Western Desert offensive).
- (b) To maintain pressure in the Gallabat area.
- (c) To further the "patriot" movement in Abyssinia by all possible means.<sup>1</sup>

2. In Kenya.

- (a) In the south, to advance to the frontier on the line Kolbio - Dif.
- (b) On the northern frontier west of Moyale, to maintain pressure on the enemy by small mobile columns.
- (c) In May or June (after the rainy season) to advance on the port of Kisumu.
- (d) In the spring or summer of 1941 to penetrate into south-west Abyssinia in conjunction with operations from the Boma area of the Sudan.

This policy - which was modified subsequently in several respects according to various circumstances - initiated the great "pincer" movement of our offensive campaigns.

/IV. THE

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1. (c) had been discussed by Gen. Wavell with the Sec. of State for War (Mr. Anthony Eden) when he visited the Sudan with the General in November. As a result of these discussions Gen. Wavell appointed the late Brigadier O.C. Wingate, D.S.O. as staff officer for the "patriot" activities - Ibid.

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## IV. THE ATTACK FROM THE SUDAN.

As stated above, the policy which General Wavell laid down for the offensive from the Sudan comprised the recapture of Kassala, the maintaining of pressure in the Gallabat area, and the support of the "patriot" movement in Abyssinia. To implement these objectives the role of the Royal Air Force in the Sudan had now to include the provision of air support to our ground forces during their offensive operations (in addition to other aspects of the role as tabulated on page 11 supra) which became of equal importance as that of maintaining the security of our shipping in the Red Sea.

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan" etc. June 1940-  
May 1941.  
(A.H.B. II J7/2).

### Preparations for the Advance into Eritrea.

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch on E.A. Ops.  
Nov. '40 to July '41. the Western Desert on 10 December (1940), General  
Enc. to C.S.18122 and  
"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

Immediately after the victory of Sidi Barrani in the Western Desert on 10 December (1940), General Wavell sent the 4th Indian Division<sup>1</sup> (commanded by Major-General N. de la Beresford-Peirse, D.S.O.) to the Sudan. Part of the Division went by sea to Port Sudan and part by railway and boat up the Nile valley. One squadron of Infantry (I) tanks and a Battery of 6 inch Howitzers were also sent to the Sudan, which thus gave Major-General Platt two Divisions,<sup>2</sup> I tanks, and a much needed addition to his artillery.

Gen. Platt's Despatch  
on Ops. in Eritrea  
etc. 1 Dec. '40 to  
26 Aug. '41.  
Enc. to CS.18122.

The 4th Divisional Headquarters were established at the Gash Delta, north of Kassala (where Gazelle Force was already located), but with only one of its Brigades - the 11th (itself short of one Battalion) - the 7th Brigade being retained for defensive purposes in the Port Sudan - Gebeit area; the 5th Brigade and the Divisional Cavalry Regiment (which were proceeding by the Nile route) were not expected until early in

/February.

1. Comprising the 5th, 7th and 11th Infy. Brigades.

2. As already stated, the 5th Indian Division had arrived in September.



February. Meanwhile the 9th Brigade (of the 5th Division) was established in the Gallabat area for purposes of defence. This left the 4th and 5th Divisions with only two Brigades each for offensive operations.

To capture the Kassala - Sabdarot - Tessenei triangle a force of four Brigades with artillery, tanks, and aircraft was considered necessary, and the 7th Brigade with artillery and other units attached (known as "Force Emily") was therefore moved to the area of operations. It was assumed that the 5th Brigade (of the 4th Division) would arrive early in February and Major-General Platt fixed provisionally 9 February for the attack on Kassala.

Early in January there were strong indications that the enemy intended to evacuate Kassala, and on 12 January Major-General Platt held a conference with his two Divisional commanders to decide the earliest possible date on which an advance could be made, and the date was then advanced to 19 January.

No. 203 Group  
"Summary of Ops.  
Jan. '41" -  
attached to  
Form 540 Entry of  
31 Jan. '41.

Meanwhile the Royal Air Force was engaged in preparing for the Kassala offensive by reconnoitring for operational landing-grounds for the bomber and fighter units, and the placing of stocks of petrol, munitions and aircraft spare parts in suitable localities. On the completion of these dispositions a series of bombing raids was carried out by Nos. 47 and 223 Squadrons on the enemy lines of communications and aerodromes, which included successful attacks on the Agordat and Barentu aerodromes and the Caproni workshops at Mai Edaga on the night of 12/13 January.

In order to mislead the enemy dummy landing-grounds were constructed complete with dummy aircraft, while the Army began a heavy traffic of spurious Wireless messages.

/Meanwhile, the

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Meanwhile, the R.A.F. convoy work in the Red Sea - which had been particularly heavy owing to the large convoys transporting the 4th Indian Division to Port Sudan - was maintained as usual .

In the Gallabat area there was less activity after the 5th Indian Division had moved up to the Kassala front.

The intended dispositions of the Royal Air Force

No.203 Group "Summary  
of Ops. Jan. 41."  
Attached to Form 540,  
Entry of 31. Jan. 41.

for the Kassala operations had to be altered at very short notice owing to the date of the Army's attack being put forward to 19 January, and the following movements were substituted: No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. (which had been augmented with Hurricanes at Khartoum) was sent to an operational aerodrome named Oxo<sup>1</sup> on the Atbara River. Six aircraft of No.47 Squadron (Wellesleys) were moved to the Blackdown landing-ground, the remainder of this squadron staying at Gordon's Tree aerodrome (near Khartoum), and six aircraft of No.223 Squadron (Wellesleys) moved to Gordon's Tree, the remainder staying at the Wadi Gazouza base (near Summit). No.430 (A.C.) Flight went to Sufeiya with Leben (on the Atbara River) as an advanced landing-ground. Two (A.C.) Flights of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron (which were affiliated to the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions) were moved to the Blackdown and Sarum<sup>2</sup> landing-grounds, the H.Q. and reserve Flights of this Squadron being at Gordon's Tree .

## Wireless Communications.

Ibid.

Meanwhile No.13 Wireless Intelligence Screen had arrived at Aroma<sup>3</sup> (via Port Sudan) on 16 January and

/were ready

1. This was an invented name.
2. Near Goz Regeb on the Atbara River. (This was also an invented name).
3. Situated approx. 30 miles north-west of Kassala.

were ready to operate on 18 January. They were allotted to various Army formations and their base was made at Kassala. Communications were, however, inadequate and in order to improve them mobile W.I.S. sets had to be employed (incorrectly) between Divisions and Brigades and advanced landing grounds and aerodromes. Within a few days additional W.I.S. sets became available and these were used on their legitimate tasks of reporting the presence of enemy aircraft, but at no time during this month (January) were the communications satisfactory.

Air Plan of Operations.

The air operations were planned exclusively for the support of the military campaign, and a Squadron Leader was detailed to co-ordinate co-operation between the A.C. aircraft and the Army. The role of the R.A.F. Units was arranged as follows:-

Ibid.

- (a) Fighters. These were to carry out offensive patrols some distance behind the opposing forces, and to act on escort duty to bombing and photographic aircraft. In order to intercept enemy aircraft two fighters were to be kept on immediate call both at Sabdaret and Tessenei landing grounds, and a W.I.S. unit was formed between these fighter aircraft and the forward positions by placing the W.I.S. sets with forward Brigade Headquarters and on the landing grounds.
- (b) Bombers. These were to be employed on suitable targets on the enemy's lines of communications.
- (c) A.C. aircraft. The Vincents and Gauntlets of No.430 Flight were intended for close support bombing and low flying attacks as requested by the Divisional Commanders. (As events transpires the Gauntlets were so employed and were /frequently

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frequently held on call either at Sabdaret or Tessenei for suitable targets reported by pilots or by our forward troops. The Vincents were used almost exclusively as "hacks" in transporting petrol, bombs, etc. to forward positions, and generally assisting the R.A.F. Units in their moves to forward landing grounds). Two Flights of the No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron were placed under control of the 4th and 5th Indian Divisions respectively for employment on tactical reconnaissances and dive-bombing attacks.

On 18 January - the day before the Army's attack - five Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron bombed Barentu and Um Hagar aerodromes, and four Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron bombed Agordat aerodrome, the object of these attacks being to render these aerodromes unfit for the enemy's use<sup>1</sup>.

## The Advance.

Gen. Platt's Despatch  
"Ops. in Eritrea  
1 Dec. '40 to  
26 Aug. '41" Enc. to  
CS.18122 and  
"The Tiger Strikes".

Meanwhile, on 18 January the Army had established a provisional Advanced Headquarters at the Butana Bridge. On the same evening it was found that the enemy had in fact evacuated Kassala, and Major-General Platt gave orders for an immediate pursuit. The 5th Division was directed to advance to Tessenei and Aicota ready to exploit towards Barentu or Biscia, while the 4th Division (led by Gazelle Force) was directed to Sabdaret and thence to Wachai and Keru. Both Divisions found the roads sown with land-mines but by 21 January the 5th had occupied Aicota and the 4th

/were up against  
1. Barentu was attacked with 250 lb. bombs from a height of 3,500 feet. Several of the bombs were delayed action of 6, 12, 18 and 24 hours. At Um Hagar 250 lb. 25 lb. and 20 lb. bombs were used from 2,000 feet. At Agordat 250 lb. bombs were used with delayed action of 1 second, 6, 12, 18 and 24 hours, from 5,000 feet.

were up against the Keru Gorge held by a Brigade of five Colonial Battalions. On 22 January the 5th Division (which had occupied Aicota) joined in the attack on Keru which was captured on 24 January, the Italian Brigade Commander, his staff and 800 troops being taken prisoner. On the following day (23 January) the enemy's garrison of Um Hagar abandoned their position and joined in the retreat.

The enemy now concentrated some 12,000 infantry, 76 guns and medium and light tanks at Agordat. This town lies on the Baraka River and is joined by both road and railway with Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, some 70 miles to the east. About mid-way between (but somewhat to the north of) Agordat and Asmara the road and railway pass through the town of Keren which lies in an almost impregnable position behind a wall of mountain ridges rising suddenly to a height of 2,500 feet above the plateau, with a number of peaks towering above the ridges<sup>1</sup>. From Asmara the road and railway lead in a north-easterly direction to the port of Massawa some 45 miles distant. The capture of Agordat, Keren, Asmara and Massawa and the liquidation of the enemy's forces concentrated therein (which meant virtually the conquest of Eritrea) now became the main objectives of our forces.

The Army now pushed on towards Agordat, and on 25 January the enemy abandoned Biscia which was occupied by out troops. On 26 January the 4th Division began to reconnoitre the enemy's defences west of Agordat while the 5th Division - augmented by the 5th Brigade which had been rushed up in lorries from Kassala<sup>2</sup> - attacked Barentu. On 1 February Agordat was captured and on that night the enemy evacuated Barentu which was occupied by the 5th Division.

/A large

1. From Kassala the whole country is mountainous - the plateau west of Keren being at an altitude of approx. 3,300 feet.
2. The 5th Brigade had, fortunately, reached the Sudan several days before it was expected.

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A large quantity of war material and guns fell into our hands at Agordat, but numbers of the enemy escaped by a track to the north of the Baraka River on which the town is situated and reached Keren.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "A" to  
Form 540 Entry of  
4 Feb. '41.

Meanwhile the Royal Air Force had assisted the Army in accordance with its plan of operations<sup>1</sup> by offensive patrols, daily tactical and photographic reconnaissances, and bombing attacks on the retreating enemy's lines of communications. The enemy's retreat was so rapid that it was soon possible to use advanced landing grounds at Tessanoi, Sabdaret and other forward localities and to establish A.C. Flights at these places which were employed to a great extent on offensive reconnaissances. The

A.C. Slatter's  
"Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc" June '40  
- May 1941.  
(A.H.B. II J7/2).

advent of the Hurricane aircraft of No.1 S.A.A.F. Squadron gave the R.A.F. air superiority "to an astonishing degree", and full use was made of these aircraft in attacks on enemy aerodromes. As the advance progressed large scale attacks on "back" aerodromes were carried out at the extreme range of 150 miles from captured enemy aerodromes and landing grounds. These operations included a level

No.203 Group  
Appx. "A" to  
Entry of 4 Feb. '41.

and  
No.254 Wing Form  
540 Entries of  
28 Jan - 3 Feb. '41.

bombing attack from 5,400 feet with 20 x 250 lb. bombs on a railway bridge near Keren by No.223 Squadron on 27 January, and on the same day four tactical reconnaissances were carried out in the Barentu - Agordat - Biscia area. An enemy M.T. Column near Barentu was ground- strafed, and a combined bomber and fighter attack was made on enemy aircraft at the Gura and Mai Edaga aerodromes; the railway station at Saati was bombed, and six Gladiators of No.1 S.A.A.F. Squadron attacked dispersed aircraft at Gura obtaining several hits. On 28 January three Blenheims of No.14 Squadron attacked the railway

/sidings at

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1. See page 77 supra.

sidings at Keren and six Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron made a bombing raid from 3,000 feet on the road-rail bridge at Shaikatu near Asmara dropping 500 lb., 250 lb. 40 lb. and 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries, and on the same day a single Hurricane attacked the aerodromes at Asmara and Gura. At Asmara three S.79s were shot up and at Gura hits were obtained on one S.79, one S.81 and two CA.133s.

Ibid.

On 29 January No.14 Squadron raided Gura damaging two CR.42s. which endeavoured to intercept, and No.223 Squadron attacked the Agordat - Keren road from a height of 600 feet, scoring several hits with 500 lb. bombs. Later the same day eight Hurricanes and five Gladiators of No.1 S.A.A.F. Squadron attacked Gura but were intercepted by ten CR.42s and one S.70; five CR.42s and the S.79, were shot down, our own aircraft returning safely.

S.A.A.F. Records:  
No.1 Sqdn. (Short  
history of).

No.203 Group  
Appx. "A" to  
Form 540 Entry of  
4 Feb. '41 and  
No.254 Wing  
Form 540 Entries of  
28 Jan. - 3 Feb. '41.

During the next five days numerous attacks were made on enemy M.T. convoys, positions, railway stations and aerodromes, including a ground-strafting attack at Teramini<sup>1</sup> by four Hurricanes on four S.79s of which two were set on fire and burnt out while a third was left smouldering. On 3 February No.14 and No.223 Squadrons attacked Gura when numerous direct hits were scored on buildings and hangars, and Gladiators of No.1 S.A.A.F. ground-strafted Azozo aerodrome and its satellite when five C.A.133s were set on fire and an S.81 damaged: during this operation three C.R.42s intercepted, of which one was shot down.

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc"  
(A.H.B. II J7/2) &  
No.203 Group  
"Summary of Ops."  
Jan. '41 attached to  
Form 540 Entry of  
31 Jan. '41.

The speed of the Army's advance necessitated the movement forward of the Army Co-operation and Fighter Squadrons, the two A.C. Flights of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron occupying Aroma, Sabderat, Keru, Agordat<sup>1</sup>; and Girba, Tessenei, Barentu, Umritsar (12 miles west of Agordat) respectively: No.1 (Fighter) Squadron S.A.A.F.

/moved up

1. Situated some 25 miles south-west of Asmara.

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moved up from Oxo to Kassala and maintained Agordat as an advanced landing-ground; and No.47 Squadron moved up from the Gedaref area to Kassala and thence to Agordat.

Meanwhile it had been found necessary to form an Advanced Wing Headquarters at Kassala in view of the distances of operations from the Headquarters of No.203 Group, Khartoum.

The Assault of Keren.

Gen. Platt's  
Despatch "Ops. in  
Eritrea etc.  
1 Dec. '40 to  
26 Aug. '41"  
Enc. to CS.18122 and  
"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

After the fall of Agordat and Barentu the Army pushed on to attack Keren where the Italians were hastily concentrating the final strategic reserve of their Eritrean army. As the last remnants of their retreating troops from Agordat passed through the narrow gorge in the mountains which leads from the plateau to Keren the Italians blew down 200 yards of cliff thus blocking the only gateway to their stronghold. They had also wrecked the Ponte Mussolini - a huge steel bridge over the Baraka River to the east of Agordat - and had strewn the dry bed of the river with land-mines. The consequent eight hours delay to our troops while the Baraka river bed was being cleared for motor traffic gave time for the Italian reinforcements to reach Keren before our forces could get there. The result of this check at the Baraka meant that we had to assault Keren - "the most formidable obstacle in the whole history of mountain warfare"<sup>1</sup> - in a series of operations which occupied two months of bitter fighting before the position could be captured.

The forces which the enemy concentrated at Keren approximated some 25,000 men and over a hundred guns - with almost unbreakable natural defences and complete observation of any attacking force approaching from the plateau. On 3 February the 4th Division made the initial assault and succeeded in storming the outlying peaks, but

/by 12 February

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1. P. Guedalla: "Middle East, 1940-42 - A Study in Air Power".



by 12 February the troops were unable to advance further and the attempt had to be abandoned. Our forces were, however, able to hold on to "Cameron Ridge"<sup>1</sup> (which rises just below the Sanchil Ridge whose capture would dominate the Keren position), but it was now evident that the whole of our forces in the Sudan would be required for the final assault. This entailed four weeks spent in bringing up the necessary supplies and material for the offensive while the troops hung on to "Cameron Ridge" despite a daily toll of 20 to 30 casualties.

Keren - Support by the Air Forces.

No. 203 Group  
Appx. "J" to Form  
540 Entry of  
17 Feb. '41.

Meanwhile the Royal and South African Air Forces were co-operating with the Army to the fullest extent<sup>2</sup>. Enemy positions, gun emplacements, stores and communications became the principal targets which were bombed continually by our Wellesleys, Blenheims, Hardys and Gauntlets. On 4 February two Wellesleys of No. 47 Squadron bombed Keren railway station from 7,000 feet, with 40 lb. and 20 lb. bombs, registering direct hits and starting fires, and on the same day two Blenheims of No. 14 Squadron bombed M.T. vehicles on the Keren - Asmara road, and three Blenheims of the same squadron bombed the hangars and aerodrome buildings at Gura scoring direct hits. Next day (5 February) three combined bombing and reconnaissance sorties were made by Hardys of No. 237 (Rhodesian) Squadron on enemy defences west of Keren. The railway bridge at Habi Mental south-east of Keren was struck by a salvo of bombs and other bombs burst among M.T. vehicles on the adjacent road; other M.T. was dive-bombed. On the following day Hardys of No. 237 (Rhodesian) Squadron dive-bombed a train in the Keren - Habi Mental section of the railway scoring two

/direct hits

1. Named after the 2nd Camerons who captured it.
2. This included a complete system of communications between the Army and the R.A.F., an account of which is given in Appendix "H".

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No.203 Group  
Appx. "J" to Form  
540 Entry of  
17 Feb. '41.

direct hits on coaches, and three other Hardys of this Squadron dive-bombed and machine-gunned enemy defences in the Keren area. On 7 February six Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron raided suspected gun-emplacements near Keren, and two Hardys of No.237 Squadron reconnoitred the railway yards at Keren: on the return journey one of these aircraft was attacked by a C.R.42 and shot down in flames. During the next five days Keren and Asmara railway stations were attacked successfully, artillery positions and supply dumps near Keren were bombed, and enemy communications and troop positions were harassed. During this period Hurricanes of No.1 S.A.A.F. Squadron carried out offensive patrols on the aerodrome at Bahr Dar, where they machine-gunned three CA.33s and also on Asmara and Gura aerodromes and suspected satellite aerodromes at Terramini (Eritrea), Selassie, Adowa, Axum and Adigrat (Abyssinia).

During an offensive patrol by six Hurricanes on 10 February two C.R.42s of a formation of five were shot down in flames, none of the Hurricanes being damaged. The enemy, however, appeared to have been influenced by the R.A.F.'s<sup>1</sup> "ground-strafting" attacks which they emulated successfully on two occasions, namely on 8 February when five C.R.42s destroyed six of our aircraft and severely damaged four others on our advanced landing ground at Agordat, and on 9 February when five C.R.42s attacked the same landing ground destroying one Hurricane and damaging two others.

#### The Karora Offensive.

Gen. Platt's  
Despatch "Ops. in  
Eritrea etc. 1 Dec.  
'40 - 26 Aug '41."  
Enc. CS.18122

While the operations at Keren were in progress part of the 7th Infantry Brigade (4th Division) was operating from Port Sudan with a Free French force

/in an

1. The R.A.F. includes the S.A.A.F. when thus mentioned in general terms.

in an attack on Karora (situated on the Sudan - Eritrea frontier some 30 miles from the Red Sea coast) with the intention of advancing on Keren from the north. On 19 February this composite force (known as the 7th Brigade Group) captured Mersa Taklai (on the coast) and Karora on 12 February. A few days later Kub-Kub fell, and by 1 March the 7th Brigade Group cleared the Mascelit Pass (15 miles north-west of Keren) and thereby drew off a considerable part of the Keren garrison.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "N" to  
Form 540 Entry  
of 26 Feb. '41.

The Royal Air Force assisted in these operations by carrying out offensive patrols over the area, and on 13 February Blenheims of No.14 Squadron bombed a large enemy

No.203 Group  
App. "G" to Form  
540 Entry of  
7 March '41.

encampment at Kub-Kub. On 24 February three Gladiators of "K" Flight from Port Sudan were sent to the Kub-Kub area where they covered the movements of our troops by offensive patrols. On 27 February one Gladiator shot down a C.R.42 near Kub-Kub, and covering patrols were maintained over the troops for several days.

#### The Keren Front.

No.203 Group  
App. "N" to  
Form 540 Entry  
of 26 Feb. '41.

The consolidation of the territorial gains made by the Army in its advance on Keren secured to the Royal Air Force the use of landing grounds so far advanced that many of the enemy's bases in Eritrea and northern Abyssinia were brought within range of our fighters and resulted in heavy destruction of enemy aircraft on the ground. There was also a very marked decrease in enemy air activity, and their bombing attacks became of almost negligible importance.

On 13 February six Gauntlets attacked Keren railway station obtaining direct hits on buildings, and on the same day dive-bombing sorties were made against artillery positions by Hardys of No.237 Squadron. On 15 February two Vincents of No.430 (A.C.) Flight covered the withdrawal of our troops on one sector of the Keren defences and then dive-

/bombed

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bombed Keren railway station, starting several fires among the buildings.

During the next few days bombing attacks were made on the railway near Habi Mentel and artillery positions and supply dumps near Keren, and also on the rolling stock on the Keren - Asmara section of the railway. Meanwhile on the night of 14/15 February eight Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron bombed the Caproni workshops at Mai Edaga from a height of 3,000 feet. 500 lb. and 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries were dropped, to a total weight of 10,700 lbs. Direct hits were claimed on the hangars but no fires or explosions resulted. The raid was repeated (in daylight) on 16 February by fifteen Wellesleys of Nos.47 and 223 Squadrons, escorted by four Hurricanes, dropping 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries. All the main workshop hangars received direct hits and many of the smaller buildings were destroyed. This was a most successful attack as proved by photographs taken at the time<sup>1</sup>. The escorting Hurricanes destroyed two S.79s at Gura; all our aircraft returned safely from this operation.

On the following day (17 February) No.223 Squadron made two sorties against enemy positions near Keren, and on 19 February five Wellesleys of the same squadron attacked the post office, telephone exchange and other targets in Asmara from a height of 4,500 feet, dropping 500 lb. and 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries, a total weight of 7,900 lbs., while five Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron successfully attacked the Asmara aerodrome. The Wellesleys were escorted by ten Hurricanes which attacked four C.R.42s, four S.79s, two S.81s and five C.A.133s dispersed on the landing ground. Of these, they destroyed three S.79s, two C.A.133s and two C.R.42s, /leaving

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1. Three photos. attached as Appx. "C" to No.233 Sqdn's Form 540 of 16 Feb. '41. all show bombs bursting right on the target.

leaving a third C.R.42 smouldering; two of the Hurricanes were slightly damaged.

During the period 12 to 19 February Hurricanes made several offensive patrols in the Keren - Gura - Asmara area meeting with very little enemy opposition. On 20/21 February two Hurricanes made an offensive reconnaissance over Axum, Adowa, Adi Ugri and Teramini, when they set on fire a petrol dump at Adi Ugri estimated to contain about 4,000 gallons. Next morning one of these Hurricanes repeated the attack, a further 2,000 gallons of petrol and five lorries (which were engaged in removing the residue of the petrol) being destroyed.

On the same day (21 February) six aircraft of No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. raided Massawa aerodrome on which were six hangars filled with enemy aircraft. Our pilots set fire to all the hangars in spite of heavy anti-aircraft fire. Meanwhile a new forward aerodrome had been constructed at Tole and using this as an advanced Landing ground No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. attacked Makalle<sup>1</sup> aerodrome on 23 February and burnt out five S.79s and three C.R.42s (which had been observed during a reconnaissance); one of our aircraft was shot down, the pilot (Major Wilmot - O.C. of the Squadron) being captured.

S.A.A.F. Records  
No.1 Sqdn. (Short  
History of)

No.203 Group  
Appx. "G" to Form  
540 Entry of  
7 March '41.

In the following week six bombing attacks were made on enemy positions in the Keren area by individual aircraft, and trenches and gun emplacements were bombed once by five Blenheims of No.14 Squadron<sup>2</sup> and six times by formations of three Wellesleys of Nos.47 and 223 Squadrons. Over 12,000 lbs. of bombs were dropped, from heights between 1,500 and 3,000 feet. Meanwhile the fighter aircraft continued their activities and inflicted considerable

/damage

1. Makalle is approx. 150 miles north of Massawa: it was an extreme range attack for the Hurricanes.
2. Blenheims of No.14 Sqdn. from Port Sudan assisted in the Keren operations.

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A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc. June 1940-  
May 1941"  
(A.F.B. II J7/2)

damage on enemy aircraft and aerodromes. It was subsequently learnt from the Italian Viceroy of Abyssinia, the Duke D'Aosta<sup>1</sup>, that this and other long range attacks on enemy aerodromes were most demoralising and resulted in the whole of the Italian Air Force being withdrawn from bases in Eritrea.

In the course of the next eight days Hurricanes carried out several offensive patrols in the Keren - Asmara areas during which they destroyed four M.T. vehicles; they also attacked and burnt a petrol dump at Zula aerodrome.<sup>2</sup>

On 24 February a Single Hurricane while on offensive patrol over Zula aerodrome blew up a hangar in which was an aircraft believed to have been an S.82, and on 3 March three Hurricanes revisited Zula and in the absence of any aircraft to attack they burned up a petrol dump estimated to contain 1,000 gallons.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "F" to Form  
540 Entry of  
17 March '41.

The period from 4 to 12 March was occupied in continued bombing attacks and reconnaissances in the Keren area and along the enemy's lines of communication, ten Wellesley and six Hardy bombing sorties being made on these objectives. On 5 March two Blenheims of No.14 Squadron attacked the Keren - Asmara road without meeting any opposition, and six Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron bombed Asmara railway station from heights ranging from 3,000 to 4,500 feet, dropping 24 x 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries and obtaining many direct hits on the track and adjacent buildings. On the following day (6 March) Advanced Group Headquarters was established at Agordat under command of the S.A.S.O., Group Captain G.O. Venn, who flew from Khartoum to take over<sup>3</sup>. On 7 March

No.203 Group  
Form 540, Entry of  
6 March '41.

1. The Duke surrendered to our forces at Amba Alagi on 18 May 1941 (as will appear hereafter on page 181 *infra*.)
2. Zula is approx. 30 miles south of Massawa.
3. A chart showing the dispositions of the Sqdns. during the operations at Keren is given in Appendix "J" (Nos.203 Group Records).

Blenheims and Wellesleys of Nos. 14 and 223 Squadrons bombed the Keren - Asmara road, and on 10 March three Wellesleys of No. 223 Squadron bombed a bridge on this road over the Mogardal valley. On the same day two Blenheims of No. 14 Squadron attacked the railway bridge over the Anseba River, and on 12 March two Blenheims of No. 14 Squadron and two Wellesleys of No. 223 Squadron patrolled and bombed the Keren - Asmara road to impede enemy transport.

Meanwhile the Hurricanes had maintained their offensive patrols over enemy aerodromes and petrol dumps and had caused considerable damage to enemy aircraft, M.T. vehicles, and personnel.

In addition to its other activities the Royal Air Force obtained satisfactory results by means of pamphlet-eering. A large number of pamphlets written in Amharic and Tigrean script and bearing the Great Seal of Abyssinia and the Royal Arms of England were dropped over Keren to encourage the enemy's Abyssinian and Eritrean native troops to desert. These pamphlets met with an encouraging response, large numbers of the native troops coming over to our lines as a result of this propaganda.

Throughout the whole period of the Keren operations photographic reconnaissances of enemy positions were carried out assiduously.

During the period 22 February to 12 March there was practically no enemy air activity - a sufficient indication of the air superiority which our Air Forces had achieved in the course of the campaign.

#### The Capture of Keren.

Meanwhile the Army had mustered its full strength for the final assault on Keren which was fixed for 15 March. On the day before the assault (14 March) a Wellesley of No. 223 Squadron dived to within fifty feet

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1. Pamphlets had been used since the early days of the war. Translations of pamphlets (numbered "A", "B" and "D") are given in Appendix "G".

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of an enemy ammunition train of forty trucks carrying 20,000 shells and set it on fire by machine-gunning, many explosions resulting and the train being destroyed.

The Royal and South African Air Forces gave the maximum close support<sup>1</sup> to the Army for the assault on 15 March. As the troops moved forward to the attack a constant stream of Blenheims, Wellesleys and Hardys from Nos.14, 47, 223 and 237 Squadrons bombed and dive-bombed the enemy positions dropping over 35,800 lbs. of bombs, while six Lysanders of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron made artillery reconnaissances. Next day intensive bombing and "ground-strafting" was continued by forty Wellesley, fifteen Blenheim, nine Gauntlet and eleven Hardy sorties, besides twelve tactical and artillery reconnaissances by the Lysanders. Our losses from all these eighty-seven sorties amounted to one Wellesley and one Hardy. On the same day (16 March) four Gladiators of "K" Flight made offensive patrols on the Keren - Asmara road and attacked M.T. vehicles.

On 17 March the intensive bombing and "ground-strafting" of the Keren area was repeated, and an attack was also made by six Blenheims of No.14 Squadron on the Fiat premises at Asmara; standing patrols of our fighters over the battle area accounted for nineteen sorties of the Hurricanes and thirteen sorties of the Gladiators. Next day the Blenheims of No.14 Squadron repeated their attack on Asmara and encountered heavy A.A. fire. The Hurricanes supported by the Gladiators of "K" Flight made several sorties over the battle area. These offensive patrols were maintained for the next ten days while the Army was battering its way through the Keren defences. At one period our troops ran short of

<sup>1</sup>. An account of the close support by the R.A.F. is given in Appendix "H".



ammunition and food which had to be dropped for them by a Vincent (of No.237 Squadron) and one of the Wellesleys respectively.<sup>1</sup>

No.203 Group  
Appx. "G" to  
Form 540 Entry of  
6 April '41.

During these final days of the assault the enemy Air Force - after a long period of inactivity - was again in the air and their fighters carried out a number of patrols. They were, however, loath to engage our Hurricanes unless with superior numbers and from an initially advantageous position of attack.

On 25 March the final assault on Keren was begun, and on the night of 26/27 March the enemy was forced to evacuate the position. Their morale had been terribly shaken by the "torment" caused by the R.A.F.'s incessant bombing and "ground strafing" and the Army's artillery barrage<sup>2</sup>.

The victory of Keren virtually broke the Italians' power in Eritrea. Its results were of great importance for it led to the capture of Asmara and Massawa thus opening the Red Sea to our ships and for American war material in American ships to reach Egypt. It also released the 4th Division for further work in the Western Desert and Syria.

Summary of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F.'s Achievements.

The great value of the assistance which the Royal and South African Air Forces rendered to the Army from the opening of the campaign until the capture of Keren is evidenced by Major-General Platt's statement that "The R.A.F. with their variety of machines from Hurricanes to Vincents had gained air superiority. By a continuous forward policy they had driven their opponents from the air and had destroyed their machines on the ground. The Army was indeed grateful for the immunity /from hostile

Gen. Platt's  
Despatch "Ops. in  
Eritrea etc. 1 Dec.  
'40 - 26 Aug. '41"  
Enc. to CS.18122

1. For an account of the method employed see Appendix "H".  
2. Taken from the Italian Gen. Frusci's diary: (see "The Abyssinian Campaigns").

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hostile air attack thus gained."

No.203 Group  
Appx. "G" to Form  
540 Entry of  
6 April '41.

It is probable that the chief factor in achieving air superiority was the operations of No.1 (Fighter) Squadron S.A.A.F. which had been carried out (from captured enemy landing grounds) over the enemy's main air bases and which had resulted in the destruction of enemy aircraft on the ground and in the air. Although a distance of 160 miles had to be flown to and from the first of the objectives - Gura aerodrome - the operation achieved complete surprise and considerable success. The subsequent operations made against Massawa, Zula, Adi Ugri, Teramini and Makalle were also successful, and the number of enemy aircraft destroyed in combat or by "ground-strafting" during the period of our advance from Kassala (19 January) to the fall of Keren (27 March) had amounted to forty two bombers and twenty eight fighters - a total of seventy aircraft - which were all destroyed by No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F. In addition to these losses a large number of enemy aircraft were damaged during combats and ground-strafting attacks, and also an unknown number in bombed hangars.

The achievement of air superiority by our Air Forces can hardly be over-estimated for there seems no doubt that without this air superiority the successful assault of Keren could not have been accomplished. In the opinion of the A.O.C., "this battle taxed our military resources to the utmost, and when it is considered that the deployment of both Indian Divisions with all their artillery, ammunition and stores necessary for the operation was done down a single road in a valley which was under complete observation from Observation Posts situated on the heights to the west of Keren, it is safe to assume that without complete air superiority the

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the Sudan  
etc. June 1940 -  
May 1941".  
(A.H.B. II J7/2).

/preparations

preparations necessary for the battle could never have been made."

Ibid

During the battle itself the R.A.F.'s air support covered the additional roles of artillery observation and supply dropping of rations and ammunition to the troops. Very close support was carried out on several occasions to assist the Infantry in scaling almost inaccessible heights, and the bombing of the defences of Keren was carried out with the utmost intensity. The Italian prisoners all admitted the demoralising and damaging effects of the bombing and dive-bombing to which they had been subjected<sup>1</sup>.

The Capture of Asmara and Massawa.

The remnants of the battered Italian forces retreated to Asmara which stands in the centre of a plateau "The Tiger Strikes" some 3,000 feet higher than Keren. A little more than half-way between Keren and Asmara the road passes through Ad Teclesan which is situated at the end of the hills before the plateau is reached. The road at this point is cut out of the side of the hills and here the Italians had prepared a strongly defended position; they had also blocked the road in several places by demolition.

As already stated<sup>2</sup> the 4th Indian Division was now released for other spheres of fighting, and the 5th Indian Division carried on the campaign alone (except for the 7th Brigade which was concentrated at Kelamet preparatory to advancing along the Red Sea littoral towards Massawa). The 5th Division forced the Ad Teclesan position on 1 April and on the same day Asmara was declared an open town and was occupied by our forces. The enemy retreated to Massawa closely pursued by the 5th Division, while the 7th Infantry Brigade advanced south towards Massawa from Kelamet.

Gen. Platt's  
Despatch "Ops. In  
Eritrea etc.  
1 Dec. '40 -  
26 Aug. '41".  
Enc. to CS.18122

/On 5 April

1. An account of R.A.F. bombing tactics and artillery observation at the battle of Keren is given in Appendix "H".
2. On page 91 supra.

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On 5 April the Italian Commander at Massawa sent in a flag of truce asking for terms which he received and refused, and on 7 April the port was attacked: it surrendered on the following day. As a last gesture of defiance the Italians had scuttled thirty of their ships in the harbour and had demolished part of the quays: but the affair had been bungled and many of the thirty vessels were subsequently salvaged by our Naval forces.

## Support of the Air Forces at Asmara.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "G" to  
Form 540 Entry of  
6 April '41.

The fall of Keren and the capture of Asmara was the culminating point of a period of intense co-operation between the Royal Air Force and the British Army in the Eritrean campaign.

On the day that Keren fell (27 March) the R.A.F. attacked repeatedly the enemy's line of retreat and the town of Asmara: five Vincents and eleven Gauntlets of No.430 (A.C.) Flight dive-bombed and machine-gunned M.T. on the Keren - Asmara and Asmara - Gondar roads when twenty five lorries were damaged, one Vincent being shot down. On the same day six Wellesley sorties of No.223 Squadron were made against enemy positions east and north-east of Keren and the Ad Teclesan area. The Hardys and Lysanders of No.237 Squadron carried out many "ground-strafting" sorties inflicting heavy casualties on the retreating enemy. During these operations three C.R.42s attacked a formation of three Lysanders; one Lysander was damaged and one C.R.42 was damaged and subsequently crashed. On 28 March sorties by three Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron and two Blenheims of No.14 Squadron bombed enemy positions at Ad Teclesan with 250 lb, 40 lb. and 20 lb. bombs, and Hardys and Lysanders of No.237

Squadron dive-bombed enemy troops and M.T. between Ad Teclesan and Asmara destroying two lorries and dragging seven others. On 29 March Wellesleys of Nos.47 and 223 Squadrons attacked Asmara station from a height of 6,800 feet with 500 lb. and

500 lb. and 250 lb. bombs scoring several direct hits on the railway track and station, and on the same day four Blenheims of No.14 Squadron bombed the Caproni workshops at Asmara and started several fires.

On 30 March seven Wellesleys of Nos.47 and 223 Squadrons and five Blenheims of No.14 Squadron bombed the railway station buildings at Asmara causing fires and explosions, and on the same day Lysanders of No.237 Squadron made tactical reconnaissances over Ad Teclesan and dive-bombed a military encampment at Asmara<sup>1</sup>; at the same time three Hardys of the same squadron dive-bombed warehouses in Asmara scoring direct hits on buildings, and on 1 April aircraft of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron attacked transport retreating from Asmara and inflicted considerable damage. Meanwhile on 31 March fourteen Wellesley, eight Gauntlet, ten Hardy, eleven Lysander and one Vincent bombing sorties were made over enemy positions at Ad Teclesan.

On the same day (31 March) General de Gaulle (who had arrived by air from Khartoum on 26 March) flew over Keren in a Free French Blenheim.

Meanwhile the Hurricanes and Gladiators carried out continual patrols and sorties over the Keren - Asmara road and railway and Asmara town. On 28 March six Hurricanes made thirteen sorties over the line of enemy retreat, and next day there were eight Hurricane sorties on offensive patrols and bomber escorts: during these operations a single Hurricane attacked three S.79s over Keren which took avoiding action and escaped in the haze.

On 30 March five Hurricanes made fourteen sorties on offensive patrols in the Keren - Asmara - Decamere

/area: no

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1. According to "The Abyssinian Campaigns" the Lysanders on this reconnaissance dived into the mouth of a railway tunnel (where the railway runs parallel to the road) to see if the tunnel was clear for a feint movement by our troops along the railway line. This is not, however, mentioned in Forms 540 or 541 of the Squadron.

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area: no enemy aircraft were encountered. On the following day four Hurricane offensive patrols of two aircraft each were made over the Ad Teclesan area. The first patrol met and attacked three S.79s; one Hurricane was hit but the other pressed home the attack and the S.79s made off, one with its starboard engine on fire and another with its undercarriage hanging down. One Hurricane failed to return.

On 1 April there were eleven Hurricane sorties on offensive and "ground-strafting" patrols covering the roads leading south and east from Asmara, during which an enemy heavy battery drawn by tractors was attacked and brought to a standstill by a single Hurricane; this battery was again attacked later in the day by another Hurricane.

On 5 April five Hurricanes machine-gunned enemy troops and transport in the Gondar area when an S.81 on Azozo aerodrome was "ground-strafted" and severely damaged. Heavy small arms fire was encountered at Gondar and all the five Hurricanes sustained superficial damage from hits.

During the period between the captures of Keren (27 March) and Massawa (8 April) the enemy Air Force was little in evidence. A few half-hearted sorties were made by their fighters over the Keren area, and three S.79s bombed Keren on the morning after its capture by our forces.

## Operations of the R.A.F. at Massawa.

Ibid.

In the meantime the Royal Air Force - in co-operation with the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy - afforded valuable air support for the attack on Massawa. Between 26 March and 1 April No.14 Squadron's Blenheims made eight sorties for visual and photographic reconnaissance

/of enemy

of enemy shipping at Massawa, and on 1 April their reconnaissance showed that three enemy destroyers had left that port. Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm<sup>1</sup> and Blenheims of No.14 Squadron were sent out to search for them, and on 3 April four destroyers were sighted east of Port Sudan. One of these was sunk by Swordfish aircraft and another - which had been damaged - was sunk by the Blenheims. The other two destroyers were discovered aground near Jiddah on the Hejaz coast and were attacked and destroyed by the Blenheims and by Wellesleys of No.223 Squadron with 500 lb. and 250 lb. bombs.

On 8 April (the day that Massawa surrendered) Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron bombed enemy gun emplacements and positions of this town while aircraft of No.223 Squadron bombed ships in the harbour which were shelling our advancing troops. At the same time No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron attacked forts and troop positions on Mount Umberto and shipping in the harbour, scoring a direct hit on one vessel.

The attack on the enemy destroyers on 3 April was the last operation of No.14 Squadron in the Red Sea as on 8 April it was moved to Egypt, the conquest of Eritrea - which culminated in the capture of Massawa - having virtually freed the Red Sea from the menace of enemy attacks.

On 3 April the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East arrived at Khartoum for a conference on 5 April at which the A.O.C's Aden, Kenya<sup>2</sup> and the Sudan, were present. At the conference the question (inter alia) of the minimum forces necessary for Eritrea and Abyssinia was discussed with particular reference to the urgency of removing from these areas to other theatres those Squadrons which were

/already

No.203 Group  
Appx. "E" to Form  
540 Entry of  
5 April '41.

1. Based on Port Sudan.

2. the A.O.C's Aden and Kenya arrived on 5 April.

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already equipped with modern types of aircraft.

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch Jan.-May  
1941.  
(A.H.B. II J1/8).

The successful issue of the campaign in Eritrea coupled with the destruction of the Italian Air Force on all fronts in East Africa<sup>1</sup> enabled the greater part of the R.A.F. Squadrons in the Sudan to be transferred, and No.1 Squadron S.A.A.F., Nos.14 and 223 Squadrons, "K" Flight and No.403 Flight were moved to Egypt, leaving in the Sudan only No.47 Squadron (Wellesleys), No.257 (Rhodesian) Squadron (Hardys, Lysanders and Gauntlets), the Free French Flight (Blenheim IVs) and three JU.52s (transport aircraft) of No.51 Flight, S.A.A.F.

## R.A.F. Supply and Maintenance.

Communicated by  
A.M. Sir L. Slatter.

The Royal Air Force supplies of ammunition, bombs, spare parts and engines were shipped through Port Sudan and moved as far as possible by rail as required, and stocks of petrol and bombs were built up at Port Sudan, Khartoum, Sennar and Cedaref.

No.203 Group  
Appxs. "J" and "O"  
to Form 540 Entries  
of 8 and 15 March '41.

From the opening of the Eritrean campaign in January the R.A.F. units obtained their supplies largely from their Railhead Detachment located at Kassala. The rapid advance of our forces necessitated a branch line from the railway for transporting supplies and this was constructed from Malaiyia (20 miles south-west of Kassala) to Tessenei, and was completed by 15 March. The R.A.F. Railhead Detachment at Kassala then moved to Tessenei; its functions were to send up supplies of petrol, oil, explosives and equipment to the forward areas.

Major repairs to and overhauls of aircraft were carried out at the Aircraft Repair Depot, Khartoum. There was also No.251 Maintenance and Repair Unit at Port Sudan, and No.52 Repair and Salvage Unit (at

/Wadi Gazouza)

1. i.e. including the Italian losses in our attack from Kenya.



Wadi Gazouza<sup>1</sup>) which moved up to Kassala and thence to Agordat and Asmara with the Advanced Air Headquarters. Meanwhile an M/T Repair Section of this Unit was formed at Tessenei under the Railhead Detachment, Kassala, to undertake repairs and salvage in the field. On 21 March an Aircraft Repair and Salvage Section was formed at Barentu. This Section was responsible for repairing all aircraft within its capacity, and for returning those aircraft which were beyond its capacity to the Aircraft Depot at Khartoum.

No. 203 Group  
Appxs. "R" and "U"  
to Form 540 Entries  
of 20 and 25 March  
'41.

Communicated by  
A.M. Sir L. Slatter.

The problem of maintaining and operating the Squadrons was very difficult, but owing to the fact that Advanced Air Headquarters was in reality part of Corps Headquarters the A.O.C. was able to establish his requirements at the daily conferences with the Army which rendered all the assistance that it could. The Royal Air Force had its quota of lorries in the Army's supply train, and it was generously treated with regard to the movement of its supplies by rail; it also had a small amount of air transport for use in emergency but this was not always sufficient, and during the advance from Kassala some of the bombers had to be used to transport petrol to stock up the advanced landing-grounds so that fighter cover might be developed.

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. Sudan Command from 1 November 1940 to 15 April 1941.

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of Air  
Ops. in the Sudan etc. the Sudan Command carried out 1,045 + medium and 269 +  
June 1940 - May 1941".  
(A.H.B. II J7/2)

During the period of Phase II the Royal Air Force of miscellaneous bomber sorties (total 1,314 +), in addition to numerous patrols and convoy escorts to shipping in the Red Sea. Of these bombing sorties 371 medium and 80 miscellaneous (total 451) were carried out during the peak period of the assault on

/Keren

1. See page 62 supra.

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Keren (8-27 March 1941) and 57 medium and 27 miscellaneous (total 84) during the advance from Keren to Asmara (28 March - 8 April 1941).

Ibid.

Aircraft Losses of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F., Sudan Command, 1 November 1940 to 15 April 1941.

The losses of aircraft of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F., of the Sudan Command during the period of Phase II were as follows:-

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| (a) <u>In the Air.</u>   | 16 Medium Bombers<br>8 Miscellaneous Bombers<br>12 Fighters |
| (b) <u>On the Ground</u> | 2 Medium Bombers<br>9 Miscellaneous Bombers<br>2 Fighters   |
| (c) <u>Other Causes</u>  | 8 Medium Bombers<br>5 Miscellaneous Bombers<br>5 Fighters   |

The totals of these losses amount to:-

26 Medium Bombers  
22 Miscellaneous Bombers  
19 Fighters

a total of 67 aircraft in all.

The enemy losses (destroyed) during the same period were:-

1. Confirmed.

- |                           |                           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| (a) <u>In the Air.</u>    | 10 Bombers<br>24 Fighters |
| (b) <u>On the Ground.</u> | 55 Bombers<br>12 Fighters |

a total of 101 aircraft in all.

2. Probable.

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| (a) <u>In the Air.</u>    | 4 Bombers<br>4 Fighters |
| (b) <u>On the Ground.</u> | 5 Bombers<br>4 Fighters |

totalling 17 aircraft.

Lessons of the Campaign.

Ibid.

The following Summary of what the A.O.C. took to be the chief lessons of the campaign may be here included:-

/"(1) Absence

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc.  
June 1940 - May 1941"  
(A.H.B. II J7/2)

- "(1) Absence of Transport aircraft. This made the operations much more difficult. Operations in the Sudan with its enormous distances could have been much more effectively conducted if Transport aircraft had been available in any degree. One Valentia (afterwards destroyed but luckily replaced by the capturing of a Caproni 133)<sup>1</sup> was quite inadequate and it became necessary at times to use operational bombers for the transporting of petrol, bombs, ammunition and personnel to Advanced Landing Grounds.
- "(2) Development of supply dropping apparatus. Requires much more development and it should be supplied in much more generous proportions. Might well be developed in conjunction with provision of suitable Transport aircraft units.
- "(3) The provision of long range fighter aircraft. Most essential as it gives the real answer to the destruction of enemy aircraft on their aerodromes.
- "(4) Absence of Red Cross aircraft. This might well be developed in provision of suitable Transport aircraft units. Improvisation of a service of this sort to get the severely wounded to a base hospital became necessary during the battle of Koron. In a campaign of this nature, the air becomes the only reasonable method of transporting severely wounded from the operational area to a base hospital.
- "(5) The provision of aircraft suitable for Dive Bombing. Essential for attacks on the diverse targets available in a campaign of this nature. Not only for attacks but for attacks on the lines of communication, trains, etc. The difficulties of damaging roads and rail bridges etc. by air action was most evident in this campaign."

Enemy Air Activity.

Ibid. The Italian Fighter pilots displayed surprisingly good fighting qualities. They all had previous experience in the Spanish War and handled the C.R.42s with dash and enterprise.

The attacks on the aerodromes at Gedaref, Goz Regeb and Agordat were very well executed. The attacks were well carried out and the  $\frac{1}{2}$ " machine guns of the C.R.42 were a most effective weapon.

The bombing of Port Sudan was feebly executed. In the early stages a lot of bombs were dropped at Suakin.

/A more

---

1. This aircraft was in fact a C.A. 143 (the C.A.148 was the civil version of the C.A.133): it had left Addis Ababa to evacuate sick families, and by an error on the part of the pilot it landed in recently captured territory and was seized by our forward troops (Nos.205 Group Appx. "J" to Form 540, Entry of 17 Feb. '41.)

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A more determined effort was obviously planned against Port Sudan in December 1940. A large number of S.79s moved up to Asmara and a determined attempt to raid Port Sudan started on December 16th in daylight. (These attacks coincided with the arrival of the 4th Indian Division). However, by this date, 3 Hurricanes were in position at Port Sudan and the enemy attacks petered out on the second day after one S.79 was shot down and about 4 more severely damaged. Cloudy weather made interception most difficult.

The bombing at Khartoum and Atbara were also very feeble efforts. Of the three attacks on Khartoum - two were divided against the Aerodrome at night and did no damage at all - the third was a daylight attack and the bombs fell in Omdurman causing a few casualties. At Atbara, two daylight raids were carried out against the railway workshops but the damage was very slight.

Some very determined bombing attacks by the Italians were carried out against the road-rail bridge across the Atbara River near Khasm El Girba but the bridge remained undamaged.

A very successful bombing attack on a troop train was made by a single bomber at Derudeb on one occasion causing about 50 casualties.

The enemy carried out effective bombing against out troops at Gallabat. With air superiority they employed large forces of bombers most effectively and with the troops completely devoid of A.A. guns the bombing was carried out in a most deliberate manner. The casualties from this bombing were very few - less than 100 in the three days - but the morale of our troops was thoroughly shaken.

/The Italians

The Italians maintained a bi-weekly mail service between Italy and Italian East Africa. The aircraft not only carried personnel, mails and stores, but some 30 C.R.42's were transported from Italy to Italian East Africa by this Service. The aircraft usually timed their arrival in Eritrea for dawn. The return service leaving Eritrea by night.

In the early stages enemy fighters produced a very serious obstacle to all close support and reconnaissance work. The stories of single Hardies and Lysanders fighting off small formations of C.R.42s are epics.

The anti-aircraft heavy defences were quite good at places like Asmara, Gura and Massawa but with the Army in the field these defences were mediocre and did little damage to aircraft. The light anti-aircraft defences, although numerous, were on the whole not very effective and certainly did not interfere to any degree with the close support given to the Army at Keren. Aircraft were damaged from time to time but seldom was an aircraft reduced to the write-off condition.

#### Enemy Anti-Aircraft Organisation.

Communicated by  
A.M. Sir L. Slatter

In general, the Italians' anti-aircraft organisation was very localised. They had a warning system for their aerodromes but it was probably not very deep and they seemed to have relied on the great climbing capabilities of their C.R.42s for interception of our bombers.

The Italians organised a telephone warning system in a small way along the Red Sea coast between Mersa Taklai and Massawa, but the Royal Air Force never picked up W.T. messages synchronising with the passage of our bombers which could be assumed as part of a warning system.

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The approaches to Asmara over the difficult country lying from north-west to south-west could be achieved with reasonable surprise by our aircraft flying at medium altitudes. Similarly, several other Italian aerodromes south of Asmara were attacked by our Air Forces from time to time with complete surprise. On the whole, therefore, the Italians' anti-aircraft organisation was inadequate and not very efficient.

/V. OPERATIONS

# SECRET

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## V. OPERATIONS OF THE R.A.F., ADEN COMMAND, DURING FEBRUARY 1941

Meanwhile the Royal Air Force at Aden was still engaged in bombing attacks on the enemy's aerodromes, railway, and supply depots, but in February (1941) certain changes of policy were adopted:-

Air H.Q. Aden  
"Review of Ops."  
during Feb. '41"  
attached to Form  
540 of Feb. '41.

With regard to shipping escorts in the Red Sea; it was decided only to escort large troop convoys thus relieving No.203 Squadron for other offensive operations. Half of the aircraft released from convoy duties were converted into bombers and were employed against targets in Addis Ababa and Awash, while the other half which remained as fighters were employed in "strafing" aircraft at enemy aerodromes deep into Abyssinia, these aerodromes now being more occupied by enemy aircraft as a result of the offensive of our forces from the Sudan. It was also decided to pay special attention to the disruption of enemy communications on the Dessie - Asmara road which was the only link the enemy possessed from Abyssinia to their northern (Eritrean) front.

The advance of our forces from the Sudan into Eritrea and the opening of our attack from Kenya against Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia (of which hereafter) had the effect of driving enemy Air Force Units into the Aden area, and close co-operation between No.203 Group (Sudan) and Air Headquarters at Aden became essential for the first time. Operational zones between these two Air Headquarters were therefore agreed upon, the boundaries of which were changed from time to time as the advance of our ground forces progressed.

The bombing raids by the Aden Air Force Units during February included the following operations:-

On 4 February two Blenheim IVs of No.203 Squadron attacked enemy aircraft and M.T. at Makalla aerodrome and

/machine-gunned

machine-gunned three S.79s on the landing ground one of which was destroyed by fire and the other two severely damaged. The Blenheims also destroyed one C.R.42 in combat, a second C.R.42 on the ground being damaged. On 5 February six Blenheims of No.8 Squadron<sup>1</sup> bombed an M.T. park and repair shops at Dessie obtaining hits in the target area and starting several small fires. On 7 February two Blenheim IVs of No.203 Squadron made a successful attack on the aerodrome at Allomata<sup>2</sup> (Abyssinia) when five C.A.133s were found on the landing-ground and four others in the adjacent dispersal area. The Blenheims made several dive machine-gun attacks setting on fire eight of the enemy aircraft and damaging the ninth by bullets: two M.T. vehicles were also attacked and hit. On the same day six Blenheims attacked hangars and workshops at Kombolcha aerodrome causing damage: pamphlets were dropped on the landing-ground. On 14 February two Blenheims bombed Assab scoring hits on buildings and two other Blenheims bombed an M.T. compound at Diredawa obtaining direct hits, and on the following day four Blenheims bombed the landing-ground at Kinile and started fires, and on 17 February six Blenheims of No.203 Squadron bombed the railway bridge at Awash with 24 x 250 lb. bombs; possible damage was done to two of the piers and a shed at the end of the bridge was hit.

During the last week of February successful attacks were made by our bombers on the railway station at Diredawa, the railway bridge at Awash, the M.T. park and repair shops at Dessie, the aerodrome at Addis

/Ababa and

- 
1. The Blenheims mentioned in this section of the text were of No.8 Sqdn. unless otherwise stated.
  2. Situated approx. 130 miles east of the northern tip of Lake Tana.



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Ababa and the shipyard at Assab.

Throughout the whole of this period numerous offensive and photographic reconnaissances were carried out over (British) Somaliland and the adjacent parts of Abyssinia, and convoys for shipping were also provided by the Blenheim IV Fighters of No.203 Squadron. Early in the month No.8 Squadron was equipped with some Blenheim IVs which were prepared for photographic reconnaissances of the more distant parts of Abyssinia.

## Summary of Bomber Sorties and Reconnaissances of the R.A.F., Aden Command from 1 - 28 February 1941.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. Aden Forms 540.

During February 1941 the R.A.F. of the Aden Command carried out 76 bomber sorties and 32 reconnaissances against the Italians (and 3 bomber sorties against the Wahidi during the first four days of the month, the operations against this tribe being terminated on 5 February).

/VI. THE RETURN

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## VI. THE RETURN OF THE EMPEROR

"The Abyssinian Campaigns".

As already mentioned<sup>1</sup> the Emperor of Abyssinia, Hailo Selassie, had arrived in the Sudan in July 1940 and had taken up his residence at Khartoum until the time was ripe for his re-appearance in Abyssinia. In the meantime Colonel Sandford and his "Mission 101"<sup>2</sup> were fomenting the rebellion of the Abyssinian "patriots" in the Gojjam district of Abyssinia which they entered on 12 August. They were assisted by two local chieftains, Nagash and Mangasha, who collected men and (transport) mules to go to the Sudan border and join the Emperor when he should begin his advance into Abyssinia. At the same time these two chiefs organised small harassing attacks by "patriot" irregulars against Italian military positions.

### Co-operation of the R.A.F.

S.A.A.F. Records -  
No.1 Sqdn. (Short  
history of).

It was decided that the Royal Air Force should assist the "patriot" movement and on 12 October a detachment of eight Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron and two Vincents of No.430 (A.C.) Flight were moved to Gedaref to assist the "patriots" by attacking enemy military targets in the Gondar-Bahr Dar areas. On 15 October two of the Wellesleys made a night attack on Gondar, but before dawn on the following morning Gedaref aerodrome was raided by one S.79 and seven C.R.32s and C.R.42s which "ground-strafted" the Wellesleys and Vincents and destroyed them all<sup>3</sup>. The great column of smoke from the burning aircraft was seen by the Detachment of No.1 (Fighter) Squadron of the S.A.A.F. which (as already mentioned<sup>4</sup>) had been sent to Azaza; it was the first intimation that this Detachment had of the raid

/as an enemy

1. See page 8 supra.
2. Consisting of four other British officers.
3. See page 21 supra.
4. In footnote 1 to page 19 supra.

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as an enemy agent had cut the telephone wire between Gedaref and Azaza. On the following morning three pilots of the Detachment took off (without permission) to avenge the loss of our aircraft, and by a shrewd guess they located the enemy raiders at Barentu. They flew over the aerodrome and saw on it some S.79s, C.A.133s and three C.R.42s, and they burned out the C.R.42s and severely damaged the bombers.

On 20 November a Vincent of No.430 (A.C.) Flight left Khartoum with Colonel Wingate, who was proceeding to join Mission "101" as staff officer, and landed at a temporary landing ground which had been constructed in the mountains east of Dangila in the chief Mangasha's country. Colonel Wingate brought the welcome news that a mixed Sudanese and Ethiopian force under British officers would shortly enter Abyssinia and occupy Belaya (some 60 miles east of Dangila) which had been selected as the place for the Emperor's headquarters in his own country.

In December detachments of No.47 Squadron began a series of attacks on enemy encampments at Dangila, Burye and Debra Markos (situated on the road from Addis Ababa to Barh Dar in the Gojjam area). On 12 December three Wellesleys bombed the Dangila forts starting several fires, and on 14 December two Wellesleys bombed the buildings of the Bahr Dar aerodrome. The same day two other Wellesleys bombed dispersed enemy aircraft on Gondar aerodrome and camp, starting a fire at the latter target. On 22 December one Wellesley dropped supplies to Mission "101" at its advanced post, and on the same day five Wellesleys bombed a troop concentration at Burye and dropped hundreds of leaflets addressed to the Italians' native levies over the target: heavy machine-gun fire was encountered.

/These

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"The Abyssinian Campaigns".

These operations of the Royal Air Force heartened considerably the "patriot" movement which the Italians were now beginning to view with increasing anxiety, and as a result General Nasi - the Vice Governor-General of the Italian African "Empire" - was sent to Gondar in charge of a special military mission in an endeavour to stem the revolt. Meanwhile a steady stream of deserters from the Italians' native troops and levies was joining the "patriots".

## The Emperor's Advance into Abyssinia.

Gen. Platt's Despatch come for the Emperor to enter Abyssinia. The newly-  
on "Ops. in Eritrea" etc.  
etc. 1 Dec. '40 -  
26 Aug. '41".  
Enc. to CS.18122.

In January (1941) it was decided that the time had formed Sudan Frontier Battalion was now marching to Belaya where an aerodrome was under construction, while three other native Battalions<sup>1</sup> were now completing their training and were to be the nucleus of the guerilla war of the "patriots" against the Italians.

The country which the Emperor had to traverse from the Sudan border to the Gojjam district can best be described as appalling. Miles of tangled bush and scrub are encountered which give place to rugged mountains, strewn with boulders, rising to a height of 8,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level. There were no roads and the country was impassable for motor traffic. The only method of transporting the necessities for the Emperor's campaign was by means of a huge number of pack animals, and for this purpose Colonel Sandford raised some 3,000 mules in the Gojjam while the "patriot" chiefs collected upwards of 15,000 camels in the Sudan. When the journey was completed hardly any of the camels had survived the rigours of the march.

/On 20 January

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1. i.e. 1st and 2nd Ethiopian (Refugee) Bns. and 4th Eritrean (Deserter) Bn.

No.203 Group "Summary  
of Ops. Jan. '41"  
attached to Form  
540, Entry of  
31 Jan. '41.

"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

On 20 January (the day after the opening of Major-General Platt's Kassala offensive) the Emperor and his suite were flown from Khartoum to Umm Idla near the Dinder River on the Sudan - Abyssinian border<sup>1</sup> and alighted on an improvised landing-ground which the R.A.F. had constructed in the bush. From Umm Idla the Emperor marched to his temporary headquarters at Belaya<sup>2</sup> which he reached on 6 February and here he assembled loyal adherents from the Gojjam, while the Sudan Frontier and 2nd Ethiopian Battalions moved into the Belaya district.

Further Operations of the R.A.F.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "N" to Form  
540. Entry of  
26 Feb. '41.

In February the Royal Air Force continued its attacks on the enemy in the Gojjam area; on 7 February a single Wellesley of No.47 Squadron bombed enemy encampments at Dangila with four 250 lb. and four 20 lb. bombs from 2,400 feet, and on 16 February the enemy evacuated this place and withdrew to Bahr Dar. On the following day two Vincents of No.430 (A.C.) Flight made an offensive reconnaissance over Burye, and on the same day three Gladiators carried out a similar operation over the Bahr Dar landing-ground. On 21 February four Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron attacked successfully enemy troop concentrations in and around Burye with 250 lb. bombs and incendiaries. The Abyssinian Church of St. Michael (which the enemy used as a store) was destroyed, and a building in the fort was hit.

"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

The R.A.F.'s bombing attacks at Dangila and Burye further encouraged the "patriots" to harass enemy outposts, convoys and foraging parties, and resulted in the important enemy garrison at Injibarra being withdrawn to Burye. On 27 February Colonel Wingate, commanding a newly-organised force known as "Gideon"<sup>3</sup>, attacked the /forts at

- 
1. Umm Idla is some 60 miles east of Rosieres.
  2. Situated approx. 135 miles east-ly-south of Rosieres.
  3. This consisted of parts of the Sudan Frontier and 2nd Ethiopian Bns. with four mortars: the whole force approximated only 450 men.

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forts at Burye (which were now held by some 5,000 enemy troops with artillery), and on the following day three Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron attacked the Burye encampment with 40 lb. bombs from a height of 1,500 feet: very heavy machine-gun fire was encountered, one of our aircraft being shot down and one damaged by gun-fire.

The attack by "Gideon" force followed up by the R.A.F.'s bombing resulted in the enemy evacuating Burye and beginning a retreat to Debra Markos. On 1 March the Frontier Battalion harassed the enemy at Mankusa on the direct line of their retreat to Debra Markos, and on 4 March the enemy evacuated Dambacha (an encampment midway between Burye and Debra Markos), pursued by "Gideon" force. On reaching Debra Markos the Italian commander concentrated there all the remaining forces of the Gojjam area except for the garrisons at Bahr Dar and Mota<sup>1</sup>.

The morale of the enemy had by this time been much shattered by "Gideon" force, the "patriots", and the operations of the Royal Air Force, and had it been possible for the R.A.F. to have staged a major offensive against them their forces might well have been completely crushed. But at this very time the R.A.F. was concentrating its resources in the assault on Keren and very few aircraft could be spared in support of the "patriot" campaign. Nevertheless a detachment of No.47 Squadron's Wellesleys gave what assistance it could and on 8 March one of the Wellesleys made an offensive reconnaissance of the Burye - Debra Markos road to attack the enemy's retreating columns. No troop movement was, however, seen but a village near Debra Markos believed to contain covering troops was attacked with four 250 lb. bombs from a height of 5,000 feet.

Meanwhile

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1. Mota is 50 miles south-west of Bahr Dar.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "M" to  
Form 540. Entry of  
14 March '41.

Meanwhile the "patriot" forces were becoming in urgent need of stores and supplies of ammunition. It was found impossible to transport these overland and it was therefore decided to inaugurate a shuttle service for this purpose between Rosieres and Burye. Three JU.52s of No.51 (Communication and Transport) Flight of the South African Air Force (which had arrived in Kenya at the end of February) were detached from the Flight and stationed at Rosieres where they maintained the shuttle service satisfactorily.

On 17 March two Blenheims of No.14 Squadron bombed Debra Markos, and on 21 March a single Blenheim of this Squadron repeated the attack when it was observed that the town area had been considerably burnt, possibly as the result of the previous raid. Attacks were also made on Gondar by two Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron which bombed the town on 20 March with eight 250 lb. bombs and 25 lb. incendiaries from a height of 4,000 feet starting fires among stores and buildings, and on 22 March two Blenheims of No.14 Squadron bombed a fort and warehouse at Gondar, the jetty at Gorgora (on the northern shore of Lake Tana) and aerodrome buildings at Azozo.

No.203 Group  
Appx. "W" to Form  
540 Entry of  
30 March '41.

Meanwhile a new Free French Flight was formed at Gordon's Tree (near Khartoum) for the purpose of supporting the "patriot" movement in the Gojjam. This Flight was equipped with six Blenheim IVs and was commanded by their own Commandant<sup>1</sup>. On 24 March one Blenheim of this Flight bombed targets at Debra Markos.

#### The Emperor Enters Addis Ababa.

The enemy's forces concentrated at Debra Markos and the adjacent district now numbered some 12,000 troops. They were harassed repeatedly by the Sudan

"The Abyssinian Campaigns".

/Frontier

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1. Equivalent to a Squadron Leader.

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"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

Gen. Platt's  
Despatch on "Ops. in  
Eritrea etc. 1 Dec.  
'40 - 26 Aug. '41"  
Enc. to C.S.18122.

Frontier Battalion which steadily won position after position until on 4 April - by order of the Italian High Command - they withdrew across the Blue Nile, and on 6 April the Emperor entered Debra Markos at the head of the "patriot" troops. The garrison remaining at Mota soon surrendered and the garrison at Bahr Dar was soon afterwards evacuated to Gondar. Meanwhile "Gideon" force and 1,000 "patriot" troops pursued the large enemy force which had evacuated Debra Markos, and on 23 May the whole of this force surrendered at Agibar (east of the Blue Nile). In the meantime on 5 May the Emperor had entered his capital of Addis Ababa<sup>1</sup>, which had surrendered to Major-General Cunningham's forces on 6 April.<sup>2</sup>

Summary of the R.A.F.'s Support to the "Patriot" Movement.

The attacks by the Royal Air Force on Italian posts and encampments in the Gojjam area and particularly the bombing of Dangila, Burye, and Debra Markos were successful in producing damaging effects to the Italins' stores and equipment and to their military prestige. Moreover the R.A.F.'s "pamphlet warfare" had encouraged hundreds of native levies to desert from the Italian forces and join the "patriots".

The conveyance by aircraft of stores, money and other equipment to the "patriots" was a most useful service without which it may be safely assumed that the "patriot" movement could not have continued with any degree of success. Finally, the conveyance of the Emperor and his personal staff from Khartoum to the Abyssinian border was undertaken by the R.A.F. This operation not only obviated a long, tedious, and difficult march for the Emperor but enabled his intended movements to be kept secret from the enemy.

/VII. THE

1. It is not without interest that the Emperor entered Addis Ababa exactly five years to the day after the entry of Marshal Badoglio into the capital in 1936.
2. See page 167 infra.



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VII. THE ATTACK FROM KENYA

Military Situation in November 1940.

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch E.A.  
Force Report on  
Ops. 1 Nov. '40  
to 5 April '41.  
Enc. to C.S.18122.

When Major-General Cunningham took over command of the forces in Kenya on 1 November (1940) his troops were disposed as follows: the 11th (A) Division was holding a line from Malindi (on the coast) to Bura (on the Tana River) and thence along the Tana River to Garissa, and the 12th (A) Division (to which the 1st South African Brigade was temporarily attached<sup>1</sup>) held a line from Wajir to Mount Marasbit and Lokitaung (on the east of Lake Rudolf<sup>h</sup>). On the arrival of the 2nd and 5th South African Brigades the Divisions were recast<sup>2</sup>, and the three Divisions then formed were aligned thus:- the 11th (A) Division on the right, the 12th (A) Division in the centre and the 1st South African Division on the left. The length of the front, however, precluded any permanent reserve formations.

The plans which Major-General Cunningham made were conditional on the rainy season which was due at the end of March<sup>3</sup>. He examined the possibility of a major offensive against the port of Kismayu before the rains broke, but for various reasons he decided that this was impracticable<sup>4</sup>. He resolved, therefore, to reduce the area of the "no-mans-land" in the Northern Frontier District, to improve communications, and to sap the Italians' morale by vigorous patrolling and by capturing isolated enemy posts. An immediate result of this policy was the successful attack on El Wak on 17 December<sup>5</sup>.

/Strength

1. With the concurrence of F.M. Smuts one of the S.A. Brigades was employed as and when required under either the 11th (A) or 12th (A) Divisions; this gave elasticity to the force which proved of the greatest value.
2. As stated on page 36 supra.
3. In the rains it is almost impossible to use M/T as the roads -- except where on rocky terrain -- become a quagmire of mud.
4. The offensive against Kismayu had been suggested by Gen. Wavell at a conference held at Khartoum at the end of October (i.e. five weeks before the conference on 2 December -- mentioned on pages 72 & 73 -- supra -- at which it was decided not to advance on Kismayu until after the rainy season) Ibid.
5. See pages 116 and 117 infra.

Strength of the S.A.A.F. (Kenya) on 31 December 1940.

The Air Force in Kenya was composed of South African Units, viz. Nos.2 and 3 (Fighter) Squadrons (Furies, Gauntlets and Hurricanes), Nos.11 and 12 (Bomber) Squadrons (Fairey Battles, and JU.86s), Nos.40 and 41 (A.C.) Squadrons (both Hartbees), the newly-formed No.60 (Survey) Squadron (Ansons), No.34 (Survey) Flight (Ansons)<sup>1</sup>, and one Flight of Glen Martin Trainers.

There were also two Glen Martins earmarked for a new No.14 Squadron, S.A.A.F., which it was intended to form at some time in the future. These aircraft were sent on their arrival to the Operational Training Unit and were referred to as "Glen Martins of the O.T.U." until 12 March (1941) when they were then called the "Advanced Air Headquarters Flight."

The Attack on El Wak.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Appx. "A" Form 540  
Entry of 2 Dec. '40.

It was arranged that the S.A.A.F. should co-operate in the coming attack on El Wak, and from 14 December until the conclusion of the operations five Hurricanes of No.2 Squadron and three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron were placed under command of Major Mostert (S.A.A.F.) to co-operate with the 12th (A) Division which had been chosen for the El Wak operations. Independent air co-operation was also provided by Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron.

On the night of 15 December units of the 12th (A) Division were moved to El Wak by mechanised transport (accompanied by tanks) from their forward positions at Wajir - a distance by road of 110 miles - and arrived at their objective unexpected by the enemy and unnoticed by their aircraft. On the following

/morning

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1. Formed (presumably) in December '40 (it is first mentioned on 3 Jan. '41: Air H.Q. East Africa, Form 540, Entry of that date.)

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morning (16 December) our forces launched their attack, and after a fierce conflict the enemy abandoned the fort and village of El Wak which were set on fire by our troops and destroyed. During the assault nine Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made seventeen sorties in co-operation with the troops and JU.86s of No.12 Squadron dive-bombed the enemy's positions from 2,500 to 100 feet, dropping 3,480 lbs. of 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs. Before dawn on the morning of 17 December three Savoia aircraft bombed the burning village in an unsuccessful endeavour to "strafe" our troops who were, however, bivouacked some distance away. Meanwhile three Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made six sorties against the retreating enemy and when a C.A.133 aircraft appeared and made a dive-attack it was intercepted by the Hartbees.

In effect the results of El Wak were much greater than the defeat of an enemy force and the destruction of one of their important frontier posts would seem to imply, for from that moment began the ascendancy of the morale of our forces and a corresponding decline of the morale of the enemy. Moreover the Italians withdrew the majority of their forces to the line of the Juba River, leaving only a screen of "Banda" auxiliaries west of the Juba and some troops and artillery in a strongly-wired encampment at Afmadu.

Shortly after the raid on El Wak the whole military aspect was altered by General Wavell's successes in the Western Desert and the Italians' withdrawal in Eritrea in the face of Major-General Platt's impending offensive at Kassala. This decided Major-General Cunningham to proceed with the comparatively small-scale offensive against Kismayu which he considered would have a reasonable chance of success in view of the Italians'

/declining morale.

declining morale.

Operations of the S.A.A.F.

In the meantime the S.A.A.F. was engaged in attacks on the enemy's aerodromes and encampments. On 5 December three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed the forts at Mega and an enemy post north of Moyale; one of the JU's was shot down. On the same day three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed M/T at Neghelli scoring direct hits with 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries. On 6 December one Glen Martin of the S.A.A.F. Operational Training Unit made a photographic reconnaissance of Kismayu and the same day two Harbess of "C" Flight, No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made a photographic reconnaissance of the Garissa - Liboi road and a reconnaissance of the Liboi - Benani area. On 11 December six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed enemy aircraft from 4,000 to 1,000 feet on a new landing ground two miles from Yavello aerodrome destroying three Caproni aircraft and damaging three others. During this attack intense pom-pom fire was encountered. On the return journey one of our aircraft developed oil trouble and crash-landed 30 miles north of Archer's Post, and another was hit and made a forced landing at Gombo aerodrome where it was repaired and flown back to its base on 13 December.

On 14 December one Fairey Battle of No.11 Squadron made a night reconnaissance of the Golgia - Afmadu - Jelib - Gobwen road to ascertain if there were any M/T or troop movements, and on 18 December one Fairey Battle made an offensive (and also photographic) reconnaissance of Moyale and Namoruputh, scoring direct hits with three salvos of 20 lb. bombs on an enemy camp near Moyale; 20,000 pamphlets were dropped at Moyale and Namoruputh. On 21 December one Glen Martin of the S.A.A.F. Operational

/Training Unit

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Training Unit made a photographic reconnaissance of Kismayu encountering intense but ineffective anti-aircraft fire. On 28 December another of the Glen Martins made a photographic reconnaissance of the Garissa, Kismayu, Gobwen, Afmadu, Jelib, Bardera and Wajir aerodromes and landing grounds. During this reconnaissance three Savoia aircraft were seen on the Bardera aerodrome and one enemy fighter was seen to take off, and photographs showed two C.R.42s on this aerodrome. As a result of this reconnaissance four Hurricanes of No.2 Squadron attacked Bardera aerodrome on the following day (29 December) destroying one Savoia aircraft and seriously damaging two others by machine-gunning. Three C.R.42s took off from a satellite landing ground three miles south of the aerodrome and attacked the Hurricanes, two of which were shot down.

These operations were in addition to several coastal patrols and offensive reconnaissances over the whole frontier areas.

Meanwhile the enemy's lack of enterprise in the air was becoming more and more apparent; during the month of December they made only one direct attack on our aircraft when a Savoia machine-gunned a JU.86 of No.12 Squadron on the aerodrome at Marsabit. Although six bursts were fired the JU.86 sustained no damage and there were no casualties among the crew. At this time most of the Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron were concentrated at Nairobi for defensive purposes and at Mombasa (the gateway of Kenya and of the Army's lines of communication) leaving the defence of our troops, aerodromes and important centres such as Nanyuki to the obsolescent Furies of No.2 Squadron. To quote Major-General Cunningham:-

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force  
Reports on Ops. from  
1 Nov. '40 to  
6 April '41".  
Enc. to CS.18122

/ "For some"

"For some inexplicable reason the Italians utterly failed to use their golden opportunity at this time to take the offensive in the air, although our troops behind the River Tana and our outlying communications were open to heavy bombing attacks by them. As soon as the Italians' lack of enterprise was realised, some of the Hurricanes were dispersed over the front with the result that the course of air operations changed rapidly, and by the beginning of February our Air Forces had established air superiority".

Dispositions of the S.A.A.F.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. -  
May 1941.  
(File M.151/1).

Meanwhile, in order to give full support to the Army, Nos.11 and 12 (Bomber) Squadrons located at Archer's Post and Nanyuki respectively were made available for operations, requests for bombing to be submitted by Force Headquarters. Detachments of the two Fighter Squadrons were sent to the following landing-grounds:-

Lamu	Ndege's Nest
Bura	Marsabit
Garissa	Lokitaung

It was also arranged that the Army Co-operation Squadrons (Nos.40 and 41) should operate under the Divisional Commands as follows:-

11 (A) Division	1 Flight No.41 Squadron
12 (A) Division	No.41 Squadron less one Flight
1 S.A. Division	No.40 Squadron.

S.A.A.F. Supply and Maintenance.

Ibid.

By arrangement with the G.O.C. the transport of fuel, bombs, ammunition and other air stores was at all times the responsibility of the Quarter-Master-General, East Africa Forces, and the unit which carried out this task was the Bomber Brigade Maintenance Company - an organisation which was foreign to the Royal Air Force<sup>1</sup>.

Information  
contributed by  
A.C. Sowrey.

An advanced Repairs and Maintenance Unit was established at Nyeri and moved thence to Garba Tulla.

/The South

1. A detailed account of the supply of fuel, bombs, ammunition etc. during the campaign (transcribed from Appendix "H" to A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Air Ops. I.E.A. 10 Feb. - 5 April '41") is given in Appendix "K".

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The South African Air Force was fully self-supporting and therefore the Repair and Maintenance organisation was only responsible for salvage and major repairs.

By the middle of January all air units were in position, and their supplies of bombs, fuel and other requirements had been assembled. The W/T arrangements occasioned considerable difficulty owing to an acute shortage of W/T sets and operators. It was impossible for each unit to have its W/T Section and when there were more units than one at the same station, one W/T Section had to suffice for all.

The Attack on the El Yibo - Gorai - Hobok - Triangle and Mega. (January - February 1941).

Before the advance on Kismayu, Major-General Cunningham decided to attack the El Yibo - Gorai - Hobok Triangle on the southern boundary of Abyssinia with a view to opening up the "patriot" country in the Galla Sidamo province and to get in touch with the "patriot" chiefs. The 1st South African Division was detailed for this operation, and on 16 January (1941) the 2nd South African Brigade captured El Yibo and on 30 January the 2nd and 5th S.A. Brigades advanced from Dukana, the 2nd Brigade moving west by north against Gorai and the 5th against El Gumu and Hobok. Gorai and Hobok were captured and the two Brigades then combined for a joint attack on Mega. This operation was completed successfully on 18 February. On 22 February a patrol of Abyssinian "patriots" occupied Moyale which the enemy had evacuated and shortly afterwards the 21st East African Brigade occupied Yavello which had also been abandoned by the enemy. Thereafter the 2nd Brigade was sent to assist in the recapture of Berbera<sup>1</sup> while the 5th Brigade was transferred to Egypt. There remained the 11th and 12th (A) Divisions

/for the

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1. An account of this operation is given on pages 156 and 157 infra.

for the operations against Abyssinia<sup>1</sup>.

Operations of the S.A.A.F. in support of the El Yibo - Gorai - Hobok and Mega Attacks.

The South African Air Force supported the Army's attack on the El Yibo - Gorai - Hobok Triangle and Mega by raiding the enemy's aerodromes at Yavello and Neghelli, carrying out offensive reconnaissances<sup>2</sup> along the Mega - Neghelli and Mega - Yavello roads and attacking enemy troop and M.T. concentrations at Moyale, Yavello and Neghelli. No.40 (A.C.) Squadron was chiefly employed in these operations.

On 9 January six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed enemy aircraft on a satellite landing-ground at Yavello in two waves, from 4,000 to 1,000 feet, destroying two or three aircraft on the ground by direct hits with 20 lb. (H.E.) bombs: heavy pom-pom fire was encountered but our aircraft all returned safely. On the same day and during the next few days Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made reconnaissances including the North Hor - Dukana - Gorai - Hobok and the El Yibo areas, and the Mega - Moyale road.

On 19 January six JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed the enemy's depot at Neghelli in two waves of three aircraft each with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs. Direct hits were obtained on the car park, petrol store and a large building situated to the north-west of the town. A large number of M.T. vehicles were destroyed, and the petrol store (consisting of two large buildings) was set on fire resulting in a violent explosion. Next day (20 January) three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed Yavello aerodrome with 20 lb. (H.E.) bombs and

- 
- /incendiaries
1. The third Brigade of the 1st S.A. Division, viz: the 25th E.A. Bgde., as also the 21st E.A. Bgde. of the 11th Division were placed under command of the 12th Division which took over the area hitherto held by the 1st S.A. Division.
  2. The reconnaissances mentioned in the text in this section were all "offensive", unless otherwise stated.



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incendiaries damaging one C.A.133, and on the same day one Anson aircraft of No.60 (Survey) Squadron made a photographic reconnaissance of the El Yibo - Mega road and three Hartbees of "B" Flight No.40 Squadron reconnoitred the El Yibo- Hobok area. On 22 January three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed buildings at Neghelli with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs and 25 lb. incendiaries scoring direct hits, and on the same day two Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made a photographic reconnaissance of the Moyale - Sololo<sup>1</sup> area and dropped five 20 lb. bombs on Moyale. On 23 January one Anson of No.60 (Survey) Squadron made a photographic reconnaissance of Mega, and on 25 January two Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dropped pamphlets over Moyale, Mega, Yavello, and other places along the frontier. On 28 January Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made 13 bombing sorties on Moyale and Jibissa<sup>2</sup>: 20 lb. bombs were dropped on buildings, trenches and machine-gun posts at Moyale and an enemy battery was located at Narra<sup>3</sup>, and an advanced landing ground suitable for Hartbees was located near Galma Galla. On 29 January three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron made a bombing reconnaissance of Yavello scoring eight direct hits with 20 lb. bombs on M.T. vehicles, and three aircraft of the same Squadron bombed Artillery, troop positions and huts at Moyale, and on the same day two Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron also dropped 20 lb. bombs on the fort and buildings at Moyale.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540 Entry of  
2 Feb. '41.

War Diary - No.40  
Sqdn.(S.A.A.F.  
Records) and  
"Its a Long Way to  
Addis".

On 2 February, during the attack by our ground forces on Hobok, nine Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made eight sorties against the enemy's positions. Our armoured cars, led by Lieut. A.J.T. Irwin<sup>4</sup>, charged the wire-entanglements, and Lieut. Irwin's car was attacked by five enemy machine gun nests. Lieut. J.D.W. Human,  
/S.A.A.F.

- 
1. Situated approx. 25 miles east of Moyale.
  2. Situated approx. 28 miles north-east of Dukana.
  3. Situated south of Moyale.
  4. Lieut. Irwin was awarded the M.C. for this exploit.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540 Entries of  
25 Feb. and 7 March,  
'41.

S.A.A.F., flew his Hartbee to Lieut. Irwin's assistance and although his aircraft was holed twice he continued to circle over the enemy's fort so that his rear gunner, Air-Sgt. J. Jackson, could bring his gun to bear on the enemy's machine-guns while Lieut. Human dropped bomb after bomb on the fort. This timely intervention distracted the enemy's attention from Lieut. Irwin until the rest of our armoured cars had raced up. The Hartbee was forced to make a crash landing in the bush but the pilot and his gunner escaped injury. For their gallantry Lieut. Human was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air-Sgt. Jackson the Distinguished Flying Medal.

On 17 February Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made twelve sorties in the Mega area obtaining direct hits with 20 lb. bombs on enemy gun emplacements and trenches, and on the following day (18 February) five Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed the fort, camp and barracks and the administrative area at Yavello scoring direct hits on targets: 200 x 20 lb. bombs and 280 x 4lb. incendiary bombs were dropped. On 22 February two Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed from 9,000 to 7,000 feet the M.T. park, dumps and storehouses at Neghelli obtaining direct hits: 1,590 lbs. of bombs (including incendiaries) were dropped. Meanwhile Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made offensive and photographic reconnaissances of the Moyale - Yavello area and dropped bombs on a fortified hill near Yavello.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540 Entries of  
6/9 and 14 Jan. '41.

Meanwhile by 9 January Advanced Air Headquarters had been established at Nanyuki under command of Brigadier Daniel. It was, however, moved back to Nairobi on 14 January.

/The Advance into

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The Advance into Jubaland.

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A.

Force Report on Ops.  
from 1 Nov. '40 -

5 April '40."

Enc. to CS.18122 and

"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

As already stated<sup>1</sup> Major-General Cunningham had

decided to advance into Jubaland and attack Kismayu. The

General had only four motorised Brigade Groups available

for the operation while the Italians had six Brigades and

six Banda "groups" holding the Juba River. Moreover his

lines of communication from the railway to his temporary

base at Garissa of 230 miles in length would now be ex-

tended by a further 280 miles - over country devoid of

roads - to Kismayu.

Role of the S.A.A.F.

Before continuing with the narration of the advance

into Jubaland it will be convenient to summarise the role

of the South African Air Force in the campaign. The

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.

from 10 Feb. to

5 April '41.

(A.H.B. II J7/1).

A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East had issued a Directive, the

relevant extracts from which were as follows:-

KENYA

- (1) Air operations for the neutralising of Italian Air Forces operating from Southern Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland.
- (2) Air defence of Mombasa, Nairobi, and other vulnerable points.
- (3) Direct co-operation with the ground forces operating under the orders of the G.O.C. East Africa.

The forthcoming operations were mainly concerned with Nos.(1) and (3): as air superiority became established it was possible to neglect (2) altogether and employ the aircraft in more effective roles.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. - May  
'41. (File M.151/1).

In view of the projected advance the operational and landing ground staff at Air Headquarters were

collecting all information as to possible landing grounds

near and beyond the Kenya-Jubaland border, particularly

along the roads (a) Dif - Afmadu - Kismayu, (b) Garissa - Afmadu

1. On page 117 supra.

Afmadu - Kismayu, (c) Bura - Kolbio - Kismayu.

Towards the end of January the Italian Air Force was attacking our ground forces along the Tana River front and the Army asked for fighter protection. There were insufficient fighters to provide standing patrols and it was impossible to arrange for the fighters to go to the assistance of our advancing troops owing to lack of suitable advanced landing-grounds. However, at the end of January, landing-grounds (with runways cut in the bush) were constructed at Ali Gabe and Galma Galla, and detachments of Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron were moved to both these places and were on call.

Terrain over which the Operations were Conducted.

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
10 Feb. - 5 April".  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

From the commencement of the campaign until the capture of Gabredame on 9 March<sup>1</sup> operations were conducted in Jubaland and Italian Somaliland, a territory hot and dry and generally below 500 feet in altitude. Roads were almost universally bad until Jelib was reached and from thence onwards the roads were fair. In the Abyssinian highlands the terrain is rugged and mountainous, although green and fertile, the average altitude being above 5,000 feet.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb.-May '41.  
(File M.151/1).

Dispositions of the Forces.

1. BRITISH

(a) Air Force

The Air Units whose aircraft would be used at this stage were located as follows:-

No.2 Wing <sup>2</sup>	H.Q. at Nanyuki
No.2 Squadron	( H.Q. at Nanyuki
	"A" Flight at Nanyuki and
	Detachments at Ndege's Nest,
	Archer's Post, Lokitaung and
	Marsabit.

/No.3

1. See page 150 infra.

2. No.2 Wing had been formed shortly before this time.

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No.3 Squadron -	( H.Q. at Nairobi and
	{ Detachments at Garissa,
	{ Nairobi, Bura and Mombasa
No.11 Squadron	H.Q. and all Flights at
	Archer's Post
No.12 Squadron	H.Q. and all flights at Nanyuki
	Glen Martin Flight at Nakuru
No. 40 Squadron	( H.Q. at Marsabit
	{ "A" Flight at Lokitaung
	{ "B" and "C" Flights at Marsabit
No.41 Squadron	( H.Q. at Garissa
	{ "A" Flight at Garissa
	{ "B" Flight at Bura
	{ "C" Flight at Ndege's Nest

Aircraft of the O.T.U. were at Nakuru.

No.2 Wing had control of the two Bomber Squadrons (Nos.11 and 12) and No.2 (Fighter) Squadron - No.3 (Fighter) Squadron remained under the direct control of Air Headquarters while the two A.C. Squadrons (Nos.40 and 41) were controlled by the Divisions to which they were allocated.

A.C. Sorey's Report (b) Ground Forces

on Air Ops. I.E.A.

10 Feb. - 5 April '41.

(A.H.B. II J7/1).

H.Q. 11th (A) Division	Bura
H.Q. 12th (A) Division	Garissa
H.Q. 1st South African Division	Marsabit

2. ITALIAN.

(a) Air Force

An estimate of the strength of the Enemy's Air Force on 10 February gave a total of 123 first line aircraft of which 28 were located in the Northern Sector (Asmara and Gura). The remaining 95 aircraft were believed to be distributed thus:-

/Dessie

Aerodrome	Bombers			Fighters		Recce:
	C.A.133	S.81	S.79	CR.32	CR.42	RO.37
Dessie	2	-	-	-	-	-
Diredawa	1	6	5	5	-	-
Addis Ababa	4	-	17	7	8	-
Shashamana	-	6	-	-	-	-
Jimma	9	3	5	-	-	3
Mogadishu	11	-	-	-	-	-
Bardera	-	-	-	-	-	2
Kismayu	-	-	-	-	1	-
	27	15	27	12	9	5

The totals of these aircraft are:-

Bombers	69
Fighters	21
Recce.	5
	<u>95</u>

(b) Ground Forces.

In Southern Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland (including Jubaland) the enemy had five Divisions of Colonial troops disposed as follows:-

Jimma	H.Q. 22nd Colonial Division
Shashamana	H.Q. 24th Colonial Division
Mega	H.Q. 21st Colonial Division
Bardera (Upper Juba)	H.Q. 101st Colonial Division
Jelib (Lower Juba)	H.Q. 102nd Colonial Division

In addition to these the enemy had five groups of "Banda" and six Battalions of "Blackshirts", making in all some 90,000 men.

Plan of Operations.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. - May  
'41. (File M.151/1).

The initial moves of our ground forces to the Jubaland frontier began on 15 January, and by 24 January the 12th (A) Division occupied Liboi and Hawaina on 27 January. On 2 February Major-General Cunningham held a Divisional Commanders' Conference at which the

/A.O.C. East

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A.O.C., East Africa was present, and a revised plan of operations was arranged as follows:-

While the enemy's attention was partially engaged with a joint attack from El Wak (sponsored by a high-powered wireless set established at Wajir sending out a steady stream of dummy messages) on their post at Bardera on the Juba River, the 12th (A) Division was to advance from Garissa on Afmau. From there one column, the 24th Gold Coast Brigade, was to advance on Bullo Erillo and threaten the important road junction at Jelib (situated on the further side of the Juba). In the meantime the 1st South African Brigade (attached to the 12th (A) Division) was to move south to capture Gobwen (situated on the Kenya side of the Juba), thus cutting off the way of retreat of the Kismayu garrison, and then to force a crossing of the river. While this threat to Gobwen was developing the 11th (A) Division (having advanced from Bura) was to make a sudden advance on Kismayu and attack the town in co-operation with a bombardment by the Royal Navy. If Kismayu were captured and the enemy's resistance on the Juba River broke, the advance could then be continued to Mogadishu, Isha Baidoa and Lugh Ferrandi. Meanwhile it was essential that the Kismayu, Afmau and Gobwen operations should be carried out speedily as a shortage in the limited supplies available for our forces would necessitate a withdrawal to the Kenya border.

The Air Force plan was primarily to neutralise all enemy Air Units within range, and thereafter,

- (1) to assist the Naval bombardment,
- (2) to assist the Army's advance by means of direct and close support.

To implement (1) and (2) it was agreed that the South African Air Force would give its maximum assistance with bombers, fighters and A.C. aircraft, and would also supply aircraft for the evacuation of casualties and for communication purposes.

/Disposition

Dispositions of the S.A.A.F. Units.

On the following day (3 February) the A.O.C. issued his orders for the S.A.A.F. Squadrons to move to their new forward bases and landing grounds which had already been prepared (by a Detachment of the South African Engineer Corps<sup>1</sup>), and in order to bring the maximum concentration of aircraft to bear at the right time and place the following steps were taken:-

- (a) Fighter defence was withdrawn altogether from Nairobi and that at Mombasa was reduced.
- (b) The Operational Training Unit at Nakuru was temporarily closed and its aircraft (although obsolete) were overhauled and held as reserves for the Army Co-operation Squadrons (there being no other reserves available).
- (c) All other aircraft consisting of Valentias and lighter types were taken into service for ambulance and communication purposes.

These changes involved administrative arrangements and movements of units as follows:-

No.41 A.C. Squadron. This Squadron had now been allotted to the two (A) Divisions<sup>2</sup> and its Flights were dispersed at various places. The Flights would be moved and located according to Divisional requirements and this entailed constant contact on the part of the Equipment and Armament staffs of Air Headquarters so as to provide them with bombs, fuel and other necessary supplies. Owing to the probable rapidity of the moves of its Flights it was arranged that this Squadron should move with a limited amount of supplies using transport supplied by the Army.

/Nos.11 and 12

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- 1. This Detachment and the Bomber Brigade Maintenance Coy. - proved of invaluable assistance to the S.A.A.F. during the campaign.
  - 2. i.e. "B" Flight to 11 (A) Division and the remainder of the Sqdn. to 12(A) Division.



Nos. 11 and 12 (Bomber) Squadrons. At Garissa (on the Tana River) there were two aerodromes known as Garissa East and West. Garissa West was the largest of the two and No. 12 Squadron was moved there, while No. 11 Squadron was moved to Hussein (some 27 miles north of Garissa). The supply requirements of both No. 11 and 12 Squadrons was undertaken by the Equipment staff which also arranged for the water supply of No. 11 Squadron from the Tana River.

Nos. 2 and 3 (Fighter) Squadrons. No. 2 Squadron was moved to Garissa East, with Detachments at Garissa West and Hussein for the protection of the bombers of Nos. 11 and 12 Squadrons, and No. 3 Squadron was moved from Nairobi to Garissa West with Detachments of Hurricanes at Ali Gabe and Galma Galla. The Communication, Transport and Ambulance aircraft were stationed at Garissa East. One Rapide aircraft was allotted to the G.O.C. Forces and it was arranged that it should be escorted by one or two fighters when proceeding to any of the forward areas.

By 8 February all the Squadrons were in position ready for operations and Advanced Air Headquarters (under command of the A.O.C.) was moved to a site at Garissa adjacent to Advanced Force Headquarters on 9 February<sup>1</sup>.

Ibid.

## General Administrative Arrangements - S.A.A.F.

### 1. Supply.

#### (a) Bombs, Ammunition, Fuel and Stores.

Arrangements had been made for these to be laid down at Hussein and Garissa East and West. Garissa was also to be used as the main stores depot from which stores would be drawn for the

/campaign

1. The new locations of the S.A.A.F. units are given in Appendix "I" (excerpted from A.C. Sowrey's Report on Ops. I.E.A. 10 Feb. - 5 April 1941, A.H.B. II J7/1).

campaign until such time as they could be brought up by sea (to Kisumu and other ports - if captured), and for this reason large stocks were built up at Garissa. Arrangements were also made for stores to be laid down at Ndege's Nest and Marsabit in case a major advance were to take place on the northern front.

(b) Rations.

Full provision for ration supplies was made by the Equipment staff.

(c) Water.

All Squadrons had been provided with a large number of 45 gallon petrol drums to meet with their requirements for water (which had to be obtained from the Tana River or any other available supply).

The difficulties which faced the Equipment staff in regard to the above were very considerable. As already stated, the Bomber Brigade Maintenance Company attended to all requirements under sub-head (a) but, although assisted to the utmost by the "Q" staff of the Army Headquarters, it was hampered greatly by lack of sufficient transport. This difficulty naturally increased when large and urgent requirements had to be met, and this was especially the case with regard to the transport of fuel<sup>1</sup>. In the opinion of the A.O.C., transport should have been attached to each Squadron but this was not possible during the campaign owing to the shortage of transport and to the great distances to be covered which would have rendered a considerable amount of transport immobile at a time when it could have been used to advantage by the Army.

/2. Aerodromes

1. The quantities of fuel required can be roughly gauged by the average consumption of the various types of aircraft. A table of the tank capacity consumption and endurance of the S.A.A.F. types of aircraft is given in Appendix "M" (excerpted from A.C. Sowrey's Draft Despatch Feb. - May 1941 (File M.151/1)).

## 2. Aerodromes and Landing Grounds.

It was arranged that the two Army Divisions should take over the construction and maintenance of aerodromes for the A.C. Squadrons attached to them as and when required as the advance continued. In this the Divisions had the assistance of Captain H. Mullins, O.C., Detachment of the South African Engineer Corps which (as already mentioned) was responsible for the preparation of forward landing-grounds<sup>1</sup>.

## 3. Guards.

These had to be provided for the aerodromes at Garissa, Hussein, Ali Gabe and Galma Galla, and Anti-Aircraft protection was provided at Garissa and Hussein by transferring the A.A. equipment which had been installed previously at Archer's Post and Nanyuki. Look-out posts were also built at both aerodromes and were manned by Native troops.

## 4. Supply dropping to the Army.

This was likely to be necessary as it was probable that the troops would at certain times be isolated through enemy action or weather conditions. At the beginning of the campaign there was only a small amount of Supply dropping apparatus which was stored at Nairobi and if required would have to be flown to the base concerned. (Later in the campaign the South African Union sent up large quantities of apparatus but this was also stored at Nairobi as it was considered advisable to keep it at a central depot, and the danger of the troops becoming isolated had by that time become far less).

## /5. Photography

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1. A General Note on the Construction and Maintenance of Landing Grounds during the campaign (transcribed from Appendix "E" to A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Air Ops. I.E.A., 10 Feb. - 5 April 1941") is given in Appendix "N".

5. Photography.

There was a shortage of photographic vans (fitted with "dark-rooms") which only allowed one van for Air Headquarters and vans for the two Army Co-operation Squadrons. The other Squadrons sent their photographs to the Photo. Section at Air Headquarters for processing. For Survey purposes map printing had to be done at Nairobi, the survey photographs being flown there and being then flown back - with the printed maps - to the Army Survey Section at Advanced Force Headquarters.

6. Pamphlets.

These were supplied by the Intelligence Section of Force Headquarters for dropping over enemy territory, at places indicated on the containers, but as in some instances aircraft were sent to raid localities for which no pamphlets had been earmarked it was later decided that aircraft were to drop pamphlets on every raid irrespective of the instructions on the containers. The pamphlets were mostly addressed to the "Banda" and other native troops: they caused a considerable number of desertions.

7. Evacuation of Casualties.

This presented a difficult problem throughout the campaign, as evacuation by air was essential owing to the great distances to be covered. Valentias of the Communication aircraft were used for this purpose and also a Fokker aircraft which had been given to the Command by the Belgian Congo Government. Prior to the capture of Kismayu casualties were flown to Nairobi but after its capture they were taken to Kismayu and

/thence

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thence by sea to Mombasa. There were no Medical personnel or Medical Department buildings or tents at the landing grounds and this frequently occasioned delays as the aircraft had to wait - sometimes for several hours - before the casualties could be taken on board or disembarked. The Medical Authorities were asked to have personnel to meet each aircraft but even then delays occurred due to bad communications.

Casualty clearing stations were established along the line of advance but the rapidity of our forward movement prevented them from being fully equipped.

In the northern area of operations (Yavello - Neghelli - Lokitaung) the evacuation of casualties was carried out by JU.52s of No.51 (Communication and Transport) Flight which had recently arrived from South Africa. These aircraft had been provided with ambulance fittings by the Union Government.

#### 8. Signal Communication.

A shortage of trained personnel, power plants, wireless sets and other equipment made it impossible for Advanced Air Headquarters and No.2 Wing Headquarters to have all their requirements, but a scheme was evolved whereby communications were established and maintained<sup>1</sup>.

#### 9. Repair and Maintenance.

As the advance proceeded adequate workshop factories were found at the main enemy aerodromes captured by our forces, and thereafter it was only necessary to move personnel and a limited quantity of stores in order to effect necessary repairs, the South African Air Force (as already stated<sup>2</sup>) being fully self-supporting in this respect.

/Progress

Information  
communicated  
by A.C. Sowrey.

1. A Note on the Advanced Air H.Q. Signals Section during the Occupation of Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia - including a detailed account of the above mentioned scheme for Advanced Air and No. 2 Wing H.Q.'s (transcribed from Appendix "F" to A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Ops. I.E.A. 10 Feb. to 5 April '41") is given in Appendix "O".

2. On page 121 supra.

Progress of the Advance.

On 4 February the 12th (A) Division captured Beles Gugani, while on the two previous days (2 and 3 February) the South African Air Force (to quote General Cunningham) "had carried out a most successful fighter attack on Afmadu, Dif and Gobwen". The attack at Afmadu (on 2 February) was made by Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron which pursued enemy aircraft to Afmadu and destroyed one grounded C.A.133 on the aerodrome. The attack on Gobwen aerodrome was made on 3 February by three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron and three Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron which ~~five~~-bombed and machine-gunned dispersed enemy aircraft on the ground: three S.79s, ~~one~~ C.A.133 and one C.R.42 were destroyed. On the same day a Hurricane of No.3 Squadron on patrol near Dif encountered three CA.133s

Air H.Q. East Africa escorted by two C.R.42s. The pilot, Captain J.C. Frost, Form 540 Entry of 17 February '41. attacked all five enemy aircraft and destroyed the three C.A.133s and one of the C.R.42s. For his "courage, determination and devotion to duty" in this encounter Captain Frost was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross<sup>1</sup>. These attacks on enemy aircraft on 2 and 3 February, in which the Italians lost in all three S.79s, five C.A.133s and two C.R.42s, did much to smash the "Regia Aeronautica" in Jubaland and to shatter the already declining Italian morale.

On 5 February the 12th (A) Division ~~had~~ approached Afmadu and 11 February was fixed for the assault on this town. A preliminary bombing attack was carried out on 10 February which appeared to paralyse the enemy. This attack consisted of heavy bombing of the outer perimeter defences (which included wire, gun emplacements and entrenchments) and was made by nine JU.86s of

/No.12

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1. It was Captain Frost who destroyed (by machine-gun fire) the CA.133 at Afmadu on 2 February.

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No.12 Squadron and six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron. The JU.86s dive-bombed in three waves from 6,000 to 3,500 feet and machine-gunned the defended area of the town, and the Fairey Battles dive-bombed in two waves from 4,000 to 1,500 feet. All the bombs fell in the target area and on the north edge of the aerodrome, and there were several direct hits on the enemy's trench systems. (The total weight of the bombs dropped by the JU.86s was 9,280 lbs and that of the Fairey Battles was 5,600 lbs.)<sup>1</sup> The only enemy opposition encountered was slight pom-pom and machine-gun fire. As a result of this bombing the "Banda" in Afmadu took to the bush and that night the 94th Italian Colonial Infantry Battalion defending Afmadu abandoned the place and attempted to reach the Juba River. On the following morning (11 February) the 22nd East African Brigade entered Afmadu unopposed.

On 13 February the 24th Gold Coast Brigade took Bullo Erillo and the Italians evacuated Kismayu. On the next morning (14 February) the 1st South African Brigade captured Gobwen and on the same day the 22nd East African Brigade was ordered to advance from Afmadu to Kismayu which it occupied the same evening. Great quantities of stores and ammunition and several guns fell into our hands.

Gen Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force  
Report on Ops. from  
1 Nov. '40 to  
5 April '41". Enc.  
to CS.18122

The capture of Kismayu was effected six days before the date which Major-General Cunningham had given in his time-table for the operation. How far the South African Air Force had contributed to this successful achievement may be judged by the General's statement that:-

"A remarkable feature of the operation up to this period was the almost complete lack of enemy interference from the air. The Fighter ground attacks at Gobwen and Afmadu aerodromes, and in the air, preceding the opening of the campaign, had resulted in driving the enemy out of the air practically altogether. At this stage enemy aircraft were seldom seen by day and he confined himself to bombing on moonlight nights. I was therefore able to remove all restrictions on daylight movement and

/henceforth

1. The type of bombs used by the JU.86s is not recorded but were, presumably, 250 lbs, the Fairey Battles used 20 lb. bombs.

henceforth our columns moved almost entirely by day."

The extraordinary lack of enterprise on the part of the enemy's Air Force during this period can be judged by the fact that it made offensives on only four occasions, namely: on 19 January when one C.A.133 dropped bombs north of Dukana, no damage or casualties resulting; on 24 January when an unspecified number of aircraft heavily bombed the Baghtiti area where a patrol of our troops was located, but no casualties occurred as our patrol had withdrawn previously having received warning of an impending air attack; on 29 January when one S.79 dropped three H.E. bombs on a convoy of three lorries ten miles west of Kolbio but without causing any damage or casualties, and on 12 February when two enemy aircraft bombed Kismayu (the day after it was entered by our forces) from a height of 3,000 feet, but no damage resulted.

Operations of the S.A.A.F. During the Advance into Jubaland and the Attack on Kismayu.

The operations of the South African Air Force preparatory to and during the advance on Kismayu (in addition to the attacks on Gobwen and Afmađu which have already been described) included many reconnaissances and patrols in the Kismayu and Mogadishu areas. On 2 and 7 January Glen Martins of the General Purposes Flight made photographic reconnaissances of Kismayu and Jelib and again of Kismayu. On 15 January a Glen Martin made a further photographic reconnaissance of Kismayu, Gobwen and Afmađu and during this operation it machine-gunned a C.A.133 which was observed grounded between Gobwen and Kismayu. On 17 January one Glen Martin made a photographic reconnaissance of Magadishu, Balad<sup>1</sup>, Afgoi<sup>2</sup>, Merka, Jelib, Margherita, Gobwen and Kismayu. At the

/Mogadishu

- 
1. Near Mogadishu.
  2. Near Mogadishu.



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Mogadishu aerodrome three large aircraft (presumed to be Capronis) and three smaller aircraft were observed. One of these took off and pursued the Glen Martin but was unable to close with it. Three miles south of the junction of the roads from Audeghle<sup>1</sup> and Mogadishu a large and well camouflaged aerodrome with the name "Vittorio" in a circle was seen on which seven aircraft were counted believed to be six Capronis and one S.81, and at an aerodrome situated part way between Gobwen and Kismayu three enemy fighters were seen preparing to take off. Heavy but inaccurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered over Kismayu. On the next day (18 January) one Glen Martin made a further photographic reconnaissance of Mogadishu and Merka: two fighters (believed to have been Fiats) intercepted the Glen Martin which managed to escape unharmed. On 24, 26, 28 and 30 January further photographic reconnaissances were made by single Glen Martins over Bardera, and the Kismayu, Afmadu and Gobwen aerodromes. Pamphlets were dropped during the reconnaissance on 30 January over Gobwen where one Caproni aircraft was seen on the aerodrome and four others on the satellite landing-ground. A C.R.42 attacked the Glen Martin which disabled the C.R.42 with its rear gun. After this engagement the Glen Martin dived down and machine-gunned the Capronis on the satellite landing-ground.

Meanwhile the S.A.A.F.'s attacks on enemy aerodromes in Abyssinia were being continued, and on 21 January six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed Shashamana aerodrome on which six S.81s were grounded. The Battles attacked in two waves of three each, by dive-bombing from 5,000 to 2,000 feet and destroyed three of the S.81s, severely damaged the fourth and set the fifth on fire.

/216 x 20 lb.

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<sup>1</sup> Approx. 35 miles east of Mogadishu.

216 x 20 lb. bombs and 480 incendiaries were dropped in sticks and salvos of mixed H.E. and incendiary. On 7 February three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron attacked Dolo and Lugh Ferrandi (on the Upper Juba River) by individual dive-bombing attacks from 4,000 to 1,500 feet. Four 250 lb. bombs were dropped near a pontoon bridge at Dolo and five more 250 lb. bombs near a wooden bridge also at Dolo, and direct hits with two 250 lb. bombs were obtained on the aerodrome hangars at Lugh Farrandi; the total weight of bombs dropped was 3,480 lbs. Inaccurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered at Lugh Ferrandi.

On 12 February a photographic reconnaissance was made over Jumbo, Kismayu and Brava by one Fairey Battle of No.11 Squadron, and on 13 February by one Glen Martin over the Jelib - Mogadishu road: the Glen Martin was attacked and damaged by a C.R.42. On the same day Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made seven offensive reconnaissances of the Jelib area, and six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron attacked administrative buildings, the ferry, the camp and water works at Bardera by dive-bombing from 5,000 to 1,500 feet. Each aircraft carried 36 x 20 lb. bombs and 80 incendiaries. All bombs fell in the target area, the total weight dropped being 2,880 lbs. and 320 lbs. of incendiaries. Pom-pom and machine-gun fire was encountered and one Battle failed to return.

The following morning (14 February, on which our troops entered Kismayu) the South African Air Force intensified their operations. Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made offensive reconnaissances of the Gobwen area while our Artillery was firing at the Gobwen defences; then of Jumbo (which our troops were shelling), and of Lak Badana<sup>1</sup>, and again over Jumbo and Gobwen

/and the

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1. Situated some 30 miles east by south of Kismayu.

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and the Korondil - Bura road. A reconnaissance was also made of the El Wak - El Katula - Wajir road. Meanwhile six JU.86s of No.12 Squadron had bombed a pontoon bridge between Gobwen and Jumbo, causing it to sink; and wire entanglements in the same area; they had also attacked the enemy's trench system at Gobwen and one 250 lb. bomb hit a blockhouse believed to contain a machine-gun post; these attacks were made by dive-bombing from 2,000 to 1,000 feet, the total weight of bombs dropped (250 pounders) being 5,760 lbs. Severe and accurate pom-pom fire was encountered at Jumbo. On the same morning three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron made an offensive reconnaissance along the Jelib - Bardera road dropping 156 x 20 lb. bombs, on M/T: four direct hits were obtained on two M/T vehicles. One of the Battles was forced to land having sustained considerable damage during the operation.

"The Abyssinian Campaigns"

The capture of Kismayu was important for three reasons: it pushed back the enemy for more than 100 miles from the Jubaland border and thus eliminated any possible threat to Kenya, and the loss of their bomber base at the mouth of the Juba River (resulting from the fall of Kismayu) practically precluded the Italians from making any serious air raids against Nairobi and Mombasa (assuming that their hard-hit Air Force had any such intention in mind). Secondly, our occupation of Kismayu virtually gave our forces the command of Jubaland and threatened the Italians' line on the Juba River. Moreover, our possession of the port established a new line of communications which was vital to our future operations, for thenceforward our forces were linked by sea with Mombasa - a distance of 325 miles - which obviated any further need of supplies being sent overland from Nairobi - a distance of 600 miles over rough tracks hewn out of the desert by the South African Engineers. /The Forcing

The Forcing of the Juba and Capture of Mogadishu.

Ibid.

The immediate task now confronting our forces was to force a passage across the Juba River which would open up a rapid line of advance to Mogadishu, the capital of Italian Somaliland, and would also lay open a second line of attack along the river to the enemy's strongholds of Lugh Ferrandi, Dolo and Neghelli, and the southern parts of Abyssinia.

The forcing of the Juba presented many difficulties: the Italians were in a very considerable numerical superiority over our forces and they had destroyed the bridges over the river which is nearly 200 yards wide. The obvious place for the crossing was at the village of Jelib on the Afmadu - Mogadishu road but this village was strongly held by the enemy. Moreover near Jelib the Juba has formed two channels, the one to the west known as "Dry Juba" and the one to the east as "Wet Juba". Bula Erillo (which the 24th Gold Coast Brigade had captured on 13 February) is situated west of the "Dry Juba", and Jelib is 10 miles further east (just beyond the "Wet Juba"). Between Bulo Erillo and Jelib lies the village of Allesandra which the Italians still held. Some 50 miles to the south the 1st South African Brigade held Gobwen on the western side of the river, and beyond the river the Italians occupied the village of Jumbo.

A frontal attack on Jelib was impracticable, but the South African and Gold Coast Brigades found crossings which were less well defended, namely at Yonte, 14 miles north of Gobwen, and at Mabungo, 30 miles south of Jelib. The south Africans effected a crossing at Yonte on the night of 17/18 February in the face of heavy counter-attacks, and the Gold Coast Brigade crossed the river at Mabungo on 19 February. By the following morning

/(20 February)

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(20 February) improvised pontoon bridges were established at both Yonte and Mabungo, and the 11th (A) Division moved up to the bridge-head at Mabungo ready to advance on Mogadishu. Meanwhile the village of Alessandra had been captured and our forces now threatened Jelib from three sides. In the meantime the South Africans had captured Jumbo (near the Yonte crossing), and the 22nd East African Brigade were hacking their way through the bush from Mabungo. After two days the East Africans emerged on to the Mogadishu road 18 miles beyond Jelib thus cutting off the Italians' only line of retreat. The enemy's native troops now deserted wholesale and large numbers of their European troops surrendered. The South Africans captured Jelib on 22 February, and the forcing of the Juba had been achieved<sup>1</sup>.

Gen. Cunningham's "E.A. Force - Report on Ops. from 1 Nov. in the campaign - some thousands of prisoners had fallen to 5 April '41". Enc. to CS.18122. The capture of Jelib marked a very definite stage into our hands and it now became apparent that the Italians had committed almost the whole of their forces to the defence of the Juba and that very few were left between the River and Mogadishu. Major-General Cunningham therefore decided that after capturing Mogadishu he could hope to reach Harrar in Abyssinia (via Jijjiga). Although the distance by road from Mogadishu to Harrar is 600 miles he calculated that he had sufficient transport to move three Brigades against Harrar and to reach that place early in April before the rainy season (which occurs later in Abyssinia than in Kenya). At the same time the General contemplated the re-capture of Berbera (British Somaliland) which he could then use as a base for future operations in Abyssinia and thereby shorten very greatly his lines of communication. The distance from Mogadishu to Jijjiga (at the junction of the Berbera - Harrar road) is nearly

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1. The forcing of the Juba has been narrated in some detail, but this seemed advisable as the whole of Gen. Cunningham's campaign through Italian Somaliland and into Abyssinia (in which the S.A.A.F. played so important a part) depended on the success of this operation.

is nearly 750 miles while from Berbera to Jijjiga is only some 200 miles. The General therefore cabled these suggestions to General Wavell and received his permission to continue the advance to Harrar. General Wavell also agreed to the Berbera proposition and he asked the A.O.C. Aden (Air Vice-Marshal Reid) to prepare a plan for the retaking of Berbera by sea in co-operation with the advance of Major-General Cunningham's forces.

The 11th (A) Division now pushed on with all speed to Mogadishu and by the evening of 23 February the 22nd East African Brigade<sup>1</sup> entered Modun<sup>2</sup>, and on the following morning (24 February) they captured Brava after encountering some opposition. On 25 February the 25th Nigerian Brigade (which had passed through the South African Brigade at Modun and Brava) captured Merka, and the same evening some of their armoured cars and light forces entered Mogadishu (which had been declared an open town by the Italians) having covered no less than 275 miles since the morning of 23 February.

Meanwhile light forces of the 12th (A) Division were advancing north up the Juba River: they occupied Bardera on 26 February, Isha Baidoa on 28 February, Lugh Ferrandi on 3 March and Dolo on 5 March. Many more prisoners were taken including the Commander of the 20th Brigade whose troops, some 3,000 men, had dispersed into the bush.

Ibid.

Thus the whole of Italian Somaliland had fallen into our hands with a great store of arms and ammunition and - a most necessary commodity - 350,000 gallons of motor spirit and 80,000 gallons of aviation spirit which were found at Mogadishu. More than 30,000 of

/the enemy

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1. This Bgde. was placed under the 11th (A) Division on 23 Feb.
  2. Situated approx. 2 miles inland from Brava.

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the enemy forces had been killed or taken prisoner or had fled into the bush, which accounted for the whole of their 102nd Division and nearly the whole of their 101st.

## Operations of the S.A.A.F. at the Forcing of the Juba and in the Advance to Mogadishu.

On 15 February (the day after the capture of Kismayu) the South African Air Force renewed its co-operation with our ground forces in the forcing of the Juba River. Nine JU.86s of No.12 Squadron attacked Jelib by individual dive-bombing in three waves at 30 minute intervals from 4,000 to 2,500 feet with 250 lb. bombs and 25 lb. incendiaries scoring direct hits on barracks and other buildings ; the total weight of bombs dropped being 10,800 lbs. They also machine-gunned the village, encountering large calibre machine-gun fire which damaged three of the JU.86s. On the same day seven Hartbees of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made ten sorties on M/T at El Sod dropping 1,680 lbs. weight of 20 lbs. bombs and obtaining direct hits. Meanwhile Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made offensive reconnaissance of Jelib, Jumbo and Margherita. Further north one Glen Martin made a photographic reconnaissance over Mogadishu and directed the fire of H.M.S. Shropshire (cruiser) on Brava; five salvos were fired of which three fell in the target area.

On the following day (16 February) six JU.86s of No.12 Squadron attacked enemy defended positions on the east bank of the Juba by individual dive-bombing from 3,500 to 2,000 feet in two waves of three aircraft. 24 x 250 lb. and 48 x 20 lb. (H.E.) bombs - a total of 6,960 lbs. - were dropped in the target area which was also heavily machine-gunned; large calibre A.A. fire was encountered and one JU.86 was hit. (The effects of the bombing could not be /observed

observed owing to thick forest). On the same day the attack on Jelib was repeated by six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron which dive-bombed in two waves from 3,000 to 1,000 feet with sticks and salvos of 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries; hits were obtained on buildings and on a hutment in the enemy's Headquarter area. On the same day three other Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed a satellite landing ground at Bardera from 4,000 to 1,000 feet obtaining direct hits on enemy troop headquarters, camp and stores, 2,880 lbs. of 20 lb. H.E. bombs and 320 lbs. of 25 lb. incendiaries being dropped. Meanwhile reconnaissances were made by Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron over the Jelib - Jumbo area.

On 18 February Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made reconnaissances of Yonte and Jelib, and on 19 February two Hartbees of the same Squadron made a reconnaissance of the Jelib - Bardera road while our troops (who had crossed the Juba at Mabungo) were constructing a pontoon bridge over the river. One Hurricane of No.3 Squadron made a patrol to protect our troops in the Mabungo area. In the meantime Advanced Air Headquarters had been moved on the previous day (18 February) to Kismayu.

On 20 February six JU.86s of No.12 Squadron attacked enemy troop concentrations at Umboi<sup>1</sup> by dive-bombing and machine-gunning from 4,000 to 2,000 feet. 24 x 250 lb. bombs and 48 x 20 lb. (H.E.) bombs - a total of 6,960 lbs - were dropped in the target area, and a direct hit was made with a 20 lb. bomb on a (probable) petrol store causing a fire. Reconnaissances were made by Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron of the Jumbo, Jelib and Margherita areas.

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1. Situated approx. 40 miles north by east of Brava.



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and one Glen Martin made a photographic reconnaissance of Mogadishu and Modun, and machine-gunned several lorries travelling towards Brava from the direction of Mogadishu. A C.R.42 attacked the Glen Martin which was severely damaged by explosive bullets. On 21 February one Hartbee of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made a reconnaissance of Yonte and another Hartbee "spotted" for our Artillery which was shelling Jelib. On the next day (22 February) our forces captured Jelib which had again been reconnoitred by Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron; another Hartbee made a reconnaissance of the roads on both sides of the Juba River north of Mabungo to ascertain if any enemy reserve troops were moving from their encampment at Bardera towards Jelib, but no troop movement was seen. Meanwhile three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron made a bombing attack on enemy M/T on the Lamma Garas - Duduma<sup>1</sup> road with 20 lb. bombs and incendiaries, scoring direct hits on eight vehicles. One Glen Martin was employed "spotting" for H.M.S. Shropshire firing at Modun where the enemy's Headquarters were now located: the Glen Martin corrected the first two salvos (by Wireless Telegraphy) and thereafter three salvos fell in the target area destroying large buildings by direct hits. On 23 February three Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron attacked the aerodrome at Brava but no enemy aircraft were observed. On the same day a Hartbee of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron while on a reconnaissance was attacked by two C.R.42s: the enemy aircraft were driven off, one with smoke pouring from its engine; the Hartbee was also damaged but landed at Jelib.

/It was now

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1. Lamma Garas is situated approx. 20 miles west of Jelib and Duduma is approx. 12 miles south-east of Brava.

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
10 Feb. - 5 April  
'41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

It was now apparent that targets for the heavy bombers would be in the Mogadishu and further forward areas, and for this reason No.2 Wing and No.11 Squadron were moved to Kismayu and No.12 Squadron to Margherita. Considerable difficulty was experienced in these moves from lack of transport but by borrowing where possible and by improvisation the equipment of these Units was transported, the moves being completed by 25 February.

On 24 February (the day on which our troops occupied Brava) Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made two further reconnaissances of the Jelib - Brava areas, and three Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron attacked the recently discovered aerodrome at Vittorio but no enemy aircraft were seen. On the next day (25 February) two Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron raided Lugh Ferrandi and Mandera<sup>1</sup> by dive-bombing from 3,000 to 1,000 feet; direct hits were obtained with 20 lb. bombs on the barracks and Wireless Telegraph station at Lugh Ferrandi and on the aerodrome buildings and barracks at Mandera. It was observed that damage to the hangars at Lugh Ferrandi made in a previous raid had not been repaired. On the same day three Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made a reconnaissance of Bardera: no military movements were observed and on the outskirts of the town natives were seen waving white flags. On the same evening our light forces entered Mogadishu.

"Its a Long Way to  
Addis".

The aerodrome at Mogadishu "was an aeroplane graveyard". The remains of eleven Caproni bombers and ten other aircraft - several of which had been destroyed by the raids of the South African Air Force - lay scattered round the air station. A large amount of aerial equipment fell into our hands - including aero engines and

/power plants

1. Situated approx. 60 miles east of Lugh Ferrandi (at the junction of the Kenya - Abyssinia - Italian Somaliland boundaries).

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power plants and a Repair and Salvage Unit was formed to assist in the clearing up of this material. The South African airmen built a C.A.133 bomber from material found at the aerodrome which was flown to Nairobi, and thence to South Africa for exhibition: they also overhauled their own machines for the advance to Harrar, for "the South African Air Force went on: it helped to blast a way for our troops to Abyssinia".

Ibid.

## Location of Italian Aerodromes.

Information  
contributed by  
A.C. Sowrey.

Our captures at Mogadishu included a complete written record of every aerodrome and landing-ground in Italian East Africa. This document was drawn up in an elaborate style and proved to be of great value when the South African Air Force advanced into Abyssinia, particularly with regard to the interception of S.79 and S.81 aircraft which (it was ascertained) were flying direct from Italy.

## The Advance to Harrar.

Gen Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A.  
Force Report on  
Ops. from 1 Nov.  
'40 to 5 April '41"  
Enc. to CS.18122.

After the capture of Mogadishu the remnants of the Italians' Juba forces were withdrawing to Jijjiga<sup>1</sup>: their forces in the northern area consisted of three fresh Brigades between Jijjiga and Harrar and one in (British) Somaliland.

On 1 March the mobile column of the 23rd Nigerian Brigade of the 11th (A) Division began the advance to Harrar along the magnificent "Strada Imperiale" motor road which the Italians had constructed along the Webi Shebelli River. They covered a daily average of 65 miles, passing the experimental plantation known as the Villaggio Duca degli Abruzzi, the oasis of Belet Uen and the Sciavalle Wells. At this place (354 miles from /Mogadisu) the

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1. Situated some 60 miles west of Harrar.

Mogadishu) the tarmaced "Strada Imperiale" petered out and the road rapidly became worse. On 7 March they entered Gabredarre and on 10 March they reached Dagahbur (580 miles from Mogadishu<sup>1</sup>).

Operations of the S.A.A.F. during the Advance to Harrar.

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
10 Feb. - 5 April '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

The rapidity of the Army's advance necessitated the forward movement of Advanced Air Headquarters, No.2 Wing and all the Squadrons, and on 28 February and 1 March Advanced Air Headquarters and No.2 Wing moved to Mogadishu, and No.11 Squadron moved to Vittorio and No.12 and the remainder of No.3 Squadron moved to Mogadishu on 1 and 2 March respectively. These Squadrons now had no transport difficulties as they had each acquired some derelict Italian lorries which were quickly rendered serviceable by the Squadrons' own engineering personnel. Meanwhile the two Fighter Squadrons began moving forward with the two A.C. Squadrons and they continued to do so during the advance. Before leaving Kismayu three Fairey Battles and four JU.86s (of Nos.11 and 12 Squadrons) were sent back to Nairobi for a general overhaul and thereafter to be kept in reserve to replace any aircraft which were becoming unserviceable during the later stages of the campaign. The reserve thus formed proved of considerable value.

On the completion of the moves to these new locations the S.A.A.F. continued its attacks on enemy strongholds and troop concentrations in co-operation with the advance of our ground forces. Offensive reconnaissances were made in the Isha Baidoa and Lugh Ferrandi areas and of the aerodrome at Neghelli, and on 4 March two Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron made an offensive reconnaissance of Gorrahei<sup>2</sup> and Gabredarre /aerodromes

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1. These distances are by road.

2. Situated on the Mogadishu - Jijjiga road approx. 14 miles south of Jijjiga.

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aerodromes where no enemy aircraft were observed but white flags were seen on the buildings. On 6 March a Glen Martin made a reconnaissance as far forward as Harrar (the second largest city in Abyssinia) and as a result of the information which it obtained four Fairey Battles of No. 11 Squadron raided Harrar on 8 March scoring direct hits on barracks, hutments and two anti-aircraft posts with 20 lb. H.E. bombs by dive bombing from 1,000 to 500 feet owing to low clouds; 4,160 lbs. of bombs were dropped: heavy anti-aircraft fire from artillery west of the town was encountered. On the same day (6 March) a Glen Martin made a reconnaissance and took photographs of the Awash area of the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway, particularly the bridge over the Awash River, and on 10 March Glen Martins and Hartbees made photographic and offensive reconnaissances of the Jijjiga area, the Marda Pass and the enemy's aerodrome at Kalam. Next day (11 March) a special reconnaissance was made by an Audax of No. 41 (A.C.) Squadron of the aerodrome at Dagahbur. This was found to be suitable as an advanced air base and No. 3 Squadron was moved to this place. At this stage the transport difficulties resulting from the execrable state of the roads seriously affected the supply of bombs, petrol, and spare parts, and operations by short range aircraft had to be curtailed.

Meanwhile, the A.O.C. Aden took the advantage of the threat by our forces to Jijjiga by arranging his intended attack on Berbera<sup>1</sup>. Information had been received that the enemy was using almost exclusively the aerodrome at Diredawa and its satellite, and with the two-fold object of assisting the intended operations against Berbera and of the advance of our forces on Jijjiga the A.O.C. East Africa organised a fighter

/ground

1. See page 144 supra. Close co-operation was maintained between the A.O.Cs. Aden and East Africa (see "Report on the Capture of Berbera" - Appx. "A" to Air H.Q. Aden, Form 540, Entries of 14, 16 March, '41).

ground attack against Dire-dawa and its satellite aerodromes. Accordingly, on 15 March, six Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron made two consecutive attacks destroying ten enemy aircraft and damaging eight others<sup>1</sup>, two of the Hurricanes being shot down<sup>2</sup>. The immediate effect on the advance of our ground forces by this severe blow to the Italians' Air Force was thus expressed by Major-General Cunningham:-

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force,  
Report on Ops. from  
1 Nov. '40 to  
5 April '41".  
Enc. to CS.18122.

"The value (i.e. to our forces) at this particular period of these heavy losses to the enemy was very great. Our further advance was over mountain roads through narrow defiles and passes, where our columns would have been extremely vulnerable to Air attack. Although they were bombed sporadically the attacks were not pushed home and little damage resulted. Our columns were still able to advance by day."

A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
I.E.A." 10 Feb. -  
5 April '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

The approach of our troops to Jijjiga (and thence to the Marda Pass where maximum air support was required) necessitated the forward movement of the heavy bomber squadrons. Accordingly No.12 Squadron (and No.2 Wing) moved to Gorraneh and No.11 Squadron to Belet Uen, the moves being completed by 16 March. Two Battles of No.11 Squadron were left at Mogadishu at the request of the G.O.C. until coastal defence guns had been put in order.

/On 17 March

#### 1. The enemy's losses were as follows:-

(shot down.	1 C.R.42 and 2 C.R.32s (or R.O.37s)	total 3
(burnt.	3 C.R.42s (or R.O.37s) 4 S.79s.	total 7
		<u>total 10</u>
<u>damaged.</u>	5 C.R.32s (or R.O.37s) 2 S.79s and 1 C.A.133 (or S.79)	<u>total 8</u>

2. One of these was piloted by Capt. J. Frost (who had won the D.F.C. on 3 Feb. - see page 156 supra). Frost had already shot down two enemy aircraft when his own aircraft was hit and its engine seized. He managed to land on the enemy's satellite aerodrome and he then set fire to his machine. Lieut. R.H.C. Kershaw, piloting another Hurricane, saw Frost's predicament and landed close to him through a barrage of enemy fire. Frost climbed on to Kershaw's lap (there was no room for him in the cockpit) and in that position he operated the "stick" and the rudder while Kershaw operated the "flap" and the under-carriage levers. Lieut. Kershaw was awarded the D.S.O. (the first D.S.O. won by a S.A. pilot in the war). During the same operation Capt. S. van B. Theron (who was piloting another Hurricane) destroyed four of the enemy's aircraft: he was awarded the D.F.C. He had already shot down an S.79 and a C.R.42 during a patrol at Dagahbur on 13 March. The pilot of the second Hurricane that was shot down, Capt. Harvey (who had already destroyed at least one of the enemy's aircraft) was killed. (Air H.Q. East Africa - Form 540 - Entry of 15 March '41 and "Its a Long Way to Addis", and Air H.Q. East Africa, Forms 540, Entries of 13, 17 and 26 March '41).

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On 17 March our troops entered Jijjiga - a distance of 744 miles by road from Mogadishu - the enemy retreating to a position covering the Marda Pass. On the same day (17 March) three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron attacked the enemy's defences at the Marda Pass by individual dive-bombing from 4,500 feet to 2,000 feet with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs. All bombs were dropped in the target area and direct hits were observed on the northern trench system and on tranches north of the road, the total weight of bombs dropped being 3,480 lbs: no anti-aircraft opposition was encountered. This attack was repeated on the following day (18 March) by three JU.86s of the same Squadron, and also on M/T for 20 miles along the road to Harrar from Jijjiga by dive-bombing and machine-gunning from 2,000 feet to 1,500 feet; bombs fell in the target area of the Marda Pass and several lorries were machine-gunned on the road (the total weight of bombs dropped was 3,400 lbs.).

Air H.Q. East  
Africa Form 540  
Entries of 4 and  
12 March '41.

In the meantime Advanced Air Headquarters had been removed from Mogadishu to Nairobi on 4 March, leaving No.2 Wing in charge of operations until 12 March when Advanced Air Headquarters was moved back to Mogadishu.

The advance was now reaching an area which was patrolled occasionally by enemy fighters and which could be easily reached by these fighters. This necessitated fighter escorts for the bombers, and from now onwards a fighter escort was provided for the bombers in most of their operations.

On 20 March three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron escorted by three Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron dive-bombed and machine-gunned from 4,500 to 2,500 feet enemy troop concentrations on the Harrar - Direedawa road and the railway at Direedawa, and dropped a stick of bombs across two trains, the total weight of bombs dropped being

/3,480 lbs.

3,480 lbs. Our aircraft encountered intense and accurate pom-pom fire from Diredawa, and during the operation the Hurricanes engaged two C.R.32s - one of which was believed to have been destroyed. On the same day three other JU.86s dive-bombed and machine-gunned from 4,500 to 2,500 feet military objectives on the Harrar - Diredawa road and Harrar and Diredawa towns; a bomb salvo hit the barracks and Wireless Telegraph station at Harrar and direct hits were obtained on the Diredawa aerodrome and two S.79s on the aerodrome were machine-gunned; (the total weight of bombs dropped was 2,320 lbs.). In this operation the JU.86s were escorted by three Hurricanes which reported shooting down one C.R.42. On 21 March three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed and machine-gunned from 4,000 to 1,500 feet trains between Diredawa and Awash, scoring a direct hit on the front of a train at the Urso siding and another direct hit on the rear of the train; direct hits were also obtained on the railway track, (the total weight of bombs dropped was 2,880 lbs.). Pom-Pom and machine-gun fire was encountered at the bridge over the Awash River. On the same day six Ju.86s of No.12 Squadron carried out individual dive-bombing and machine-gunning from 3,000 to 1,500 feet of the railway and M/T from Diredawa to Awash scoring hits on the track at Miesso and Urso and a direct hit on a train at Miesso which was followed by a violent explosion, the train being set on fire and burnt. The total weight of bombs dropped in these operations was 6,000 lbs. On the same day a Hartbee of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made four tactical reconnaissances of the Marda Pass and bombed enemy positions dropping 25 x 20 lb. bombs and machine-gunning the targets; several tank traps and trenches were observed.

/Meanwhile,



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Meanwhile, outlying parts of Italian Somaliland were being "mopped up". In consequence of information received that the Italians of Rocco Littorio (350 miles north-east of Mogadishu and the centre of an important district) were being harassed by the local natives, a Fairy Battle dropped a message saying that if the town would surrender an aircraft would land to evacuate the children and those in distress. Accordingly, on 21 March a JU.52 of No.51 (Communication and Transport) Flight landed at Rocco Littorio and having received the surrender of the town conveyed the invalids and children to Mogadishu.

On the same day (21 March) Advanced Air Headquarters A.C. Sowrey's Draft was moved from Mogadishu to Gorraheh. About this time Despatch Feb.-May '41. (File M.151/1). No.2 (Fighter) Squadron was sent back to Nakuru to be re-equipped with Curtis aircraft and to move thence to Egypt, its Fury aircraft being handed over to the Operational Training Unit at Nakuru (which was being re-established). Owing to road and weather conditions it was found impracticable for this Squadron's transport to be sent back and the greater part of it was made over to No.3 Squadron whose need for more transport was urgent, the balance of the transport being divided amongst the other squadrons which were still under establishment in this respect.

Meanwhile, during the whole period of the advance into Jubaland, Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia, Ansons of No.54 Flight maintained a succession of coastal patrols and channel sweeps from Dar-es-Salaam to Mombasa (including the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba), and also provided escorts to H.M. ships and merchantmen.

## The Re-conquest of British Somaliland.

As already stated<sup>1</sup> the A.O.C. Aden had decided to attack Berbera, and early in March the Royal Air Force at

/Aden

Aden carried out many preparatory offensive and photographic reconnaissances over British Somaliland in order to gauge the enemy's strength<sup>1</sup> and dispositions, and to obtain information as to the Berbera defences. At the same time co-operation with the 11th (A) Division's ground forces was maintained, and on 9 March the Blenheims of No.8 Squadron R.A.F. (Aden) made six sorties against Diredawa aerodrome to cover the entry of our ground forces into Dagahbur. During these sorties two C.R.42s were found patrolling over the target, and three other C.R.42s and one unidentified monoplane climbed to intercept our attack. Two of the enemy aircraft were attacked and damaged, and one of the Blenheims scored a direct hit on a train in Diredawa railway station. After the enemy fighters had thus been drawn off a second flight of three Blenheims made a low level dive attack and dropped 250 lb. bombs across the aerodrome: it was believed that one enemy aircraft was destroyed and one probably destroyed.

On 11 March a Blenheim I of No.8 Squadron made an offensive reconnaissance of Hargeisa and Jibuti and machine-gunned five lorries on the Laferug - Berbera road, and on the same day a Blenheim IV of No.203 Squadron made a photographic reconnaissance of Berbera. The attack on Berbera (which was to be made by a Naval bombardment followed by the landing of troops from transports) was fixed for 16 March and on the nights of 14 and 15 March Blenheims of No.8 Squadron made sorties on Diredawa aerodrome. These attacks were repeated on the night of 15/16 March by individual sorties on the same target by four Blenheims of the

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<sup>1</sup> Berbera was held by approx. 1,500 Colonial troops with European officers and N.C.O's, supported by several 120 mm. guns and machine-guns. /same Squadron

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same Squadron with the object of preventing enemy aircraft operating from the aerodrome against our landing troops: considerable and fairly accurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered. Meanwhile during the day one Blenheim IV of No.203 Squadron had carried out a photographic offensive reconnaissance of British Somaliland. No suitable targets, aircraft, or enemy activities were observed at Hargeisa, or at the ports of Bulhar or Zeilah.

The "Aden Striking Force" consisting of two Indian Battalions and attached troops appeared off Berbera on the night of 15/16 March in two ships of the Royal Indian Navy and other vessels supported by two Cruisers and two Destroyers (under command of Captain H. Hickling R.N., Senior Officer of the Naval Force). On the morning of 16 March the naval guns bombarded Berbera and the troops were ferried ashore in lighters, the landing being carried out without any casualties. The enemy troops fled to the hills; some 200 were taken prisoner.

"Its a Long Way to Addis" and  
Report on the Capture of Berbera" Appx. "A"  
to Air H.Q. Aden.  
Form 540 - Entries  
of 14/16 March '41.

During the landing of the troops the R.A.F.'s main task was to prevent enemy air action interfering with the operation, and subsequently with the establishment of the base. This was achieved successfully, no enemy air attack being made. Meanwhile a continuous fighter patrol was maintained over Berbera during the hours of daylight from 16 to 21 March when a Flight of Gladiators of No.94 Squadron was established there.

On 20 March a small column of the 23rd Nigerian Brigade advanced from Jijjiga and occupied Tug Wajale on the Abyssinian - British Somaliland border, and two armoured cars, led by the Chief Engineer, E.A. Force, motored through Hargeisa to Berbera and made contact with the "Aden Striking Force". No enemy was encountered for the Italians had already evacuated their 70th

/Brigade

Brigade (which had garrisoned the Protectorate) but its retreat was cut off by our forces at Jijjiga. The subsequent adventures of this enemy Brigade are obscure: nothing further was heard of it and it was assumed that it had broken up into small bands and disintegrated. Thus British Somaliland came once more under our rule after an occupation by the Italians of just seven months. The Capture of the Marda Pass and the Surrender of Harrar.

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force  
Report on Ops." from  
1 Nov. '40 to  
5 April '41.  
Enc. to CS.18122.

The Marda Pass was a formidable proposition: it towered above the Jijjiga plains where everything - including the aerodrome - was in full view of the strong garrison which held the Pass. However, the enemy's defences had been "softened" by the S.A.A.F.'s attacks on 17 and 18 March<sup>1</sup>, and on the morning of 21 March the 1st Nigerian Regiment captured a height overlooking the Pass on its northern side, and the enemy evacuated the whole position that night. It was now possible to transfer the line of communications to the Berbera - Hargeisa route.

Two more enemy prepared positions remained before Harrar could be reached, namely at the Bibille Gap and above the Bisidimo River, but after a two days' battle the enemy evacuated these positions. On the morning of 25 March it was reported that the Italians had declared Harrar an open town, and after a parley with an Italian Civil Official Harrar was surrendered, our troops entering the town that evening.

During the advance from Mogadishu to the surrender of Harrar a further 19,000 enemy troops had been accounted for in killed, prisoners, or by desertion, bringing the total up to 50,000 men, and amongst other war material captured at Harrar were two heavy batteries of 105 c.m. guns.

/The

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## The Capture of Diredawa.

The town of Diredawa lies at the foot of the hills on the Jibuti - Addis Ababa railway some 35 miles from Harrar. The last ten miles of the road winds down a steep 4,000 feet incline which is admirably suited for demolition. The Italians had taken full advantage of this by blowing up several bridges at points on the plateau itself and had also blasted the road in five separate places on the steepest grades. Nevertheless the East African Field Companies and the Nigeria Regiment cleared the road in 36 hours. The enemy did little to defend the road blocks with the exception of the first one, and our forward troops entered Diredawa unopposed on 29 March.

## Operations of the S.A.A.F. during the Attacks on Harrar and Diredawa.

A.C. Sowery's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
I.E.A. 10 Feb. -  
5 April '41".  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

Meanwhile the South African Air Force was continuing its attacks, its chief objective being the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway (especially the Diredawa - Awash section) with the object of disorganising the enemy's retreat. On 23 March three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron S.A.A.F. dive-bombed and machine-gunned from 2,000 to 1,000 feet trains on the Diredawa - Awash section of the railway: one stick of three 250 lb. bombs straddled a train: (the total weight of bombs dropped was 3,400 lbs.). On the next day (24 March) three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron attacked the railway and road at El Bah and Adda Galla by dive-bombing from 4,000 to 1,500 feet and scored a direct hit on a railway bridge five miles south of Harrawa, and at Adda Galla a bridge and some trucks received direct hits; both the bombed bridges collapsed (the total weight of bombs dropped was 3,000 lbs.). Heavy pom-pom fire was encountered along the Diredawa road and the Adda Galla - Diredawa section of /the railway

the railway, one of our aircraft being hit in fourteen places. On 25 March 5 JU.86s of No.12 Squadron dive-bombed rolling stock from Diredawa to Awash from a height of 4,000 to 1,000 feet scoring two direct hits on a train in a siding at Awash (the total weight of bombs dropped was 5,800 lbs.); severe damage to the train and to the Awash station was inflicted. On the same day two Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron made tactical reconnaissances of Jijjiga and Harrar and indicated the route and guided our troops who were working round the flank of an enemy position. During this operation the Hartbees encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire of all kinds, and they replied with 120 lb. bombs. On 26 March one Fairey Battle of No.11 Squadron dive-bombed the railway from heights of 4,000 to 1,500 feet from El Bah to Adda Galla straddling three trucks at Harrawa and scoring a direct hit on the Adda Galla station: 960 lbs. weight of bombs were dropped. On the same day a Glen Martin of No.12 Squadron<sup>1</sup> made a road and railway reconnaissance of Harra, Barada and Diredawa and sighted two S.79s on the Diredawa landing ground and encountered a third which had taken off. The Glen Martin pursued the third S.79 closing to 250 yards, but the S.79 made off and disappeared. On the same afternoon the main body of our troops entered Harrar.

During the next few days the attacks on the railway and road from Diredawa to Awash were continued. On 27 March three Fairey Battles dive-bombed M/T near the road from heights of 3,000 to 1,000 feet scoring direct hits on trucks and other vehicles parked in the bush with 20 lb. fragmentation bombs: (the total weight of bombs dropped being 5,160 lbs.), and on the

/same day

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1. The Glen Martin Flight was attached to No.12 Sqdn. as from 23 March.

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same day six JU.86s made individual dive-bombing attacks with 250 lb. bombs from 2,000 to 1,000 feet on railway trains and on the station at Mieso where a direct hit was obtained. The station was set on fire and burnt furiously, the fire spreading to other buildings; direct hits were also scored on trains and a warehouse, a goods train being set on fire. At Arba, a direct hit with a 250 lb. bomb was obtained on the station. The total weight of bombs dropped during this operation was 6,900 lbs; one of our aircraft was damaged and forced to land. On the next day (28 March) one Glen Martin of No.12 Squadron made a reconnaissance of the aerodromes at Adama, Addis Ababa, Jimma, Soddu and Shannamana, so as to ascertain an idea of the enemy's future intentions and the location of enemy aircraft. During this reconnaissance a satellite aerodrome was observed near Mojjo on which were three large enemy aircraft - probably S.79s - and three enemy fighters. The Glen Martin machine-gunned the large aircraft hitting one of them, and it was then attacked by two C.R.42s and one C.A.133 (which took off from Mojjo) but managed to escape. At Addis Ababa aerodrome the Glen Martin saw twenty to thirty S.79s and C.A.133s, three or four Savoias or Capronis at Jimma, and a large defended camp at Abalti<sup>1</sup>. On the following day (29 March, during which our forces occupied Diredawa) a Hartbee of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron made a tactical reconnaissance of Diredawa and the adjacent localities, and a Glen Martin made a reconnaissance of the Diredawa - Adama - Asba Littorio road.

Meanwhile Advanced Air Headquarters, No.2 Wing, and No.12 Squadron had moved from Gorrahei to Jijjiga on 23 and 25 March, and No.11 Squadron moved to Dagahbur on 27 and to Jijjiga on 29 March.

/During

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1. Situated approx. 110 miles south-west of Addis Ababa.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540 Entries of  
27 and 29 March, and  
Appxs. "X" "Y" and  
"Z".

During this period the enemy's Air Force made three attacks on the recently captured aerodrome at Jijjiga, as follows:- soon after mid-day on 27 March three C.R.42s swooped down out of the sun and began "ground-strafting" three JU.52s of the Communication and Transport Flight which had just returned to the aerodrome with some passengers and stores. All the three JU.52s were damaged and also one Vega Gull aircraft. Our Hurricanes took off and pursued the raiders but failed to engage them. On 29 March at 07.50 hours four C.R.32s suddenly appeared out of the sun and machine-gunned one JU.52, one Valentia, one Hartbee and one Hurricane, which they set on fire and destroyed. Three other enemy fighters circling high above the aerodrome dived down to attack our Hurricanes which intercepted and a general "dog-fight" took place, one of the Hurricanes being set on fire and burnt out. Meanwhile one of the enemy fighters was also set on fire in the air and crashed, the other two making off pursued by a Hurricane (piloted by Captain Frost) which shot down one of them. On the following day (30 March) two S.79s bombed the aerodrome before dawn from 3,500 feet dropping 200 anti-personnel and incendiary bombs, but no casualties to personnel or aircraft resulted. Two of our Hurricanes and two Gladiators chased the raiders, the Hurricanes overhauling and damaging them but having to break off the pursuit as all their ammunition was expended.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb.-May  
'41. (File M.151/1).

In the meantime the aircraft of Nos.11 and 12 Squadrons had been reduced to a low state of service-ability and three of the Fairey Battles and two of the JU.86s which had been sent to Nairobi for overhaul at the end of February<sup>1</sup> were flown back to these squadrons on 30 and 31 March.

/S.A.A.F. Close

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1. See page 150 supra.



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## S.A.A.F. Close Support Flight.

Ibid.

At this stage of the campaign contact with the enemy's ground forces was becoming much more frequent than formerly and it therefore became necessary to establish a system of close support for bombing purposes. Accordingly on 1 April a Close Support Flight was formed consisting of four Gladiators of No.3 Squadron and four Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron, the Hartbees being used as bombers. The Close Support Control enabled the advanced Battalions to call immediately upon aircraft based at a Close Support aerodrome to assist these Battalions in clearing up opposition such as small machine-gun posts and other light opposition. The Close Support Flight's first aerodrome was at Diredawa; it moved forward as our ground forces advanced.

## Co-operation of the R.A.F., Aden Command.

Meanwhile the Royal Air Force at Aden was co-operating with the South African Air Force by attacking enemy aerodromes and troop concentrations. On 19 March six Blenheims of No.8 Squadron bombed the aerodrome at Kombolcha from a high level seriously damaging the tarmac and probably damaging a grounded C.A.133. On 21 March three Blenheim IVs of No.203 Squadron attacked road and rail transport between Miesso and Awash, heavily bombing 28 vehicles and machine-gunning trains which were hit repeatedly. On the same day six Blenheims of No.8 Squadron bombed Diredawa railway station, and on 22 March three Blenheim IVs of No.203 Squadron made offensive and photographic reconnaissances of the Urso - Miesso - Awash area, attacking 30 M/T vehicles with machine-guns and bombs and machine-gunning three railway engines. On 25 March three Blenheims of No.8 Squadron dive-bombed and damaged Harrawa railway station, and on the same day

/four

four Blenheim IVs of No.203 Squadron attacked railway trains in the Awash area. These attacks were repeated during the next few days, the railway between Goja and Miesso being dive-bombed by Blenheims of No.8 Squadron which scored direct hits on a train, the railway track and a bridge near Bischet, and trains and transport being bombed and machine-gunned on the Miesso - Adama - Awash sections of the railway and road by Blenheim IVs of No.203 Squadron. Other attacks included the bombing of bridges, trains and trucks and the machine-gunning of an engine. By 27 March reconnaissances showed that the railway line was now blocked in several places by bomb craters and wrecked trains. On 31 March three JU.86s and three Fairey Battles of Nos.12 and 11 Squadrons S.A.A.F. bombed M/T and troops on the Addis Ababa - Dessie road diving from 3,000 to 1,000 feet, and dropping 12, x 250 lb. and 156 x 20 lb. bombs and scoring direct hits on M/T. Two days later (2 April) Advanced Air Headquarters were moved to Harrar and No.2 Wing moved to Dire-dawa. Meanwhile on 29/30 March and 1 April twelve Gladiators of No.94 Squadron (Aden Command) had, by arrangement with the A.O.C. Aden, arrived at Jijjiga and had been incorporated into No.3 Squadron, S.A.A.F., which moved to Jijjiga at this time<sup>1</sup>. These Gladiators were chiefly used for the protection of the aerodromes on which Nos.11 and 12 Squadrons were based, and they were also available as escorts for the G.O.C. Forces.

During this period raids and reconnaissances were also carried out over the port of Assab (Eritrea) and along the Red Sea coast, and a photographic reconnaissance was made at ~~Cape~~ Guardafui in the northern area of Italian Somaliland.

/The Capture

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. - May  
'41. (File M.151/1).

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1. The remainder of No.94 Sqn. was transferred from Aden to Egypt.

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## The Capture of Addis Ababa.

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force.

Report on Ops. From Dire-dawa, and on 21 March Lieut.-General Cunningham had  
11 Nov. '40 to

5 April '41" Enc.  
to CS. 18122.

Addis Ababa is nearly 300 miles (by rail) from  
received a cable from General Wavell to the effect that he  
saw no military advantage in an advance beyond Dire-dawa  
unless it was likely to end the campaign, and pointing out  
the danger of becoming too deeply committed. He added,  
however, that he did not wish to hamper General Cunningham's  
action and asked for his views. In his reply General  
Cunningham tabulated his reasons for thinking that the  
capture of Addis Ababa appeared quite possible, and he  
received General Wavell's permission to proceed with the  
advance accordingly. On 1 April the 1st South African  
Brigade occupied Mieso and the 22nd East African Brigade  
passed through towards Awash. By this time the enemy's  
morale had cracked: road demolitions were left uncovered  
and on several occasions enemy troops guarding road-blocks  
fled at the approach of our forces. The line Mieso -  
Asba Littorio was evacuated after a skirmish, and hundreds  
of Italians voluntarily surrendered to our troops as the  
advance progressed.

The Awash river (which is crossed by the railway and  
the road near the township of Awash) was the last of the  
great natural obstacles to the advance on Addis Ababa.  
It was an excellent defensive position for here the river  
runs through a deep gorge between high cliffs. The  
Italians demolished both the railway and the road bridges  
and they held the further bank with machine-gun posts.  
Our troops, however, forded the river at two places and  
the enemy fled. During the next day (2 April) our  
Engineers constructed a new road bridge over the river  
and the advance continued early on the following morning.

/Adama

Adama (75 miles from Awash) was entered that day (3 April) by the 22nd East African Brigade where their Commanding Officer received a request from Italian Officials in Addis Ababa to send forward some troops to the city to prevent looting by natives. Meanwhile the main enemy forces were retreating towards Ponte Malcasa (on the Awash river, south of Adama); the 22nd East African Brigade attempted to cut them off but were held up by the enemy having blown the bridge over the river.

The S.A.A.F. Attacks Addis Ababa and Kombolcha Aerodromes.

On the two following days (4 and 5 April) the South African Air Force (which had been continuing its raids on the Dire-dawa - Awash sections of the road and railway) made heavy attacks on the aerodrome at Addis Ababa. On the first day (4 April) Fairey Battles and JU.86s of Nos. 11 and 12 Squadrons - escorted by Hurricanes and Gladiators of No. 3 Squadron - dive-bombed hangars and aircraft on the aerodrome and the barracks scoring many direct hits with 20 lb. and 250 lb. bombs<sup>1</sup>, from heights of 5,000 to 1,000 feet and 2,000 to 1,500 feet respectively. Meanwhile two Glen Martins of No. 12 Squadron made offensive reconnaissances and accounted for at least one of the enemy fighters in the air. On the second day (5 April) five Hurricanes of No. 3 Squadron and one Glen Martin of No. 12 Squadron made offensive reconnaissances over the aerodrome and destroyed several Savoia and Caproni aircraft and damaged others by "ground-strafting". During these two days' attacks a total of at least fifteen enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground and one (or more) in the air, and upwards of twelve others were /damaged.

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1. The total weight of bombs dropped was 12,120 lbs. (of these 4,160 lbs. were dropped by No. 11 Sqdn.).

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damaged<sup>1</sup>. These operations were followed on the next day (6 April) by a further attack on the aerodrome by two Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron which burnt out two Fiats, two S.79s and one C.A.133, and damaged four Fiats and one S.79.

On the same day (6 April) three other Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron "ground-strafed" aircraft on the aerodrome at Kombolcha and shot down two C.R.42s, burnt out one S.79 and damaged one Fiat, one S.79 and one Romeo aircraft; and six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed the Kombolcha aerodrome with 20 lb. fragmentation bombs, dive-bombing down to 500 feet destroying one enemy aircraft and damaging five others, and scoring direct hits on M/T, the barracks and aerodrome buildings. These were the heaviest blows that the South African Air Force had inflicted on the "Regia Aeronautica" which was by this time reduced to a skeleton of its former strength. To quote Lieut.-General Cunningham:-

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force  
Report on Ops. from  
11 Nov. '40 to  
5 April '41. Enc. to  
CS.18122.

"The shambles on Addis Ababa 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."

Meanwhile negotiations between Lieut.-General

Cunningham and the Italians for the surrender of the city had been in progress but as these were not satisfactory the advance was continued. The proximity of our troops had the desired effect and on 5 April the Head of the Italian Police was waiting ten miles outside Addis Ababa to make the surrender. It was decided, however, not to enter the capital until the next day when as representative a force as possible would be assembled to share in the official occupation. Accordingly our troops entered Addis Ababa on the morning of 6 April and the Divisional

"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns".

/Commander

1. These losses included:-

8 Savoias, 4 Capronis and 2 Fiats (C.R.32s or 42s) destroyed on the ground, and one C.R.42 in the air: and 5 Savoias and 4 Fiats (C.R.32s or 42s) damaged.

Commander (Major-General Wetherall) received the formal surrender of the city.

During the period between the beginning of the advance from Harrar to the capture of Addis Ababa a further 15,000 of the enemy were estimated to have become non-effective, and a great quantity of war material was captured during the advance and in the city itself.

Summary of the S.A.A.F.'s Operations during the Second Phase.

The value of the activities of the South African Air Force during the period of Phase II can hardly be overstated. From the attack on El Wak in December 1940 to the fall of Addis Ababa on 6 April 1941 they had attacked continually the enemy's aerodromes, aircraft and troops and had co-operated with our ground forces to the fullest extent. Without their assistance the successful invasion from Kenya of Italian Somaliland and of the highlands of Abyssinia could not have been achieved. In addition to their support in these operations their Army Co-operation Squadrons (Nos. 40 and 41) and their Bombers of No. 11 Squadron had carried out successful operations against scattered enemy groups in the Gojjam district of Abyssinia and the enemy strongholds of Hobok, Yavello, Neghelli, Moyale and Mega. At the same time the Anson aircraft of No. 34 Flight and No. 60 Squadron had maintained a series of coastal patrols, channel sweeps, escorts to ships and photographic and mapping reconnaissances. Meanwhile R.A.F. auxilliary machines had made continuous communication flights between the various locations of the widely separated groups of our ground forces. The attacks which the South African Air Force made on the Italians' aerodromes at Afmau, Gobwen, Diredawa, Addis Ababa and Kombolcha did much to shatter the morale of their ground forces, and put the finishing touch to

/the virtual

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A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch Jan.-May  
'41 (A.H.B. II  
J1/8).

the virtual obliteration of the "Regia Aeronautica" in East Africa whose losses in aircraft were now estimated to amount to upwards of 300 machines.

In his despatch covering operations of the East African Forces during this period Lieut.-General Cunningham said:-

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch "E.A. Force  
Report on Ops. from  
No. '40 to 5 April  
'41" Enc. to  
CS.18122.

"I cannot speak too highly of the part played by the Air Force in this campaign. The Air Officer Commanding remained with me throughout the operation, thus facilitating the requests for immediate air assistance. From the commencement of the campaign our Air Forces, under Air Commodore W. Sowrey D.F.C., A.F.C., ably assisted by Brigadier H. Daniel, M.C., A.F.C., S.A.A.F., established complete air superiority, with the result that the advance of the troops was little interfered with by enemy air activity, and after the crossing of the Juba we moved wholly by day. Bombing and "ground-strafting" by the enemy was sporadic and normally ineffective. During the later stages of the campaign a support group consisting of Bombers, Fighters, and A.C. machines was formed, and its Air Force commander with his own communications advanced with the commander of the leading troops. The value of this arrangement from the Army point of view cannot be over stressed. Air support for the forward troops of the nature called for by the situation, was "on tap", and engendered the greatest confidence amongst both commanders and men.

To the Pilots of the S.A.A.F. Fighters, who destroyed such a number of enemy machines on the ground, and to the S.A.A.F. Bombers which created such havoc amongst the retreating enemy, must be ascribed their great share of the credit for the successes gained. The invaluable work of the S.A.A.F. Army Co-operation Squadrons was carried out with daring and efficiency. Without the continuous employment of the Communication Flight R.A.F., control of the operations spread over such a large area of the country would have been impossible. I would like to mention the ground staff which, in spite of lack of spares and facilities generally, by dint of unceasing toil kept the maximum number of machines in the air."

To this may be added the tribute of the A.O.C.-in-C.,

Middle East:-

A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch Jan-May  
1941 (A.H.B. II  
J 1/8).

"The South African Air Force are to be congratulated on the important and successful part they played in the campaign. They were operating over difficult country under conditions which tested their initiative, stamina and technical efficiency to the utmost. They contributed largely to the complete defeat of the Italian Air Force in I.E.A."

/Summary of

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## Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the S.A.A.F. Kenya- East Africa Command, from 1 December 1940 to 6 April 1941.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. East Africa  
Records.

During the period of Phase II the South African Air Force of the Kenya (East Africa) Command made 307 bomber sorties and 988 reconnaissances: the total weight of bombs dropped during these operations was approximately 100 tons.

### Note on Reserve Aircraft etc. and Supply.

Excerpted from Notes  
in A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
I.E.A. 10 Feb. -  
5 April '41".  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

#### 1. Reserve Aircraft and Spares.

The very inadequate supply of reserve aircraft, and of ordinary spares for initial equipment<sup>1</sup> (such as tyres and undercarriage parts for the Hurricanes) was a source of considerable concern throughout the campaign. By the fall of Addis Ababa this had resulted in the total number of serviceable aircraft being not more than 50% of the original strength.

#### 2. Condition of Aircraft.

All aircraft stood up well to the exposed weather conditions under which they operated. Those which suffered most were the wood and fabric-covered types such as the Vega Gulls of the Communication Squadron.

3. Flying Conditions, were generally good until the Abyssinian Highlands were reached when tropical storms rendered them unreliable and treacherous. Several cases occurred of accidents to aircraft which it was presumed were due to the pilots having flown into mountain slopes owing to obscuring cloud conditions.

#### 4. Supply and Transport.

At certain periods of the campaign air operations had to be curtailed owing to lack of petrol, bombs and ammunition at the advanced landing grounds. In the opinion of the A.O.C., had it not been for the activities

/of the

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1. See page 62 supra.



of the Bomber Brigade Maintenance Company<sup>1</sup> no air operations would have been possible. This Unit of the South African Army was placed directly under the control of Air Headquarters and although it was inadequate on establishment to deal with the rapid advance made, it was able by great efforts to maintain in most cases the minimum requirements of the advanced Air Units.

The A.O.C. felt very strongly that the transport of supplies - which is a vital part of air operations in campaigns such as the one now under review - should not be left to the Divisional Transport or some other Army Unit but that a definite Air Transport Organisation should be formed.

5. Local Resources.

The only local resources made use of in the campaign were:-

- (a) Occasional captured enemy vehicles which were employed to replace those incapacitated during the advance, and
- (b) Enemy aircraft materials and stores captured at the major aerodromes of Mogadishu and Direedawa.

It was considered inadvisable to use any captured aviation petrol or oils without first making an analysis thereof.

Chief Lesson of the Campaign.

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
from 10 Feb. to  
5 April '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/1).

In the opinion of the A.O.C. the chief lesson to be learned from this short campaign was "the vital necessity of the preparation of landing grounds immediately behind the most advanced forces, so as to give that moral support to ground troops which only comes by having their own aircraft always with them, and to permit the shortest range aircraft the maximum possible inroad into enemy territory. To this end three essentials are required for the Army:-

/(1) C.R.E.'s

1. See Appendix "K".

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- (1) C.R.E.'s trained in the preparation of landing grounds, equipped with the necessary equipment and impressed with the vital importance of the subject.
- (2) A Supply Organisation whose sole duty it is to transport petrol, oil, bombs and ammunition to the advanced landing grounds, and to get these requirements into position by the time that the landing ground is available for occupation.
- (3) Immediate communication from most advanced troops to advanced landing grounds so as to give warning of enemy approach or attack."

## Note on Italian Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Italian aerodromes in Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia were defended by anti-aircraft weapons ranging from those of heavy calibre to pom-poms and machine-guns. The Italians' anti-aircraft performance varied considerably; in many instances their fire was inaccurate and ineffective, but on occasion (and notably during the final operations at Gondar<sup>1</sup>) our aircraft encountered accurate and intense anti-aircraft fire.

In the opinion of the Narrator the Italians' anti-aircraft defences cannot as a whole be considered to have been very effective: our losses in aircraft from enemy anti-aircraft fire throughout the campaign were few, more especially in relation to the number of the attacks which were made by our Squadrons.

/VIII. GENERAL

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1. See page 225 infra.

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## VIII. GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE SECOND PHASE.

The period dealt with in Phase II is remarkable for the achievements made by our forces in a comparatively short space of time. At the beginning of November (1940) our forces were still on the defensive but within five months the great "Pincer" movement of Lieut. Generals Platt and Cunningham - with the invaluable assistance of the Royal and South African Air Forces - had conquered Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, re-conquered British Somaliland, successfully invaded Abyssinia, and captured the Abyssinian section of the Jibuti - Addis Ababa railway, the important towns of Jijjiga, Harrar and Diredawa, and the capital city of Addis Ababa. Moreover the Abyssinian "patriots" - assisted by the British "Mission 101", "Gideon Force", and the attacks upon enemy strongholds by the R.A.F., and encouraged by the advance of the Emperor Haile Selassie into the Gojjam district - had harassed continually the Italians and done much to shatter their declining morale.

The part played by the Royal and South African Air Forces in these successes was of great importance. At the beginning of the period under review the Italian Air Force was still in a numerical superiority and was equipped with more efficient machines. The arrival of the S.A.A.F.'s Hurricanes gave our Air Forces their much-needed fighter aircraft, and with this welcome reinforcement the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. had, by the end of the period covered by Phase II, achieved complete air superiority and had virtually driven the "Regia Aeronautica" from the skies. The successful assault on Keren - which broke the enemy's resistance in Eritrea - the capture of Kismayu, the crossing of the Juba, and the capture of Mogadishu, the Marda Pass, Harrar and Addis Ababa - which presaged the conquest of Italian Somaliland /and led

and led to the conquest of Abyssinia - and the re-capture of Berbera (British Somaliland) were in a great measure due to the determined and unceasing onslaughts upon the enemy of the Royal and South African Air Forces and the whole-hearted "close-support" which they afforded to our ground forces throughout the campaigns. This was fully

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch on E.A. Ops.  
(to cover Reports by  
Lieut. Generals Platt  
and Cunningham)  
Nov. 1940 to Jan 1941  
Enc. to CS.18122.

recognised by General Wavell who wrote:-

"The support of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F., with comparatively small numbers and equipment far from modern, was altogether admirable; and the co-operation between the Army and Air Forces close and efficient."

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THIRD PHASE

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE ENEMY'S SCATTERED FORCES

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The British conquest of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, the invasion of Abyssinia and capture of Addis Ababa, the re-conquest of British Somaliland, and the return of the Emperor Heile Selassie marked the beginning of the end of the Italian East African "Empire". Thenceforward our forces were employed in liquidating the scattered remnants of the Italian armies which now held only comparatively small parts of Abyssinia in the Dessie, Amba Alagi<sup>2</sup> and Gondar (Lake Tana) areas in the north, and various strongholds round the chain of lakes - Zwai, Abyata, Langana, Shala, Awusa, Abaya and Chamo - to the south. The "mopping-up" of these enemy forces was accomplished in three secondary movements, the capture of Gondar being the final episode of the East African Campaigns<sup>3</sup>.

### Role of the Air Forces.

Before proceeding with the Narrative it will be convenient to summarise the role of the Royal and South African Air Forces in the Sudan, Kenya (East African) and Aden Commands during the period covered in Phase III.

#### (a) The Sudan.

- (i) Destroying the remaining enemy aircraft in Abyssinia and attacking enemy strongholds in the Gondar area.
- (ii) Giving close support to our ground forces operating under the G.O.C. Sudan (Lieut.-General Platt).
- (iii) Carrying out combined operations with the S.A.A.F. (Kenya-East Africa Command) against the Gondar area.

#### /(b) Kenya

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1. For purposes of clarity Phase III is divided into three sub-headings:-  
The Pincers Close.

The Battles of the Lakes and the Crossing of the Omo.

The Capture of Gondar.

- 2. Situated approximately 150 miles west of the northern shore of Lake Tana.
- 3. It may be mentioned that the attack on Gondar was begun by a unit of the Sudan Frontier Force and the 3rd Ethiopian Brigade (which were part of General Platt's forces) as early as March; these operations were, however, held up for several weeks by the rainy season.

(b) Kenya (East Africa)

A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
in I.E.A. 6 April  
to 11 July '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/1).

- (i) Destroying the few remaining enemy aircraft in Abyssinia.
- (ii) Giving close support to our ground forces operating under the G.O.C. East Africa (Lieut.-General Cunningham).
- (iii) Air defence of Addis Ababa.
- (iv) Carrying out combined operations with No.203 Group (Sudan) against the Gondar area.
- (v) Coastal defence of the Mombasa and Dar-es-Salaam areas.

(c) Aden.

- (i) Supporting our ground forces operating under the G.O.C. East Africa in the advance on Dessie. (After the capture of Dessie (26 April) the Aden units took no further part in operations in Abyssinia, as the areas where these operations were conducted were out of range of Aden).
- (ii) Routine reconnaissances of Assab and Jibuti<sup>1</sup> and assistance at the capture of Assab.
- (iii) Co-operation with our ground forces engaged in "cleaning-up" operations in the north-eastern area of Italian Somaliland.
- (iv) Communication duties between Addis Ababa, Berbera, Aden and Massawa.

Strength and Dispositions of the Air Forces.

- (a) The Sudan. As already stated<sup>2</sup> the R.A.F. units remaining in the Sudan in April (1941) were No.47 (Bomber) Squadron (Wellesleys), No.237 (Rhodesian A.C.) Squadron (Hardys, Iysanders and Gladiators) and the Free French (Bomber) Flight (Blenheim IVs).

/There

1. See footnote 1 to page 187 infra with reference to Jibuti.

2. On page 98 supra.

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There were also the three JU.52s of No.51

(Communication and Transport) Flight, S.A.A.F.

The disposition of these Units was as follows:-

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc."  
(A.H.B. II J7/2).

On the withdrawal of the 4th Indian Division -  
after the battle of Keren - Nos.47 and 237 Squadrons  
were based on Asmara (Eritrea) and as preparations  
for the advance on Amba Alagi progressed No.237  
(Rhodesian) Squadron remained based at Asmara but  
used Makalle as an advanced landing ground.

## (b) Kenya (East Africa).

Air H.Q. East Africa.  
Form 540 Entry of  
30 April '41.

On 18 April, No.14 Squadron<sup>1</sup> was renumbered No.24,  
re-equipped with Maryland aircraft and moved to  
Egypt. The remaining Units and aircraft available  
for operations consisted of:-

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. in  
I.E.A. 6 April to  
11 July '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/1).

<u>Squadron or Flight</u>	<u>Type of aircraft</u>	<u>No. of Service- able Aircraft.</u>
No.3 Squadron (Fighter)	Hurricanes)	8
	Gladiators)	6
No.11 Squadron (Bomber)	Fairey Battles	7
No.12 Squadron (Bomber)	JU.86s	10
Glen Martin Flight	Glen Martins	2
No.40 Squadron (A.C.)	Hartbees	15
No.41 Squadron (A.C.)	Hartbees	13
No.34 Flight (Coastal recce.)	Ansons	4

65<sup>2</sup>

/The disposition

1. This was in fact a "Shadow" Squadron. (See page 116 supra).
2. The aircraft of No.3 Squadron gave every satisfaction during the operations: this Squadron finally wiped out all enemy air resistance. The aircraft of No.11 Squadron had a number of forced landings due to engine trouble: those of No.12 Squadron were most effectively employed during close support operations although their performance dropped considerably when operated from high altitude aerodromes in mountainous country owing to a much increased "take-off" run and slow rate of climb. The aircraft of Nos.40 and 41 Sqdns. were placed under Army operational control. On 24 May, No.40 Squadron was converted into No.20 Squadron and on 1 June all its aircraft were handed over to No.41 Squadron, No.40 Squadron's personnel going to Nakuru (Kenya) for re-equipment. The Glen Martins proved most reliable and had an excellent performance, their short "take-off" run, fast rate of climb, high cruising speed (240 m.p.h.) and long range (2,000 miles with extra tanks) were factors which were most useful for long distance recce: in the mountainous regions of Abyssinia. Ibid. No.60 (Survey - later Photographic) Sqdn, although still in Nairobi, did little operational work after the end of March. It moved to Egypt on 29 June (S.A.A.F. Records: War Diary - No.60 Sqdn.).



The disposition of the S.A.A.F. units was as follows:-

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>
Advanced Air Headquarters	Harrar
H.Q. and all Flights No.11 Squadron Detachment No.3 Squadron	Jijjiga (East Satellite)
H.Q. and all Flights No.12 Squadron Detachment No.3 Squadron Glen Martin Flight	Jijjiga (South Satellite)
H.Q. No.2 Wing H.Q. & "C" Flight No.3 Squadron	Diredawa
No.3 Squadron, "A" & "B" Flights	Miesso
H.Q. and all Flights No.41 Squadron (under 11(A) Division)	Addis Ababa
H.Q. and "A" and "C" Flights No.40 Squadron (under 12(A) Division)	Yavello
No.40 Squadron, "B" Flight (under 12(A) Division)	Neghelli
H.Q. and Detachment No.34 Flight	Mombasa
Detachment No.34 Flight.	Dar-es-Salaam

(c) Aden. The R.A.F. Units at Aden were No.8 (Bomber)

Squadron (Blenheim Is), No.203 (G.R.) Squadron

(Blenheim IVs), No.94 (Fighter) Squadron (Gladiators),

one (General Purposes) Flight of Vincents attached to

No.8 Squadron, and a Free French Flight equipped with

Glen Martins. Of these, No.94 Squadron was moved to Egypt early in April and No.203 Squadron was also moved to Egypt before the end of that month. There remained

therefore No.8 Squadron, the Flight of Vincents and

the Free French Flight. These units remained based

at Aden, but on 29 April two of the Vincents were

moved to Berbera to assist our troops in "cleaning-

up" operations in British Somaliland and in the north-

eastern area of Italian Somaliland. (The Communica-

tion duties<sup>1</sup> were performed by aircraft detailed from

No.8 Squadron).

/Strength and

1. See Role of the Air Forces (Aden), sub-section (c) on page 175 supra.

No.94 Sqdn. Form  
540 Entry of  
5 April '41.

Air H.Q. Aden  
Form 540. Entry  
of 1 May '41.

## Strength and Dispositions of the Italian Air Force.

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. in I.E.A.  
6 April to 11 July  
'41. (A.H.B. II J7/7/1)

An estimate of the enemy's aircraft at aerodromes within range of the S.A.A.F.'s bases gave a total of 37 aircraft which were believed to be distributed thus:-

<u>Aerodrome</u>	<u>Bombers</u>			<u>Fighters</u>	
	CA.133	S.79	S.81	CR.32	CR.42
Alomata	-	2	-	-	-
Kombolcha (Dessie)	-	4	-	-	4
Jimma <sup>1</sup>	17	-	4	6	-
<u>Totals</u>	17	6	4	6	4

equalling:- Bombers 27  
Fighters 10  
37

## Ground Forces.

The British ground forces were as follows:-

### (a) The Sudan Force<sup>3</sup>

Gen. Platt's Despatch  
on Ops. In Eritrea  
etc. 1 Dec. '40 to  
26 Aug. '41.  
Enc. to C.S.18122

5th Indian Division, Advanced H.Q.  
(Two Companies M.1 and two Mobile M.G.  
(units of the Sudan Defence Force.  
One Batty. 68 Medium Regt. R.A.

Location  
Asmara  
(Eritrea)

### (b) East Africa (Kenya) Force

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
6 April to 11 July  
of 1 Dec. '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/1).  
Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch 6 April to  
11 July '41.  
Enc. to CS.18122.

No.11(A) Division  
No.12(A) Division  
Advanced Force H.Q.

Location  
Addis Ababa  
Neghelli  
Harrar

In Abyssinia the enemy had seven Divisions of

Colonial troops disposed thus:-

21st Colonial Division  
22nd Colonial Division  
23rd and 26th Colonial Division  
  
24th Colonial Division  
25th Colonial Division  
101st Colonial Division

Gibassire<sup>4</sup> front  
Jimma<sup>5</sup> Bonga  
Jhimbi<sup>6</sup> - Lechemti  
front  
Wadara<sup>7</sup> front  
Shashamana  
Gardulla-Soddu  
front

plus three Blackshirt Battalions and two  
"groups" of "Banda". These forces  
totalled some 40,000 men and 200 guns.

## /II. THE "PINCHERS"

1. Situated approx. 87 miles north-east of Soddu.
2. It would seem from the number and types of enemy aircraft subsequently destroyed or damaged by our Air Forces that this was an under-estimate.
3. i.e. for the attack on Amba Alagi - other units of the Sudan Defence Force, the Sudan Frontier Force, etc. were operating in other areas.
4. Situated approx. 35 miles east of Lake Chamo.
5. Situated approx. 120 miles west of Lake Abyata.
6. Situated approx. 110 miles west of Addis Ababa.
7. Situated approx. 35 miles north-west of Neghelli.
8. Most of these Divisions were in fact considerably below strength and notably the 101st which had been heavily engaged in the Jubaland operations (see page 145 supra).

II. THE "PINCERS" CLOSE.

Outline.

"The Abyssinian Campaigns"

On 13 April, one week after the fall of Addis Ababa, the 1st South African Brigade of the 11th(A) Division advanced 110 miles along the Addis Ababa road to the so-called "Mussolini Tunnel" where the Italians had made considerable demolitions. By 17 April their forward troops had passed the "Tunnel" and attacked the Kombolcha Pass a few miles south of Dessie. This was captured on 22 April and four days later Dessie surrendered. Some 8,000 prisoners were taken and a large number of guns. Many of the enemy fled north to the mountain fortress of Amba Alagi where the Duke D'Aosta - Viceroy of Italian East Africa - was ensconced with 5,000 troops, 54 guns and 250 machine guns.

Meanwhile the 5th Indian Division (commanded by Major-General Mayne<sup>1</sup>) had advanced south from Asmara (Eritrea) on Amba Alagi - and the two arms of the "pincer" - the 5th Indian Division and part of the 11th(A) Division - were now about to close on the Duke D'Aosta's stronghold, from north and south respectively.

Amba Alagi is a great peak rising to 10,000 feet above sea level and is the central point of a ring of lesser peaks. The "Strada Imperiale" linking Amba Alagi to Asmara winds through the narrow Toselli Pass<sup>2</sup>. The Italian engineers had greatly improved the natural defences of this position by concrete emplacements, and by demolition of the "Strada Imperiale" and of a road through the Falaga Pass which reaches Amba Alagi by a circuitous route through the mountains on the eastern side of the position. As in the case of Keren the fortress of Amba Alagi appeared to be impregnable.

/The 5th

1. Maj.Gen. Heath had been promoted and had left the Division.
2. Named after Major Toselli who was destroyed with his Italian garrison by Ras Mokonnen, father of the Emperor Heile Selassie, in 1895.

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The 5th Indian Division attacked Amba Alagi by a series of feints which occupied several days, and finally captured the Toselli Pass on 8 May. From this position our Artillery (supported by the Royal Air Force) maintained a devastating bombardment of the fortress and its environs while the 1st South African Brigade (assisted by "patriot" forces under Ras Seyoum - a veteran leader against the Italians in 1936) advanced from the southern side of Amba Alagi.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. to May

'41. (File M.151/1). As the attack on Amba Alagi developed, the proximity of the Sudan and East African armies (which were approaching each other from the north and the south) presented some risk of our aircraft attacking either of these forces in error, and lines were therefore defined within which the South African Air Force could safely attack anything on the ground. The need for close liaison between the two armies was shown by an unfortunate incident on 5 May when, despite the fact that the recognised signal (the letter T) had been displayed, some Gladiators of the R.A.F., Sudan Command, attacked troops of the southern army resulting in one fatal casualty and several wounded. Two days later (7 May) the South Africans were put under Lieut.-General Platt so that the attacking forces<sup>1</sup> from north and south should be under one command.

By 14 May the South Africans had advanced to the outer perimeter of the defences and Amba Alagi was now encircled. Two days later (16 May) the Duke D'Aosta sent in a flag of truce with proposals for surrender, and on 17 May the Italians capitulated.

/Operations of

Operations of the R.A.F. and S.I.A.F. during the Advance on Dessie and Amba Alagi.

(a) The R.A.F. (Sudan Command).

After the capture of Massawa (8 April) the two R.A.F. Squadrons (Nos.47 and 237 (Rhodesian)) and the Free French Flight operated against the Bahr Dar, Alomata, Mai Kao and Saio<sup>1</sup> areas with the object of assisting our ground forces and of weakening enemy positions and the morale of their Colonial troops: they also made attacks on the aerodrome at Gondar.

On 12 April Gladiators of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron "ground-strafed" Alomata landing-ground and seriously damaged three C.A.133's and one S.79. Gladiators of the same Squadron repeated this attack on 21 April, setting fire to two C.A.133s and one S.79. On 29 April the Gladiators attacked M/T near Makalle and Alomata: during this operation they set one Caproni on fire and machine-gunned and bombed another Caproni, one S.79 and one C.R.42 on a landing-ground ten miles south of Alomata.

On 30 April one Wellesley of No.47 Squadron made three bombing sorties on enemy positions at Amba Alagi while two Blenheims of the Free French Flight made an offensive reconnaissance of the Bahr Dar area dropping 1,720 lbs. of bombs on the fort and town. On 1 May Nos.47 and 237 (Rhodesian) Squadrons and the Free French Flight attacked enemy positions near Lake Ashangi (south of Amba Alagi), the Chelga area and the Falaga Pass (Amba Alagi): 3,200 lbs. of H.E. bombs and 1,125 lbs. of incendiaries were dropped from heights ranging from 2,600 to 3,600 feet, and 50 lorries were machine-gunned. Next day (2 May) 15 Gladiators, 7 Hardys and 7 Lysanders /of No.237

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1. Situated approx. 300 miles west of Addis Ababa and 50 miles east of the Sudan - Abyssinian boundary.

of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron dive-bombed gun positions, ammunition dumps and M/T concentrations at the Falaga Pass and the main road south of Amba Alagi, dropping 3,800 lbs. of H.E. bombs and 300 lbs. of incendiaries, and expending many thousands of rounds of machine-gun ammunition: direct hits were obtained on gun positions and many lorries were machine-gunned. On 3 May two Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron bombed Saio town and fortifications, and another Wellesley of the same Squadron dropped 1,930 lbs. of bombs from 4,000 feet on Fort Toselli (Amba Alagi) scoring direct hits on ammunition dumps which resulted in numerous explosions. On the following day (4 May) two Wellesleys of the same squadron made seven sorties on the Amba Alagi area bombing and machine-gunning enemy troops and forts and dropping 5,880 lbs. of bombs, direct hits being obtained. On the same day Hardys, Lysanders and Gladiators of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron repeated these attacks on Amba Alagi, Fort Toselli and the Falaga Pass. Direct hits were obtained by dive-bombing on Fort Toselli followed by large explosions, and ammunition dumps at Amba Alagi were hit; some 50 M/T vehicles were also attacked and machine-gunned in various localities in the target area. These attacks on Amba Alagi, Fort Toselli and the surrounding area were repeated on 7, 9 and 10 May, and on 14 May the Lysanders and Gladiators of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron bombed and machine-gunned Fort Toselli scoring ten direct hits on the fort. Two days later (16 May) the Duke D'Aosta asked for an armistice.

The bombing of Fort Toselli on 14 May was the last operation in which No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron was engaged in the East African campaigns, as on 20 May orders were issued for its transfer to Wady Halfa to

/assist in

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assist in the defence of the Kufra oasis, and on 24 May the Squadron began the move. On the same day the Free French Flight (which had hitherto been administered by No.203 Group<sup>1</sup>) became self-administrative.

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc. June '40  
to May '41".  
(A.H.B. II J7/2).

The effect of the R.A.F.'s bombing and machine-gun fire during the attack on Amba Alagi was most marked, and Italian prisoners once again testified to their devastating and demoralising effect. After the capitulation the Duke D'Aosta remarked that the machine-gun fire from the Gladiators and Lysanders had been most effective and was very demoralising to the defenders.

(b) The S.A.A.F. (Kenya - East Africa - Command).

In the meantime the South African Air Force continued to co-operate in the support of our troops, their activities being chiefly offensive reconnaissances during which bombing and machine-gun attacks were made on enemy objectives. On 12 April three Hurricanes of No.3 Squadron attacked Kombolcha (Dessie) aerodrome destroying two Savoias by fire and damaging one C.A.133 and five fighters: one of the Hurricanes was damaged and rendered unserviceable. Next day (13 April) two Hurricanes of the same Squadron made "ground-strafting" attacks on the Dessie area. On 17 April three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron escorted by three Hurricanes attacked the Kombolcha (Dessie) aerodrome. The JU.86s dropped bombs to the weight of 3,480 lbs. obtaining direct hits on buildings and workshops; intense anti-aircraft fire was encountered and one of our aircraft was damaged. After the

JU.86s left the target, the Hurricanes "ground-strafted" enemy aircraft of which one S.79, five C.R.42s

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1. It may here be mentioned that at the end of May, No.254 Wing (Port Sudan) was abolished, there being no longer any R.A.F. operational units in the Port Sudan area.

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C.R.42s and one C.R.32 were destroyed and one C.A.133 damaged. On 19 April three Hurricanes<sup>1</sup> attacked 40 M/T vehicles at a pass north of Dessie and burnt out four oil tankers, while three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed the barracks and car park at Dessie, scoring direct hits on the targets. One of the Battles made a forced landing near Kombolcha and its crew were captured; a second Battle landed in an endeavour to effect a rescue but was fired on by enemy troops and forced to take off again. On the same day three JU.86s of No.12 Squadron bombed the Dessie-Alomata road and also attacked an M/T column; 3,300 lbs. weight of bombs were dropped during this action. Blenheims of No.8 Squadron (Aden) co-operated in this attack. On 23 April three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron div-bombed Dessie with 20 lb. bombs and dropped pamphlets: several direct hits were scored on M/T on the Dessie-Kombolcha road. On the same day two Hurricanes attacked Kombolcha aerodrome and destroyed two C.R.42s inside a hangar by machine-gun fire. Three days later (26 April) our troops captured Dessie.<sup>2</sup>

(c) The R.A.F. (Aden Command).

Meanwhile No.8 Squadron at Aden had assisted in the Dessie and Amba Alagi operations. On 6 April three of this Squadron's Blenheim Is bombed Kombolcha (Dessie)

/aerodrome

1. As the only Hurricanes left in the S.A.A.F. East African units were those of No.3 Squadron, from now onwards it is unnecessary to designate the Squadron when the Hurricanes are mentioned.
2. While these operations were taking place in the Dessie area the S.A.A.F. was also operating in the Jimma and Lakes area during the Battles of the Lakes (as will appear hereafter, see page 155 infra).



aerodrome with 250 lb. bombs from a high level starting two fires among the buildings, and on 8 April three of the Blenheims repeated the attack by individual dive-bombing, starting a fire among the buildings; very accurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered which damaged one of our aircraft. On 19 April, six of the Blenheims in two flights - in co-operation with the S.A.A.F. - (as stated above) attacked M/T on the Dessie-Alomata road: the first flight dive-bombed 15 stationary lorries while the second flight attacked and machine-gunned another convoy two miles south of Ala. Considerable damage was inflicted and some fires were started; no opposition was encountered.

On the next day (20 April) at the request of Air Headquarters, Middle East, three of the Blenheims attacked M/T on the same road (Dessie-Alomata) and dive-bombed six lorries destroying one of these with a direct hit of a 250 lb. bomb.

During May regular reconnaissance by single Blenheims were carried out in the Jibuti and Assab<sup>1</sup> areas and the Dessie-Assab road. On 15 May one Blenheim IV (Fighter) was sent to Bandar Kassim<sup>2</sup> to assist in the "cleaning-up" operations in Italian Somaliland, a second Blenheim IV being also sent there on the following day.

#### The Capture of Assab.

Assab was the last remaining port of Eritrea which was still occupied by the Italians. The aerodrome and its landing ground at Macaaca had been attacked repeatedly by the Royal Air Force and was littered with destroyed and burnt out aircraft.

/Early in

1. The Eritrean port of Assab and the landing-ground at Macaaca were still held by the enemy.
2. Situated on the northern coast approximately 14 miles from the British-Italian Somaliland border.

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Early in June it was decided to attack Assab from the sea with Royal Naval and R.A.F. co-operation (from the Aden Command), and in the early morning of 11 June, a Battalion of the 15th Punjab Regiment (supported by an Engineer detachment from East Africa) landed almost unopposed and captured the harbour and town. The landing was preceded by a bombing demonstration made by four Blenheim's of No.8 Squadron which remained in the area while the troops were disembarking. Meanwhile two Blenheims and six of the Flight of Vincents carried out reconnaissances and close support patrols over our troops from dawn until dusk.

The attack on Assab was a complete surprise to the enemy: more than 200 white prisoners were taken including two Italian Generals, a Naval Captain and some German seamen.

## Operations of the R.A.F. Aden Command, June to November 1941.

After the fall of Assab the operations of the Royal Air Force at Aden were mainly confined to reconnaissances over French Somaliland and its surrounding waters (which were carried out to implement the blockade of that colony<sup>1</sup>), and to noting movement of enemy submarines and Italian aircraft which came periodically from Benghazi (Libya). More than 100 reconnaissances were made on these operations up to the end of November and on several occasions pamphlets were dropped.

Meanwhile on 5 July six of the Vincents (attached to No.8 Squadron) carried out bombing operations against some Yemeni occupying a "fort" at Tor Al Baidha (in the Aden Protectorate) who had refused to comply with a Government ultimatum to surrender; 28 sorties were made

/during

1. At the request of the Free French, Jibuti was blockaded by our forces in an endeavour to win over the Vichy-controlled government of French Somaliland.

during these operations and 11,800 lbs. of bombs were dropped<sup>1</sup>.

The Royal Air Force of the Aden Command now passes from the stage of the East African Campaigns. From the entry of Italy into the War until the final elimination of the Italians in East Africa the R.A.F. at Aden proved of great value by its protection of convoys in the Red Sea and of shipping at Aden, its frequent attacks on enemy aerodromes in Abyssinia and Eritrea, its assistance to our ground forces during the Italian attack on British Somaliland (August 1940) and during the reconquest of that Protectorate (March 1941) and the capture of Assab, and by its operations in support of our campaigns in Abyssinia.

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the R.A.F., Aden Command from 1 March to 30 November, 1941.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. Aden Forms 540.

From 1 March to 30 November the Royal Air Force of the Aden Command carried out upwards of 200 bomber sorties and 330 reconnaissances.

/III. THE BATTLES

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1. The "fort" - only 12 feet square in size - proved to be too small a target for direct hits to be scored, and on 7 July an R.A.F. ground party from Aden attacked and demolished it.

## III. THE BATTLES OF THE LAKES AND THE CROSSING OF THE OMO

### Outline.

"The Abyssinian Campaigns" and Gen. Cunningham's Despatch 6 April - 11 July '41, of 22 July '41. Enc. to CS.18122 .

The second of the three secondary campaigns was fought in the south-west of Abyssinia and cleared the whole of the Galla-Sidamo area south of Addis Ababa and west of the Lakes. The campaign consisted of converging attacks from north and south comprising the two battles of the Lakes which resulted in our forces joining hands at Soddu. This completed the first phase of the south-western campaign. The second phase consisted in the crossing of the Omo River and the pursuit of enemy forces retreating to the west. With the surrender of these forces at Gambela<sup>1</sup> and the occupation by our forces of Jimma, Italian resistance south and west of Addis Ababa ceased.

### Ibid.

The battles of the Lakes were the most elaborate operations of the whole of the East African campaigns: they were fought by units of Lieut.-General Cunningham's 11th(A) and 12th(A) Divisions against a great superiority of enemy troops, tanks and artillery. The campaign was in one respect somewhat similar - but on a greatly reduced scale - to that of the great "pincer" movement of the Sudan and East African Forces which had swept through Eritrea from the north and through Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia from the south to close at Amba Alagi, but in the case of the battles of the Lakes the arms of the "pincer" were provided by the 11th and 12th (African) Divisions. The northern arm was mainly the 22nd East African Brigade of the 11th(A) Division advancing south after the capture of Addis Ababa: this force fought the "northern" battle of the Lakes. The southern arm consisted of the Gold Coast and 21st East African (K.A.R.)

/Brigades

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1. Situated approx. 200 miles west of Addis Ababa. (It had been a British trading post before the Italian conquest of Abyssinia).

Brigades of the 12th (A) Division and fought the "southern" battle of the Lakes.

To obtain a picture of these operations the following facts must be kept in mind: the chain of Lakes from Zwai to Chamo<sup>1</sup> runs roughly from north to south for a distance of some 200 miles and forms an impassable barrier to motor transport, except at two gaps, namely to the north and south of Lake Awusa. Here were situated the Italian strongholds of Shashamana and Dalle<sup>2</sup> and through here ran the Italian line of communication westward to Soddu and Jimma<sup>3</sup>. At the beginning of the operations the Italian forces north of Shashamana had been withdrawn to this line of communication, but south of Shashamana and east of Lake Abaya two divisions of Italians at Wadara and Giabassire were resisting the 12th (A) Division which was advancing from Neghelli. If Shashamana was captured the retreat of these two Divisions would be threatened; if Dalle fell or if the road to Soddu was cut they would be blocked by the 22nd E.A. Brigade to the north, the 12th (A) Division to the south, "patriot" forces in the mountains to the east, and Lake Abaya to the west.

"The "northern" battle of the Lakes was fought against the enemy forces which retreated south via the Ponte-Malcasa over the Awash River<sup>4</sup> on the day that Addis Ababa fell (6 April). The pursuit occupied a considerable time owing to the breaking of the rains (and the consequent serious deterioration of the roads) and the absence of adequate maps<sup>5</sup>. However our forces attacked and defeated an enemy force at Fike<sup>6</sup> and captured

/Shashamana on

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1. See page 175 supra.

2. Situated approx. 35 miles south of Shashamana.

3. The Italian Civil Government had retired to Jimma after the capture of Addis Ababa.

4. See page 166 supra.

5. No accurate maps of the Lakes area existed.

6. Situated near the western shores of Lakes Abyata and Shala.

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Shashamana on 14 May, and Dalle on 17 May; they then followed the remnants of the retreating enemy to Soddu which they captured on 24 May. During these operations the enemy's 21st, 25th and 101st Divisions were smashed and their Divisional Commanders and some 12,000 troops were taken prisoner. With the capture of Suddu the "northern" battle of the Lakes was completed.

As already stated, the "southern" battle of the Lakes was fought by two Brigades of the 12th (A) Division. It will be remembered that during Lieut-General Cunningham's advance through Italian Somaliland (in February) the 12th (A) Division had left the 11th (A) Division on the line of the Juba River and their light forces had advanced northwards into Abyssinia, occupying Bardera, Isha Baidoa, Lugh Ferrandi, and Dolo<sup>1</sup>. On 17 March, these forces began to advance from Dolo to Neghelli which was occupied on 21 March, and on 6 April the Headquarters of the 12th (A) Division moved to that place. Neghelli was one of the most important of the enemy air bases in southern Abyssinia and its occupation by our forces was a further heavy blow to the Italian Air Force<sup>2</sup>.

Meanwhile the enemy had withdrawn to Wadara and Giabassire in the highlands. They were pursued by the Gold Coast and 21st East African Brigades along the (parallel) Neghelli and Yavello roads respectively, and in spite of appalling weather conditions and almost impassable roads Wadara was captured (after a battle lasting for three weeks) on 10 May and on the following day (11 May) our troops occupied Giabassire.

/Although

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1. See page 144 supra.

2. Neghelli had already been heavily bombed by the S.A.A.F. in January (see page 122 supra).

Although some thousands of the enemy had fled from Wadara and Giabassire they could not escape from the trap in which they found themselves encircled: to their west was Lake Abaya, their retreat to the north and east was cut off by the 21st East African Brigade (the victors of the "northern" battle of the Lakes) at Soddu, Shashamana and Dalle, while the Gold Coast and 22nd East African Brigades (the victors of the "southern" battle of the Lakes) pressed upon them from the south until they were crushed between these two arms of the "pincer" and annihilated.

Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch 6 April  
to 11 July '41.  
Enc. to CS.18122.

Meanwhile in April, the 12th (A) Division's 25th East African Brigade had advanced from their base at Kalam<sup>1</sup> to the Italian stronghold at Maji. On 12 April our forces occupied Washa-Waha (75 miles to the north) and entered Maji on 20 April without opposition, the enemy having evacuated the town.

"The Abyssinian  
Campaigns."

After the battles of the Lakes and the capture of Soddu the only Italian forces remaining in the Galla-Sidamo (or south-western) area of Abyssinia were located west of the River Omo and were centred on Jimma. The approaches by which our forces could advance to attack them consisted of two roads which run south-west from Addis Ababa and north-west from Soddu respectively, and which cross the Omo at Abalti<sup>2</sup> and at a point some 60 miles further south<sup>3</sup>. Both these crossings were made, the northern (Abalti) by our troops who advanced from Addis Ababa, and the southern by those who had occupied Soddu after the battles of the Lakes.

The Omo is one of the three great rivers of Abyssinia<sup>4</sup>; it flows through a deeply cut valley in the

/mountains

1. Situated approx. 15 miles north of Lake Rudolf.
2. One of these roads runs through the passes of Woliso and Wolkite before reaching the Omo at Abalti.
3. This crossing is approx. 45 miles north-west of Soddu.
4. The three rivers are the Blue Nile, the Juba and the Omo.

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mountains and in the rainy season it becomes an almost impassable barrier 100 yards in width. Our forces, however, effected the crossing of the river at Abalti and at the "southern crossing" 60 miles distant in the face of severe opposition by the enemy, both operations taking place on 5 June.

After the forcing of the Omo the Italians gave up the struggle and on 21 June Jimma was surrendered with 8,000 prisoners. Those of the enemy who escaped retreated further into the western Abyssinian mountains but their position was untenable. Some months earlier (January-February) a line had been established to the west of Gambela and along the Dabus River by local forces from the Sudan<sup>1</sup>, and thereafter a K.A.R. Battalion from Kenya had occupied Kurruk<sup>2</sup> on 9 March, while a Free Belgian contingent from the Congo had captured Asosa<sup>3</sup> two days later. By the end of March the K.A.R. had moved south to the Baro River and had captured Gambela.

The remnants of the enemy in the Gala-Sidamo area (under command of General Gazzera) were thus hemmed in by the Sudan-K.A.R.-Free Belgian forces on the Gambela - Dabus River line while numerous "patriot" forces and the units of the 12th (A) Division (which had crossed the Omo and captured Jimma) closed upon them from the north and east. They now had no hope of further escape and on 8 and 11 July they surrendered in two parties at Dembidolo<sup>4</sup> and Gambela; Gazzera and nine other Generals and some 3,000 White and 2,000 Native troops were taken prisoner.

/This successful

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1. i.e. The Sudan Defence Force and Frontier Bn.
  2. Situated on the Sudan-Abyssinian border approx. 95 miles south of Rosieres.
  3. Situated approx. 40 miles south-by-east of Kurruk.
  4. Situated approx. 23 miles north-east of Gambela.



Gen. Cunningham's  
Despatch 6 April to  
11 July '41. Enc.  
to C.S.18122.

This successful conquest of the Galla-Sidamo area marked the conclusion of Lieut.-General Cunningham's East African campaign in which enemy forces numbering some 170,000 men had been put out of action in a period of five months from 11 February<sup>1</sup>.

Operations of the R.A.F. during the Battles of the Lakes and the Advance on Jinna.

With the transfer of No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron to Wady Halfa on 20 May<sup>2</sup> the operational strength of the Royal Air Force of the Sudan Command was reduced to No.47 (Bomber) Squadron of Wellesleys and the Free French (Bomber) Flight of Blenheim IVs. These two Units maintained daily attacks on enemy positions in the Gondar (Lake Tana) area with an occasional reconnaissance in the Dabus River district.

On 15 May two Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron attacked military buildings at Gondar, from heights ranging from 5,000 to 3,000 feet and dropped 2,000 lbs. of bombs, while three Blenheim IVs of the Free French Flight reconnoitred the Gondar-Chelga<sup>3</sup> road and dropped bombs on Chelga. Two Wellesleys repeated the attack on Gondar on the following day (16 March) while three of the Blenheim IVs reconnoitred the Chelga and Lake Tana area, and machine-gunned hangars on an aerodrome east of Chelga, and also the Chelga fort. On 19 May two Wellesleys made low-level attacks on buildings at Debarech<sup>4</sup> scoring direct hits. This attack was repeated on 24 and 25 May from 3,000 feet when 16 x 250 lb. bombs were dropped; some of the bombs fell among the buildings one of which was destroyed. Other

/localities

1. The above outline of the military campaign has been given at some length (though in fact very greatly compressed) in order that the narration of the activities of our Air Forces - in their co-operation with the Ground Forces - may be more readily understood.
2. See page 183 supra.
3. Situated approx. 25 miles west of Gondar.
4. Situated approx. 50 miles north-east of Gondar.

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localities attacked included Azozo, Wolchefit<sup>1</sup> and Dabat<sup>2</sup>, and on 29 May three Wellesleys bombed and machine-gunned enemy fortifications and M.T. south of Dabat and scored direct hits on Dabat fort. On the same day one Blenheim IV bombed a fort west of Azozo aerodrome and machine-gunned lorries on the Chelga-Azozo road.

During the month of June the Wellesleys and Blenheim IVs made repeated attacks on the Debarech, Debra Tabor<sup>3</sup>, Chelga and Gondar areas. These operations included low level attacks by five Wellesleys on military buildings at Debra Tabor on 20 June when 3,520 lbs. of bombs were dropped from 3,200 feet, one building being set on fire and several explosions occurring, and an attack on 27 June when five Wellesleys bombed buildings and M.T. at Gondar town from 3,500 feet; 5,195 lbs. of bombs were dropped during this operation and direct hits were observed.

On 17 June, during an attack by three Wellesleys on enemy positions at Debarech, two C.R.42s were seen "ground-strafting" our troops. The C.R.42s attacked two of the Wellesleys but were both damaged and one of them was seen diving towards the ground; one of the Wellesleys was damaged.

## Operations of the S.A.A.F. (Kenya-East Africa Command) during the Battles of the Lakes and the Advance on Jimma.

During the battles of the Lakes and the advance on Jimma the South African Air force co-operated with our ground forces and also launched many attacks and carried out offensive reconnaissances against the enemy's aerodromes, landing-grounds and other targets. During this period all our landing-grounds and aerodromes (except those

A.C.Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
in I.E.A. 6 April  
to 11 July '41  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/1).

1. Situated north of Debarech.
2. Situated between Gondar and Debarech
3. Situated approx. 90 miles south of Lake Tana. The R.A.F.'s attacks on Debra Tabor were in co-operation with operations then being conducted by Skinner's Horse and some other troops on this front (see Gen. Platt's Despatch "Ops. in Eritrea and Abyssinia 1 Dec. 1940-26 Aug. 1941" (Enc. to CS.18122).

those at Addis Ababa, Jinna, Diredawa satellite and Kombolcha) became totally unserviceable owing to the very heavy rains which had now begun. An all-weather aerodrome was therefore constructed on the northern shore of Lake Abyata which proved invaluable as an operational base while the battles of the Lakes were in progress<sup>1</sup>. The average height of those of the Abyssinian aerodromes which our forces had captured was 6,000 feet above sea level and owing to the very mountainous country our pilots had to face considerable difficulties when operating in bad weather conditions, and the chances of making forced-landings were almost negligible. Meanwhile there was an increasing need of Repair and Salvage Units<sup>2</sup>, and early in May these Units were established at Diredawa and Addis Ababa in addition to the one already formed at Mogadishu<sup>3</sup>. Apart from the salvage of our own aircraft<sup>4</sup> much enemy equipment was found, not only in captured aerodrome buildings but also in buildings in captured towns, which proved to be of considerable value to the S.A.A.F. Squadrons and also to the

A.C. Sowrey's  
Draft Despatch  
Feb.-March '41.  
(File M.151/1).

Letter - A.V.M.  
Maund to A.C.Sowrey  
of 13 May '41.  
(File D.O./S.46596/  
A.O.A.)

Air Command, Middle East, which needed any equipment and spares available owing to our heavy losses in Cyrenaica and Greece.

Attacks were now concentrated on enemy aerodromes and troop positions and on 10 April six Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed objectives at Shashamana with 20 lb. H.E. bombs and 20 lb. fragmentation bombs scoring direct hits on buildings and causing a fire, and machine-gunning two enemy aircraft which were grounded under some trees: one of our aircraft failed to return. The Battles were escorted by five Hurricanes which burnt out two S.79s and two C.A.133s and damaged one C.A.133. Later in the day

/six Hurricanes

1. This aerodrome was known by the S.A.A.F. as Algato (being the Italian name for Lake Abyata).
2. i.e. for purposes of salvage.
3. By the end of May an R. and S. Unit was also established at Kombolcha.
4. e.g. 2 Gladiators which had collided at Jijjiga, a crashed JU.86 at Jijjiga, and a crashed Fairey Battle at Hargeissa.

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six Hurricanes attacked the aerodrome at Jimma destroying four Capronis, one C.R.32 and two unidentified aircraft (the latter in a hangar), and shooting down one C.R.42 and one C.R.32 in combat; and five Hartbees of No.41(A.C.) Squadron bombed a concentration of 5,000 enemy troops and 50 M.T. at Tullu Milki<sup>1</sup>, and machine-gunned one S.79 on the landing-ground: intensive-machine-gun and pom-pom fire was encountered. Meanwhile two Hartbees of the same Squadron attacked enemy positions between the Omo River and Abalti and dropped 320 lbs. of bombs.

During the remainder of the month bombing attacks and reconnaissances were made at Debra Markos, Soddu, Jimma and Shashamana and the Abalti, Dalle-Wondo<sup>2</sup> and Wadara-Adola<sup>3</sup> areas in which considerable damage was inflicted on enemy positions and M.T. concentrations.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, on 2 April No.12 Squadron moved from Jijjiga to Addis Ababa.

A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. -  
March 1941.  
(File M.151/1).

By the end of April the striking force of the JU.86s of No.12 Squadron had decreased considerably, the daily serviceability of these aircraft now averaging only three per day. Two of the Battles were therefore detached from No.11 Squadron and were transferred to No.12 Squadron's location at Addis Ababa. They were then fitted with 250 lb. bomb racks.

During the first week of May several bombing attacks were made on enemy positions at Shashamana, Wadara, Dilla, Addis Debra and Debra Tabor, and

/offensive

1. Situated approx. 62 miles north by west of Addis Ababa.
2. Wondo is situated approx. 20 miles south of Dalle.
3. Situated approx. 20 miles north-west of Wadara.
4. On 30 April a Hurricane (pilot Capt. Frost) while patrolling over Jimma and Agaro shot down one S.79, and destroyed a C.R.42 by machine-gun fire. (The C.R.42 was the one hundred and first enemy aircraft destroyed by No.3 Squadron since its first successful "bag" of two C.A.133s at Bura on 22 November, 1940, - S.A.A.F. War Diary - Narrative of Northern Ops: Entry of 30 April '41.).

offensive reconnaissances of the Jimma, Agaro and Abalti areas, including a reconnaissance of an enemy landing-ground near Lake Langana near which our ground forces were operating.

On 11 May two JU.86s of the newly formed No.16 Squadron<sup>1</sup> bombed Agaro and Jimma: 2,320 lbs. of bombs were dropped on troop concentrations south of Agaro, and at Jimma enemy troops were machine-gunned and direct hits with bombs were registered on store buildings. On the next day (12 May) two JU.86s of No.16 Squadron raided suspected enemy positions near Shashamana dropping 2,320 lbs. of bombs and also pamphlets, and one Hurricane while reconnoitring the Lechemti<sup>2</sup> - Bonaia<sup>3</sup> area attacked and destroyed a Caproni on Bonaia landing-ground. On the same day (12 May) a Hartbee of No.40 (A.C.) Squadron while on a reconnaissance of the Alghe<sup>4</sup> - Giabassire area dropped 400 lbs. of bombs on an enemy camp at Giabassire: our troops were seen in Alghe. Two other Hartbees of the same Squadron raided Giabassire and dropped 560 lbs. of bombs on the enemy camp and A.A. posts at this place; they encountered heavy A.A. fire. On this day (12 May) No.11 Squadron moved to Mojjo.

During the months of May and June the activities of the South African Air Force were many and varied, and operations were of daily occurrence. As an illustration of its varied activities, the operations in which the S.A.A.F. engaged on 17 May are given in full:-

/Two JU.86s

- 
1. No.16 Squadron was formed on 1 May and took over the J.U.86s of No.12 Squadron on 9 May: it was also equipped with some Maryland aircraft. Thereafter No.12 Squadron was re-equipped with Marylands and was moved to Egypt on 26 May (Air H.Q. East Africa, Forms 540. Entries of 9, 10, and 26 May, '41).
  2. Situated approx. 52 miles east of Jhimbi.
  3. Situated approx. 14 miles south-west of Lechemti.
  4. Situated approx. 16 miles south-west of Giabassire.

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Two J.U.86s of No.16 Squadron attacked Jimma: one of these dropped 1,090 lbs. of bombs on M.T. in that locality; the other was damaged by A.A. fire and forced to return to its base. A Maryland of "B" Flight of the same Squadron completed a mosaic of the Jimma area: it encountered intense A.A. fire over the town.

A J.U.86 of the same Squadron reconnoitred the Alatu-Neghelli area: a large enemy camp was observed south of Hula<sup>1</sup> and many M.T. vehicles were seen moving towards that place.

Three Hartbees of No.4 O (A.C.) Squadron reconnoitred the Giabassire-Dilla road and dropped 320 lbs. of bombs on M.T.

Three Hartbees of "C" Flight, No.41 (A.C.) Squadron bombed and machine-gunned M.T. south of Dilla dropping 160 lbs. of bombs.

One Hartbee of the same Flight made a reconnaissance of the roads from Dalle to Soddu; our troops were seen at Boditti<sup>2</sup>. Another Hartbee of this Flight made a reconnaissance of the Soddu-Shashamana area: our troops were observed on the main road between these places. A third Hartbee of the same Flight bombed three M.T. vehicles on the Dalle road and machine-gunned between 20 and 30 M.T. vehicles at Soddu: our troops were seen between Gogi<sup>3</sup> and Malchi<sup>4</sup>. Two Hartbees of "A" Flight, No.41 (A.C.) Squadron reconnoitred from Dessie to Debra Tabor and observed a large number of enemy M.T. and two A.F.V.'s near Baba<sup>5</sup>: our troops were seen near Ambo<sup>6</sup>. In the coastal area one Anson of No.34 Flight carried out a channel sweep at Mombasa, and another Anson of this Flight made a coastal patrol from Dar-es-Salaam to Mombasa.

/On 20 May

1. Situated approx. 12 miles south of Dalle.
2. Situated approx. 25 miles north-west of Soddu.
3. Situated approx. 20 miles north of Dalle.
4. Situated approx. 4 miles north of Gogi.
5. Situated approx. 37 miles north-west of Dessie.
6. Situated approx. 10 miles north-west of Dessie.

A.C. Sowrey's Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
6 April to 11 July  
'41. (A.H.B. II J7/  
7/1) and  
Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540. Appx. "C"  
to Entry of 20 May  
'41.

On 20 May the close-support control with our ground forces (which had been disbanded on the fall of Addis Ababa) was re-established at the Algato aerodrome, the close support Controller being stationed with the Headquarters of the 22nd East African Brigade<sup>1</sup>. It consisted of:-

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>
No.11 Squadron	3 Fairey Battles (being all that remained of this Squadron).
One Flight of No.3 Squadron	4 Gladiators.
Two Flights of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron.	7 Hartbees.

On the same day (20 May) two JU.86s of No.16 Squadron attacked an enemy M.T. park at Soddu dropping 2,320 lbs. of bombs and also pamphlets. During this and the succeeding three days many attacks and offensive reconnaissances were carried out at this place and on 24 May our troops captured Soddu.<sup>2</sup>

The capture of Soddu marked the end of the battles of the Lakes, and the South African Air Force now began operations over the Omo in preparation for the crossing of this river by our ground forces. On 23 May three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron, escorted by one Gladiator of No.3 Squadron, bombed enemy M.T. which was crossing the Omo by a pontoon bridge and scored direct hits on three vehicles. On the same day two JU.86s of No.16 Squadron took photographs and dropped bombs on buildings at Abalti, obtaining three direct hits. Next day (24 May) two Gladiators of No.3 Squadron machine-gunned 50 M.T. vehicles at Sciola<sup>3</sup> which were waiting to cross the Omo; three vehicles were destroyed. On the same day three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron bombed a ferry on the

/Omo obtaining

1. As stated on page 189 supra the 22nd E.A. Brigade was the northern "arm" of the "pincer" in the Battles of the Lakes.
2. See page 191 supra.
3. Situated on the Omo approx. 37 miles north-west of Soddu.

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Omo obtaining two direct hits, and four JU.86s of No.16 Squadron bombed an enemy camp near the pontoon bridge: six direct hits were scored on the camp and the targets were also machine-gunned. On 27 May three Fairey Battles of No.11 Squadron, escorted by two Gladiators of No.3 Squadron, carried out a bombing raid over the Omo and Jimma dropping 3,040 lbs. of bombs on Jimma and on enemy tents and M.T. at the river, and on the same day two JU.86s of No.16 Squadron bombed enemy M.T. between the Omo, Jimma and Abalti: 2,320 lbs. of bombs were dropped and the targets were also machine-gunned.

These attacks on the Omo River, Jimma, Abalti and other places in that area were maintained with full vigour and were intensified to the maximum on 5 June - the day on which our ground forces effected their two crossings of the river<sup>1</sup>. On 6 June the retreating enemy's M.T. was bombed by two Fairey Battles escorted by three Gladiators, direct hits being obtained with 20 lb. fragmentation bombs on an armoured car. Meanwhile Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron bombed enemy columns which were retreating towards Jimma: direct hits were obtained on three lorries and enemy troops were machine-gunned.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540 Entries of  
June '41.

In the meantime No.11 Squadron had been evacuated on 1 June from the forward areas and a new Squadron - No.15 - had taken over the Fairey Battles from No.11. On the same day No.40 (A.C.) Squadron had been disbanded and its Hartbees incorporated in No.41 (A.C.) Squadron with its Headquarters located at Addis Ababa.<sup>2</sup>

/After the successful

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1. See page 193 supra.

2. See footnote to page 177 supra.



After the successful crossing of the Omo by our troops the South African Air Force advanced its operations to the Jimma, Boddolo<sup>1</sup> and Jhimbi area. On 12 June two JU.86s of No.16 Squadron bombed Beddele registering near misses on enemy M.T., tents and buildings. On the next day (13 June) the JU.86s bombed a bridge over the Didessa River near Beddele with 250 lb. and 20 lb. bombs to a total of 2,320 lbs. scoring a direct hit but the track remained intact: they also machine-gunned an enemy convoy of M.T. On the same day two Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron dropped 320 lbs. of bombs on an enemy anti-aircraft post and M.T. at the Didessa bridge, and three Hartbees bombed enemy M.T. on the road and in the car-park south-west of Jimma starting a large fire. On 14 June two JU.86s attacked Jhimbi with 2,320 lbs. of bombs scoring direct hits on buildings and on an enemy camp. On 15 and 17 June two JU.86s again attacked the bridge near Beddele and on 18 June one JU.86 which bombed Jhimbi observed that the Beddele bridge was demolished. Our troops were now approaching Jimma, and on 21 June three Hartbees attacked anti-aircraft posts and huts at Dembi<sup>2</sup>, and two Fairey Battles bombed enemy huts at the same place scoring many direct hits: one of our aircraft made a forced landing but the crew were unhurt. On the same morning at 11.00 hours our troops entered Jimma.

Several attacks were now made on Debidollo and the neighbouring area where the remnants of the enemy's troops were concentrating. On 24 June two JU.86s dive-bombed Debidollo dropping 2,320 lbs. of bombs and scoring three direct hits on buildings, and during the next few days Hartbees made offensive reconnaissances of Dembi,

/Gore,

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1. Situated approx. 60 miles north-west of Jimma.  
2. Situated approx. 40 miles north-west of Jimma.

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Goro<sup>1</sup>, Jhimbi and Yubdo<sup>2</sup>. On 27 June two JU.86s raided Mattu<sup>3</sup> dropping 2,320 lbs. of bombs and obtaining two direct hits on buildings: accurate anti-aircraft fire was encountered. The village of Dembidollo was also bombed on several occasions and buildings were hit. By this time General Gazzera had realised that he now had no chance of escape; his troops were being pursued relentlessly by our ground forces and were being continually harassed by the South African Air Force which carried out its operations with no opposition from the air, and (as already stated<sup>4</sup>) he surrendered on 8 July.

## /IV. THE CAPTURE

- 
1. Situated approx. 65 miles east of Gambela.
  2. Situated approx. 50 miles north-east of Dembidollo.
  3. Situated approx. 10 miles north of Gore.
  4. On page 193 supra.

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## IV. THE CAPTURE OF GONDAR.

### Outline.

"The Abyssinian Campaigns".

After General Gazzera's surrender there now remained in Italian hands only the stronghold of Gondar and a small area round lake Tana with the forts of Chelga, Wolchehit, Amba Giyorgis<sup>1</sup> and Gorgora<sup>2</sup>. These were under command of General Nasi - the ablest of the Italian generals - who had been sent to Gondar some months previously in an endeavour to suppress the growing revolt of the Abyssinian "patriots"<sup>3</sup>.

In fact, attacks had been made by our Sudan forces against Gondar since January (1941) before the opening of the Eritrean campaign. The 9th Indian Infantry Brigade (which had remained at Gallabat) and a Battalion of the Sudan Frontier Force Regiment compelled the enemy to evacuate Metemma and pursued them to the Chelga escarpment. Our forces were, however, not in sufficient strength<sup>4</sup> to consolidate our gains and with the breaking of the rains the operations had to be suspended. Meanwhile a second attack was made by "patriot" forces at the Wolfechit Pass but here again the rainy season intervened. A third attack was made from the south-east by a small British force and Ethiopian Scouts followed by Skinner's Horse; these forces captured Debra Tabor taking prisoner 3,000 Italians and 1,200 Colonial troops. Then operations on this front also ceased with the breaking of the rains.

Gondar stands about 7,000 feet above sea level amidst mountains which rise from 10,000 to 13,000 feet to the east, north and west while to the south the plateau declines to Lake Tana some twenty miles distant.

/There were

- 
1. Situated approx. 20 miles north-west of Gondar.
  2. Situated on the northern shore of Lake Tana.
  3. See page 110 supra.
  4. The 9th Infantry Brigade (except for one Battn.) was switched to Keren.

There were only two routes by which an army of sufficient strength to conquer General Nasi's forces (numbering 30,000) could approach. These routes ran south-west from Asmara and north-west from Debra Tabor, and the two main enemy outposts were situated on these routes at Wolchefit and Kulkabor<sup>1</sup> respectively. Of these, Wolchefit was attacked by "patriot" forces under Colonel Ringrose who cut the road between Wolchefit Pass and Gondar. Thereafter some regular troops of Lieut.-General Platt's command joined the operations which were assisted with bombardments by our artillery, and the Royal and South African Air Force operating under control of No.203 Group, R.A.F., Sudan<sup>2</sup>. On 27 September enemy resistance ceased and Wolchefit was occupied by our forces, and on the same day the important post of Debarech was captured.

Ibid.

The capture of Wolchefit opened up the road to Amba Giyorgis and to the first of the main defences of Gondar. It also gave our Air Forces a usable landing-ground which proved to be of great value during the final operations against Gondar. In the meantime on 22 September the 12th (A) Division<sup>3</sup> of the East African Command had taken over the operations from the forces of Lieut.-General Platt, but until the rains ceased no progress could be made. Early in November Advanced Divisional Headquarters with the 25th and 26th East African Brigades were established east of Amba Giyorgis: these Brigades were assisted by troops from the Sudan, an Ethiopian Battalion and five groups of "patriots". On 11 November the Ethiopian Battalion attacked Gianda: they were assisted by our Air Force which carried out daily bombing operations and did much to lower the enemy's morale.

/On

1. Situated near the north-west shore of Lake Tana and approx. 30 miles south-east of Gondar.

2. See page 209 infra.

3. Commanded by Maj.-Gen. Foxes who had succeeded Maj.-Gen. Godwin-Austen.

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On 13 November an attack was made on Kulkaber by a force known as "Southforce" (consisting of two Battalions and a battery of medium guns) augmented by a group of "patriots" under Major Douglas. This attack failed after an initial success in spite of a non-stop attack by our Air Forces which was maintained during the whole day. On 20 November a new attack was made by the 25th E.A. Brigade from the north and "Southforce" and the "patriots" from the south-east (after continuous attacks by our Air Forces<sup>1</sup>) and Kulkaber was captured on the following day. Thereafter the 26th E.A. Brigade moved forward to Aiva (north-east of Gondar), and at dawn on 27 November the final battle began, the 26th E.A. Brigade attacking the Defeccia ridge while the 25th E.A. Brigade advanced up the main road towards Azozo and Major Douglas' "patriots" attacked the positions known as the Fanta Posts. These attacks, assisted by continuous sorties of our Air Forces<sup>2</sup>, were successful and that evening General Nasi surrendered with all his forces; 11,500 Italians and 12,000 Africans, 48 field guns and 400 machine-guns were captured, the number of prisoners greatly exceeding the number of our whole attacking force.

## Operations (general) of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. during the Gondar Campaign.

The Royal Air Force (Sudan Command) comprising No.47 Squadron and the attached Free French Flight<sup>3</sup>, and the South African Air Force (Kenya-East Africa Command)

/directed

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1. See page 223 infra.

2. See page 224 infra.

3. No.237 (Rhodesian) Squadron, which had moved to Wady Halfa (see page 185 supra) maintained a series of patrols in the Kufra area in co-operation with No.6 (Fighter) Squadron (which had moved recently from Libya to Kufra). These two Squadrons took no part in the Gondar operations.

directed their operations as follows:-

(a) The R.A.F. (Sudan) Systematic bombing of enemy positions with the object of lowering the morale and resistance of the enemy's garrisons.

A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
12 July to 31 Oct.  
'41. (A.H.B. II J7/  
7/2).

(b) The S.A.A.F. (Kenya-East Africa).

- (1) Supporting the "patriot" forces surrounding enemy positions in the Gondar, Debarech and Wolchehit areas.
- (2) Co-operating with No.203 Group R.A.F. (Sudan) in the systematic bombing of enemy positions.
- (3) Giving close support to our ground forces operating under the command of the G.O.C., E.A. Force.
- (4) Destroying the last few remaining enemy aircraft.

In addition to the above, operations included (as formerly) Coastal defence of the Mombasa and Das-es-Salaam areas<sup>1</sup>.

Ibid.

Strength of the S.A.A.F.

The aircraft of the S.A.A.F. available for operations varied considerably in numbers due to deterioration of already aged machines, the withdrawal of aircraft to the Union of South Africa, and the transfer of other aircraft outside the Command.

Four S.A.A.F. Squadrons and one Flight were nominally available, namely Nos.3, 15, 16 and 41 Squadrons, and No.34 Flight (Ansons) which was employed in Coastal reconnaissance. Of these, No.3 (Fighter) Squadron had at the beginning of this period a few Hurricanes and

/Gladiators.

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1. From the middle of September the S.A.A.F. also maintained patrols of the French Somaliland border (at the request of the G.O.C., E.A. Force) to assist the blockade by our ground forces of that colony. The S.A.A.F. units thus employed were placed under the operational control of the A.O.C., Aden.  
(Air H.Q. East Africa - Appendix "R" to Form 54- - Oct. '41).

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Gladiators, but on 27 August this Squadron (except one Detachment left at Alomata) was withdrawn to Nanyuki (Kenya) and re-equipped with Mohawks. No.3 Squadron returned to Alomata at the end of October (less one Detachment of Mohawks stationed at Aiscia<sup>1</sup>).

No.15 (Bomber) Squadron only made a few bombing operations with their two remaining Fairey Battles and ceased operating by the middle of August<sup>2</sup>.

No.16 (Bomber) Squadron had at the beginning of this period eight JU.86s but these aircraft were in poor condition and generally unserviceable as they had been employed throughout the operations; some of them were, however, employed in the Gondar area until the end of September when they were transferred to Aiscia<sup>3</sup>. Towards the end of October the remaining aircraft became unserviceable and the Squadron was withdrawn to the Union of South Africa.

No.41 (A.C.) Squadron was employed continuously throughout the operations.

The aircraft available for operations were:-

<u>Squadron or Flight</u>	<u>Type of Aircraft</u>	<u>Average No. of serviceable aircraft.</u>
No.3 Squadron	Hurricane	2
	Gladiator	3
	Mohawk	12
No.15 Squadron (This Sqdn. was withdrawn on 25 Aug. '41 as its aircraft had become unserviceable)	Fairey Battles	2

/No. 16 Squadron

1. Situated on the south-eastern boundary of French Somaliland. This Detachment patrolled the French Somaliland border to assist the blockade (see footnote to page 207 supra.)
2. Their two aircraft were sent to (the new) No.70 O.T.U. established at Nakuru (Kenya). (Air H.Q. East Africa, Form 540. Entry of 25 Aug. '41.
3. i.e. for the patrol duties on the French Somaliland border.

<u>Squadron of Flight</u>	<u>Type of Aircraft</u>	<u>Average No. of serviceable Aircraft.</u>
No.16 Squadron (This Sqdn. was taken over by No.35 Flight on 22 Aug. '41)	JU.86s	3
No.47 Squadron (Sudan Wellesleys Command) (This Sqdn. was based at Asmara (Eritrea) with operational Detachments at Alomata)		10
TOTAL		<u>32</u>

Ibid.

The inclusion of No.47 Squadron (Sudan Command) came about thus:-

In order to achieve close co-operation with the Royal Air Force in the Sudan, operational control of the South African Air Force was transferred, in the early stages of the period, to No.203 Group, R.A.F. from 3 August. On 25 September, however, Eritrea was transferred to the (Kenya) East African Command and the Gondar operations became the responsibility of that Command. The A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, then decided that Air Headquarters East Africa should at the same time take over air operations and No.47 Squadron R.A.F., was placed under the control of No.2 Wing, S.A.A.F., at

No.203 Group Appx. "D" to Form 540. Entry of 16 Aug. '41.

Alomata, thereby assisting to co-ordinate the final operations against Gondar. (The only other unit of the Sudan Command employed in the Gondar operations, namely the Free French Flight had been transferred to Damascus in the middle of August).

#### Dispositions of S.A.A.F. Units.

At the beginning of the period the S.A.A.F. Units were disposed thus:-

/Squadron or Flight



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A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
I.E.A." 12 July to  
31 Oct. '41.  
(A.H.B.II J7/7/2).

<u>Squadron or Flight</u>	<u>Location</u>
H.Q. No.2 Wing	} Addis Ababa
H.Q. and "A" Flight No.3 Squadron	
H.Q. No.16 Squadron	
H.Q. and "C" Flight No.41 (A.C.) Squadron	
"B" Flight No.3 Squadron	} Kombolcha
"A" and "B" Flights No.15 Squadron	
H.Q. and all Flights No.15 Squadron	Algato
"A" Flight No.41 (A.C.) Squadron	Didessa
H.Q. and Det. No.34 Flight	Mombasa
Detachment No.34 Flight	Dar-es-Salaam.

## Strength of the Italian Air Force.

Ibid.

The estimated strength of the remnants of the Italians' aircraft in the Gondar area on 12 July was:-

	1 CR. 32 (doubtful)
	2 CR. 42s
	1 CA.133 (doubtful)
	1 Savoia 79
TOTAL	5 (excluding civil and transport aircraft.)

equalling :- Bombers 2  
Fighters 3 (which were located on the Gondar and Azozo aerodromes and satellites).

## Territory over which Operations were Conducted.

Ibid.

The Gondar area and the country covered by the operations are situated in the northern highlands of Abyssinia, rising from the level of Lake Tana (5,800 feet) to the western highlands of the Great Rift Valley, whence the terrain falls rapidly to the level of the Red Sea. Alomata - the headquarters of No.2 Wing, S.A.A.F. for the final assault on Gondar - is situated at a height of some 5,000 feet and Dabat - the nearest operational landing ground to Gondar - is over 8,000 feet.

This rugged mountainous country with its heavy rain fall was frequently veiled by low clouds which hampered operations generally, including observations of bombing results, reconnaissances and photography. In fact, the operations of our Air Forces were carried out /over difficult

over difficult terrain and mostly in unfavourable weather conditions from bases approximately 6,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level. No.47 Squadron, R.A.F., was based at Asmara (Eritrea) but maintained operational Detachments at Alomata. (The distance between Asmara and Alomata is approximately 210 miles and that between Alomata and Gondar is approximately 130 miles).

Plan of Operations.

Ibid.

During the period up to the early part of November when the rains decreased sufficiently to allow the East African (Ground) Force troop concentrations to be effected at required positions, the main objective was to keep the enemy confined to the Gondar area. The "patriot" forces - established at key positions - greatly assisted this objective by harassing the enemy's outposts, transport, and lines of communication. Meanwhile continued air attacks were made with a view to breaking the enemy's morale and in the hope that the surrender of the enemy's forces would result. In spite of the surrender of the garrisons at Debarech and Wolchefit (27 September) General Nasi's determination to hold out at Gondar to the last possible moment necessitated offensive action to clean up this last remaining stronghold of the enemy.

In this operation the tasks of our Air Forces were:-

- (i) Bombers. Action by bomber aircraft to facilitate the advance of our ground forces by demolishing buildings, camps, stores etc.
- (ii) A.C. Aircraft. Reconnaissance by Army Co-operation for photography and offensive action against enemy positions, either independently or in close support of Infantry.
- (iii) Fighters. Protection of Bombers by fighter aircraft against enemy fighter attack; dive-bombing enemy positions and machine-gunning trenches, gun posts, troop concentrations. etc.

/Operations

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Operations were conducted mainly against buildings, supply dumps, M/T and trenches, attended on many occasions with considerable success. The aerodromes at Gondar and Azozo were attacked repeatedly.

A Close Support Group, comprising Bomber, Army Co-operation and Fighter aircraft was formed, with close support Controls operating with the 12th (A) Divisional Advanced Headquarters and subsidiary formations. Enemy positions, tank traps and road obstructions were photographed by both Hartbees of No. 41 (A.C.) Squadron and Wellesleys of No. 47 Squadron, R.A.F., as and when required by the Army Commanders.

Operations (in detail) of the R.A.F. during the Gondar Campaign (July - November 1941).

The two units of the Royal Air Force of the Sudan Command - No. 47 Squadron and the Free French Flight - which took part in the Gondar operations maintained almost daily attacks on enemy strongholds and positions. On 6 July five Wellesleys of No. 47 Squadron made a level attack on Gondar town from 4,500 feet dropping 5,500 lbs. of bombs and scoring direct hits on several buildings. These attacks were repeated on 9 July by five Wellesleys which were intercepted by a C.R.32 from Azozo airport: one of our aircraft was slightly damaged and the C.R.32 was believed to have been hit. On the same day two Blenheims of the Free French Flight made a reconnaissance of the Gondar area and dropped 2,220 lbs. of bombs. On 15 July a single Blenheim bombed Azozo airport and obtained a hit on the corner of a hangar: this attack was repeated by another Blenheim on 18 July when the same hangar received a direct hit; the Blenheim then machine-gunned M.T. on the Chelga-Azozo road. On 19 July five Wellesleys bombed an enemy camp south of /Gondar in

in the face of heavy machine-gun and Breda gun fire, and on 21 July five Wellesleys made level attacks on Debarech from 4,000 feet dropping 3,660 lbs. of bombs and obtaining direct hits on buildings. On 23 July two Blenheims bombed Gondar and the airport at Azozo obtaining direct hits on buildings; they then machine-gunned an enemy armoured car and lorries on the Chelga-Azozo road.

Meanwhile the Wellesleys had made several supply-dropping sorties to our ground forces in the Debarech area: on 12 and 13 July four Wellesleys dropped a total of 500 lbs. of ammunition and on 14, 15, and 16 July four Wellesleys dropped food and stores. No enemy opposition was encountered during these operations.

At the beginning of August it was arranged that the Royal Air Force (Sudan) and the South African Air Force (Kenya-East Africa) Commands should co-operate in the campaign, and (as already stated<sup>1</sup>) on 3 August No.203 Group R.A.F. (Sudan) took over operational command of the S.A.A.F. units. On the following day (4 August), at the request of No.203 Group, the S.A.A.F. Squadrons began intensive operations on Gondar, while No.47 Squadron R.A.F. and the Free French Flight confined their activities to the Wolchefit and Debarech areas.

Air H.Q. East Africa  
Form 540. Entry of  
August '41.

On 4 August three Wellesleys attacked the fort at Wolchefit which was straddled by a stick of bombs and hit by two heavy bombs from a low level dive. On the next day (5 August) three Wellesleys bombed and machine-gunned enemy positions in the Debarech area and hits were obtained on "tukls", buildings and trenches, and on the same day one Blenheim (of the Free French Flight) made an offensive reconnaissance of the Gondar area and scored two direct hits on buildings at the east side of

/the town.

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1. On page 209 supra.

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the town. This was the last operation in which the Free French Flight engaged, as on 16 August it moved to Damascus. During the next four days the Wellesleys again attacked the fort and enemy positions at Wolchefit, and again from 13 to 19 August (inclusive). The attacks on Wolchefit and Debarech were maintained almost every day during the remainder of August and the first week of September. Thereafter attacks were concentrated on the Gondar - Azozo area which included a raid on 19 September when four Wellesleys bombed enemy positions north of Azozo airport from 2,000 feet with 12 x 250 lb. bombs all bombs falling in the target area: photographs of this attack were taken. On 26 September six Wellesleys dropped 100,000 Maria Theresa dollars for "patriot" troops at the village of Dankaz, and on the return journey one of our aircraft machine-gunned enemy troops at Debarech. Next day (27 September) Debarech and Wolchefit were captured.

Meanwhile (as already stated<sup>1</sup>) on 25 September No.2 Wing of the South African Air Force had taken over the operational control of No.47 Squadron. Thereafter the Wellesleys of this Squadron were employed in the Gondar area (in co-operation with the S.A.A.F.) their activities including the making of photographic and offensive reconnaissance in addition to bombing attacks on enemy positions. During the last week of the campaign No.47 Squadron distinguished itself in two attacks, namely on 20 November when nine Wellesleys bombed successfully enemy positions in the Feroaber<sup>2</sup> area from heights ranging from 3,300 to 4,800 feet, dropping 16 x 250 lb. and 114 x 40 lb. bombs, and on 27 November (the day of

/the surrender

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1. On page 209 supra.

2. Situated on the north-eastern shore of Lake Tana.

the surrender of Gondar) when three Wellesleys made successful bombing attacks on enemy positions north of Gondar town and at Deva<sup>1</sup>, from heights ranging from 3,500 to 4,000 feet, dropping 16 x 250 lb. and 24 x 40 lb. bombs. These bombing operations evoked congratulatory messages from the Commander of the 25th East African Brigade and the A.O.C., East Africa.

Operations (in detail) of the S.A.A.F. Kenya-East Africa Command during the Gondar Campaign.

Meanwhile the units of the South African Air Force were concentrating their activities on the Gondar area. On 14 July three JU.86s of No.16 Squadron attacked Gondar aerodrome and the Azozo airport dropping 3,480 lbs. of bombs which fell near Gondar fort and the hangars and set a building on fire at the north end of the aerodrome. Heavy A.A. and pom-pom fire was encountered and one of our aircraft made a forced landing near Badinia<sup>2</sup>, the crew escaping unhurt. On 17 July two JU.86s (with one Gladiator of No.3 Squadron as protective escort) made a raid on Gondar and the Azozo airport but were compelled to jettison their bombs on being attacked by two C.R.42s. In the ensuing combat one of our aircraft was holed and the two C.R.42s were believed to have been hit. On 20 July three JU.86s (escorted by two Hurricanes) bombed Gondar and its aerodrome dropping 3,540 lbs. of bombs and setting fire to three buildings at Gondar town and other buildings on the aerodrome: during this operation two C.R.42s<sup>3</sup> attacked the JU.86s which were all damaged slightly. Meanwhile the Hurricanes shot up another C.R.42 which was grounded at the aerodrome. On 27 July two JU.86s (escorted by one Hurricane) dropped 2,360 lbs. of bombs in one long

/stick across

- 
1. Situated approx. 7 miles north-east of Gondar.
  2. Situated approx. 17 miles south-east of Gondar.
  3. Probably the same which had been encountered on 17 July.

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stick across Gondar from a height of 6,000 feet.

On 4 August twelve Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron (escorted by one Gladiator) and three JU.86's (escorted by two Hurricanes) made a series of level and dive-bombing attacks on Gondar and Azozo. The Hartbees bombed from 9,000 feet, while the JU.86s dive-bombed. Direct hits were scored with one 250 lb. bomb and four 20 lb. bombs, on the east side of Gondar town and fires were started in buildings in the centre of the town; enemy M.T. was machine-gunned in a park and on the road and three A.A. posts were put out of action: 6,760 lbs. of bombs were dropped. Heavy pom-pom, Breda and machine-gun fire was encountered: one Hurricane failed to return and one Hartbee made a forced landing while the Gladiator received severe damage from the A.A. fire. On the following day (5 August) nine Hartbees, three JU.86s, two Fairey Battles (No.15 Squadron) escorted by one Hurricane continued the attack by level and dive-bombing enemy M.T., troop concentrations, military stores and buildings; 8,440 lbs. of bombs were dropped. A number of fires were started in Gondar town, and buildings were hit: light pom-pom and machine-gun fire was encountered and one Hartbee failed to return. On the next day (6 August) Gondar was again attacked by eight Hartbees, three JU.86s and two Fairey Battles (escorted by one Gladiator): 7,600 lbs. of bombs were dropped and 3,800 rounds of ammunition were fired, direct hits on the military Headquarters, oil store and other buildings being obtained. Heavy pom-pom and Breda fire was encountered. The Hartbee missing from the previous day's operations was located near Dich in a badly damaged condition.

/The attacks

The attacks on Gondar, Azozo and neighbouring localities were continued almost every day throughout the month of August and several bombing raids on Debarech and Wolchefit were also carried out. The S.A.A.F. units were now somewhat depleted as on 25 August No.15

Air H.Q. East Africa. Squadron was withdrawn, its armament of two Fairey Battles Form 540 Entries of 22 and 25 Aug. '41. having become unserviceable. In the meantime No.16

Squadron had been replaced by No.35 Flight which took over the few JU.86s which were still serviceable from that Squadron. On 27 August No.3 Squadron handed over their Hurricanes and Gladiators to No.41 (A.C.) Squadron

Ibid.

Entry of 27 Aug. '41. with sufficient personnel to fly and maintain them. The remainder of No.3 Squadron was then withdrawn to Nanyuki (Kenya) where it was re-equipped with Mohawk aircraft, and returned to Alomata on 31 October for the final assault on Gondar<sup>1</sup>.

On 25 August six Hartbees of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron and two JU.86s of No.35 Flight dive-bombed Wolchefit and Debarech dropping 5,920 lbs. of bombs<sup>2</sup>. Thirty-two direct hits were scored on enemy trenches, one hit on a building at Wolchefit and one on Debarech fort, and 9,600 rounds of ammunition were fired: considerable A.A. fire was encountered. On the same day (25 August) three Hartbees bombed an enemy M.T. convoy at Badinia, dropping 8 x 120 lb. bombs and 16 x 20 lb. bombs (total weight of bombs being 1,280 lbs.). On 31 August two JU.86s escorted by one Hurricane dive-bombed the village of Casa Littorio<sup>3</sup> from 5,000 to 2,000 feet; 2,360 lbs. of bombs were dropped and two direct hits obtained on a warehouse, one on a cross-roads and three on other buildings and two on houses: four enemy M.T. vehicles moving towards Gondar were machine-gunned.

/During the

1. Less one detachment of Mohawks stationed at Aiscia for the French Somaliland blockade.
2. The bombs were: 8 of 250 lbs; 22 of 120 lbs. and 64 of 20 lbs. - (total 5,920 lbs.).
3. Situated between Gondar and Azozo.



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During the first half of September almost daily attacks were made on Wolchefit and Debarech and on 16, 18 and 20 September photographic reconnaissances were made of the Kulkaber-Feroaber areas by JU.86s. On 24 September two Hartbees made a photographic reconnaissance of Debarech and corrected shell bursts for our Artillery which was shelling enemy positions. On 26 September (the day before the capture of Wolchefit and Debarech) three Hartbees bombed and machine-gunned enemy trenches, huts and suspected gun positions at Debarech (dropping 900 lbs. H.E. and 300 lbs. of incendiaries and firing 2,500 rounds), and two Hartbees reconnoitred Wolchefit and dropped a message on our forward troops with information as to negotiations for an armistice. On 29 September two Hartbees escorted by two Gladiators dropped pamphlets in Italian and Amharic over Gondar, Chelga, Azozo, Feroaber and Gorgora, and next day (30 September) three Hartbees dive-bombed and machine-gunned a large concentration of enemy trenches near Bambelc<sup>1</sup> dropping 840 lbs. of H.E. bombs and 300 lbs. of incendiaries. The area appeared to be strongly occupied and light A.A. fire was encountered. On 10 October two Hartbees again attacked Bambelo firing 500 rounds of ammunition at machine-gun posts: light machine-gun fire was encountered.

At the end of September the JU.86s of No.35 Flight were transferred to Aiscia<sup>2</sup> and there remained only No.3 (Fighter) Squadron and No.41 (A.C.) Squadron for the Gondar operations. These Squadrons were moved to forward areas for the final attacks on Gondar and were disposed as follows:-

/Unit of Squadron

A.C. Sowrey's  
"Report on Air Ops.  
I.E.A. 12 July to  
31 Oct. '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/2).

- 
1. Situated approx. 12 miles north-east of Gondar.
  2. i.e. for the French Somaliland blockade.

<u>Unit or Squadron</u>	<u>Location</u>
Advanced No.2 Wing "A" Flight Detachment No.3 Squadron (3 Gladiators) "C" Flight, No.41 Squadron	Dabat
H.Q. No.2 Wing	
H.Q. and "A" Flight, No.3 Squadron	
"B" Flight, No.41 Squadron <sup>1</sup>	
H.Q. No.41 Squadron	Addis Ababa

The largest offensive during October took place on the 17th when seven Hartbees, four Gladiators and one Hurricane raided Ambazzo<sup>2</sup> and dive-bombed enemy trenches, a fort and huts in five waves dropping 7,810 lbs. of bombs: sixteen direct hits were scored on the fort. On the next day (18 October) four Hartbees repeated this attack dropping 800 lbs. of H.E. and 660 lbs. of incendiary bombs: direct hits were obtained on enemy trenches and tents, and photographs were taken. On 24 October two Gladiators on patrol attacked and shot down in flames a C.R.42 near Dabat, and on the next day (25 October) two Hartbees (escorted by one Gladiator) bombed enemy trenches and huts at Guramba<sup>3</sup>, dropping 800 lbs. of bombs and firing 1,400 rounds of ammunition. Other targets at this period included enemy positions at Deva, Magivez Sana<sup>4</sup> and Ambazzo.

Strength of the S.A.A.F. in Abyssinia on 3 November 1941.

On 3 November the strength of the South African Force Squadrons in Abyssinia was as follows:-

/ "A" Flight

- 
1. "B" Flight Detachment of No.3 Squadron (3 Mohawks) was based at Aiscia for the French Somaliland blockade (see page 208 supra).
  2. Situated approx. 2½ miles west of Bambelo.
  3. Situated mid-way between Gorgora and Azozo.
  4. Situated approximately 10 miles north-east of Gondar.

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		Type of Aircraft	No. of Aircraft	No. of Aircraft <u>Serviceable</u>
S.A.A.F. War Diary Narrative of Northern Ops. Entry of 1 Nov. '41.	"A" Flight, No.3 Squadron	Mohawk	10	10
		Gladiator	4	3
		Hurricane	1	1
	"B" Flight, No.3 Squadron	Mohawk	5	2
	No.41 Squadron (all Flights)	Hartbees	<u>25</u> <u>45</u>	<u>11</u> <u>27</u>

The absence of heavy bombers (since the withdrawal of the JU.86s of No.35 Squadron) was compensated by the co-operation of the Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron R.A.F. of the Sudan Command.

### Operations Against the Wajirate.

Ibid.

In the meantime a native tribe known as the Wajirate had been giving trouble in the Dessie area and on 31 October it was decided that offensive air action might be necessary in co-operation with our ground forces, more especially as some 200 of the Danakill tribe had been killed by Wajirates, 5,000 of whom were moving towards Batic. "B" Flight of No.41 (A.C.) Squadron was therefore sent to Korbolcha on 2 November to operate against the Wajirates. However these tribesmen could not be located and on 5 November the Flight returned to Alomata.

### Final Operations - Gondar.

By 4 November our ground forces were closing in from the south-west on the Kulkabaz-Ferocher positions whilst "patriot" forces had now occupied a ridge between these two places. Two Hartbees attacked enemy positions in this neighbourhood near the jetty on Lake Tana and scored a direct hit on the jetty and two direct hits among tents and trenches in the target area: photographs were taken but no enemy movement was disclosed. On the same day two other Hartbees bombed huts and M.T. at Deva: near misses were registered. On 6 November the attack on the Ferocher jetty was repeated by three Hartbees which dropped 1,920 lbs. of bombs scoring hits on the jetty and on enemy positions on a fortified hillock which were also machine-gunned. On the next day (7 November) three

Hartbees attacked the same targets, and enemy positions at Deva, Azozo and Tadda<sup>1</sup> (from whence heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered) were machine-gunned.

On 8 November No.3 Squadron made its first offensive since its re-equipment when three Mohawks attacked enemy positions in the Magivez-Sana area: 600 lbs. of bombs were dropped and a direct hit was scored on a building

1. Situated approx. 10 miles south of Gondar.

building west of Sana. Enemy gun positions and trenches along the hills in the area were observed, and machine-gunned, and 8,000 rounds of ammunition were fired at a large stack of shells, and five machine-gun posts were silenced by the fire of our aircraft. On the same day this area was also attacked by two Hartbees: 1,280 lbs. of bombs were dropped which scored direct hits on enemy trenches, and other trenches on the slopes of the ridges at Sana and Janahoi were machine-gunned. During the next three days attacks were made on Deva, Ambazzo, Sana and Feroaber by the Mohawks and Hartbees.

On 11 November thirty sorties were made during the largest air operations which had yet been carried out against Gondar. The targets included enemy positions at Ambazzo, Chelga, Deva, Gorgora and Jangua (on the Gondar-Gorgora road) where large enemy concentrations were reported. Direct hits were registered and heavy casualties to troops were inflicted, and trenches, gun positions, huts and boats (on the shore of Lake Tana) were machine-gunned. Three Hartbees dropped 1,440 lbs. of bombs on an enemy camp at Jangua, and direct hits were scored on enemy emplacements and trenches at Azozo. On the next day (12 November) nineteen sorties were made on Feroaber by six Mohawks, seven Hartbees and six Wellesleys (of No. 47 Squadron, R.A.F.) in preparation for an Infantry attack: 10,170 lbs. of bombs were dropped, direct hits being obtained on enemy camouflaged huts and gun-emplacements. In addition, three Hartbees dropped 1,440 lbs. of bombs at the Meghec River<sup>1</sup> and three other Hartbees attacked Gorgora.

During the next few days the attacks against enemy positions were maintained including attacks on

/Chelga, Dabat

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1. This river flows near Gondar, from Megivez to Tadda.

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Chelga, Dabat, Feroaber and Kulkaber, and a tactical reconnaissance of the Minzero<sup>1</sup> - Azozo road. On 17 November, in preparation for a major attack by our ground forces in the Gondar area, a continuous air attack was made on enemy positions from Ambazzo to Azozo. Forty-five sorties were made, twenty-four by Hartbees, twelve by Mohawks, and nine by Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron, R.A.F. The attack began at 06.20 hours when three Hartbees dropped 1,668 lbs. of bombs on enemy positions round Sana. At 06.35 hours three Hartbees dropped 1,215 lbs. of bombs at Ambazzo, all bombs falling in the target area which was also machine-gunned. At 07.20 hours three Wellesleys bombed Azozo and Gondar dropping 2,960 lbs. of bombs on buildings and huts, and at the same time three Mohawks dropped 600 lbs. of bombs on the same targets. One hour later another three Mohawks attacked Deva with 600 lbs. of bombs on enemy tents, trenches and huts, and exploded ammunition dumps by machine-gun fire. Three Hartbees also attacked Deva dropping 2,040 lbs. of bombs and machine-gunning the whole area. At 08.30 hours three Wellesleys dropped 3,000 lbs. of bombs on the same target, all bombs falling among enemy positions. At 10.35 hours three Hartbees attacked enemy positions at Larei with 1,096 lbs. of bombs and machine-gun fire, and at the same time three Hartbees bombed Ambazo dropping 640 lbs. of bombs and scoring eight direct hits on enemy trenches which were also machine-gunned. Three Wellesleys made another attack on Gondar and Ambazo with 2,960 lbs. of bombs: a building in Gondar was destroyed. At 11.30 hours three Mohawks repeated this attack dropping 600 lbs. of bombs and scoring two direct hits on a (presumed) ammunition dump east of Azozo, and machine-gunned the Power Station at Gondar. At 14.00 hours three Mohawks

/bombed

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1. Situated approx. 15 miles south-east of Azozo.

bombed Deva dropping 600 lbs. of bombs on enemy huts and trenches and machine-gunning these targets, and at 15.00 hours three Hartbees attacked Deflecha with 1,120 lbs. of bombs; sixteen of these fell wide but thirty-two fell among enemy positions. An hour later three Hartbees bombed and machine-gunned enemy positions at Sana, causing damage. The last raid of the day was made by three Hartbees on the enemy positions at Ambazo: 1,188 lbs. of bombs were dropped and a "Blackshirt" troops' camp received a direct hit. During these attacks a total of 10,880 lbs. of bombs were dropped.

In the afternoon and evening of 20 November our troops attacked the Feroaber-Kulkaber positions, and in preparation of this assault continuous attacks were delivered by our Air Forces from 06.30 hours. Forty-four sorties were made, seventeen by Mohawks, eighteen by Hartbees and nine by Wellesleys of No.47 Squadron, R.A.F.<sup>1</sup> These sorties were confined to the Kulkaber Pass and the Feroaber Ridge; extensive damage was inflicted on enemy trenches, fortifications and huts. During these sorties a total of 20,166 lbs. of bombs were dropped. In addition to these attacks three Hartbees dropped 1,528 lbs. of bombs on an enemy camp west of Chelga, all bombs falling in the target area.

These heavy<sup>2</sup> attacks made by our Air Forces on 17 and 20 November - in addition to other air attacks carried out almost every day - greatly demoralised the enemy. Their "Regia Aeronautica" had already been annihilated<sup>3</sup> and except for their anti-aircraft fire they had no means of replying to our aerial onslaughts.

/On

1. See page 20. supra.

2. ibid. at that period and in that country.

3. The last Italian aircraft to operate in East Africa was a C.R.42. On 22 November it machine-gunned our troops at Dabat when the C.R.A., Lieut.-Col. Ormsby, was killed.

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On 21 November our ground forces gained the Kulkaber Ridge and during this and the next two days our aircraft attacked Kulkaber, Feroaber, Gondar, Azozo, Chelga, Dabat, Gorgora and Ambazzo. On 24 November the main target for our Air Forces was Colonel Torrelli's Mobile Brigade which occupied four camps between Gondar and Azozo. These camps were attacked in several sorties by Hartbees which started fires and inflicted considerable casualties on enemy troops.

On 26 November the final assault on Gondar was fixed for the next morning, and in preparation of this operation four Mohawks, six Hartbees and one Gladiator made sorties on Ambazo, Azozo, Gondar, Sana and Maldiba<sup>1</sup>. Eight direct hits were scored on enemy gun positions at Maldiba, six direct hits were registered on buildings in Gondar, and huts, tents and trenches were straddled north-west of the town.

On 27 November the last day's aerial offensive in the East African Campaigns began with patrols by Mohawks and Hartbees over the Gondar area. Our ground forces broke through the outer defences of the Gondar stronghold and captured the whole area including Gondar in the north and Azozo in the south. During this operation eight Mohawk, sixteen Hartbee and six Wellesley sorties were made in close support of our troops, 12,544 lbs. of bombs being dropped. These sorties continued throughout the day, the enemy maintaining light to heavy A.A. fire, until the evening when our troops penetrated into Gondar and General Nasi was forced to surrender.

Meanwhile the enemy outposts at Chelga and Gorgora were unaware of the surrender of Gondar and on the next day (28 November) two Hartbees flew to these places

/and

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1. Situated approx.  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles south-east of Gondar.

and dropped messages<sup>1</sup> informing the garrisons that Gondar had fallen. The garrisons thereupon capitulated and their surrender terminated hostilities of the East African Campaigns.

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the R.A.F. (Sudan Command) from 16 April to 27 November 1941

A.C. Slatter's  
"Brief Summary of  
Air Ops. in the  
Sudan etc. June '40 -  
May '41." (A.H.B.  
II J7/2) and  
No.203 Group Records.

During the period of Phase III the Royal Air Force of the Sudan Command carried out more than 600 bomber sorties (of which approximately 400 were made in the period 16 April to 31 May) in addition to numerous reconnaissances and patrols.

Summary of Bomber Sorties etc. by the S.A.A.F. (Kenya-East Africa Command) from 7 April to 27 November 1941.

Compiled from Air  
H.Q. East Africa  
Records.

During the period of Phase III the South African Air Force of the Kenya (East Africa) Command carried out some 970 bomber sorties and 934 reconnaissances. The total weight of bombs dropped during these operations was approximately 200 tons.

Aircraft Losses.

A.C. Sowrey's "Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
6 April - 11 July '41 during the above period was some 20 bombers, 14 fighters, and 12 July -  
31 Oct. '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/1 & 2).

The estimated number<sup>3</sup> of enemy aircraft destroyed during the above period was some 20 bombers, 14 fighters, 1 Transport, 1 Reconnaissance and 2 unidentified aircraft.

Our own aircraft destroyed by enemy action for the same period were 7 bombers, 5 fighters and 3 A.C. aircraft.

A.C. Sowrey's "Report  
on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
12 July - 31 Oct. '41.  
(A.H.B. II J7/7/2).

Although our aircraft casualties would appear to be high in relation to the available enemy air opposition, numerous low level attacks were pressed home in the face of intense machine-gun and Breda-gun fire. At one period our aircraft losses were considered to be out of proportion to the results obtained and instructions were issued to No.2 Wing to conserve aircraft for subsequent-intensive operations.

/GENERAL

1. The message to the garrison at Cholga was written by General Nasi himself.
2. Including the Free French Flight.
3. There is some doubt as to the exact figures. In A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Air Ops. I.E.A. 6 April - 11 July '41 of 1 Dec. '41, two different sets of figures are given on pages 4A and 5.



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## GENERAL SUMMARY OF PHASE III.

The assistance which the Royal Air Force and the South African Air Force rendered in the operations during Phase III was, as in the earlier Phases of the East African Campaigns, of the first importance. The advance of our ground forces on Dessie, the capture of Amba Alagi and surrender of the Italian Viceroy, the Duke D'Aosta, the two battles of the Lakes and subsequent surrender of General Gazerra at Gambela, and the final assault and capture of the Italians last stronghold of Gondar owed much of their success to the untiring energy and skilful operations of the men of the Royal and South African Air Forces. It can, indeed, be safely assumed that without the co-operation of the R.A.F. and S.A.A.F. these secondary campaigns would at least have occupied many more months of manoeuvring and fighting by our ground forces, and it is more than probable that their successful outcome could not have been accomplished with the comparatively slender forces at our disposal and owing to the very difficult terrain over which the operations had to be conducted. These difficulties were to a large extent overcome by the vigorous attacks from the air to which - since the virtual annihilation of their Air Force - the Italians had no longer an effective method of reply.

As an indication of the esteem in which the Army Commanders held the Air Forces, the following paragraph from an Order of the Day by Major-General Fowkes<sup>1</sup> after the capture of Gondar may be mentioned:-

S.A.A.F. War Diary:  
Narrative of  
Northern Ops.  
Entries of 28 Nov.  
'41.

"The Gondar Fortress was a tough nut, and the shell took some cracking. Let no one think that this or that unit or this or that operation was the decisive factor. All arms and units contributed

/their

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1. Commanding the 12th (A) Division.

their full share to this success ..... Let us also remember our brothers in the air who so gallantly responded to the calls made on them," and Lieut.-General Wetherall, G.O.C., East Africa<sup>1</sup>, said to the A.O.C., East Africa Command:-

"I am now at Gondar. I hear on all sides of the splendid and gallant work carried out by the Air Forces ..... No task was too difficult, no day too long. Best thanks from the Army and myself."

/GENERAL SUMMARY

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1. Gen. Wetherall had succeeded Gen. Cunningham as G.O.C.

SECRET

GENERAL SUMMARY

# SECRET

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## GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE OPERATIONS OF THE ROYAL AND SOUTH AFRICAN AIR FORCES<sup>1</sup>.

At the beginning of the conflict the primary responsibilities of our Air Forces were to keep inviolate the all-important Red Sea route for our shipping, to destroy hostile air bases, aircraft, ports and naval and mercantile vessels<sup>2</sup>, and to assist the operations of our ground forces in every manner possible. These duties were performed successfully by our Air Forces although for several months they were inferior both in numbers and types of aircraft to the Italian "Regia Aeronautica". During this period (covered by Phase I of this monograph) the Italians learned to their cost the striking power of our bombers which, though few in number and unprotected for lack of fighters, made continual raids upon their aerodromes and arsenals in Abyssinia, Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, and daily patrols and offensive reconnaissances over the Red Sea and its African shore. These assaults, and the toll in aircraft which our Air Forces levied upon the enemy, were strong contributory factors to the largely ineffectual attacks which the Italians made against our territories. Their only conquest - and that a temporary one - was of British Somaliland which they owed to the overwhelming numbers of their land forces against a totally inadequate number of Empire troops for whom aerial assistance had to be supplied from the few R.A.F. Squadrons at Aden. The absence of any protected aerodromes<sup>3</sup> in British Somaliland forced our aircraft to operate from Aden - a distance of 200 miles - which greatly hampered their effort and precluded the all-important maintenance of close

/contact

1. Including No.237 (Rhodesian) Sqdn.

2. Especially submarines.

3. Two aerodromes existed, namely at Berbera and Laferug, but they were quickly made untenable by enemy bombardment largely owing to lack of sufficient ground defences.

contact with the military situation.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of the many difficulties with which they had to contend, the R.A.F. Squadrons at Aden gave their utmost assistance to the support of our ground forces; their efforts evoked the thanks of General Wavell, who expressed

Gen. Wavell's  
Despatch "Ops. in  
Somaliland 1939-40".  
(A.H.B. II J7/3).

himself as "deeply grateful to Air Vic-Marshal Reid and to the Royal Air Force at Aden".

In the opinion of the Narrator the absence of any R.A.F. units in British Somaliland was an unfortunate circumstance, for had there been a few Bomber, Fighter and Army Co-operation aircraft based in the Protectorate (and some efficiently protected aerodromes from which to operate) the Italian attack on British Somaliland might have been frustrated, or at least held up sufficiently to allow reinforcements for our troops (assuming that any could have been spared) to have been sent there.

During the second phase of the campaigns the scene changed entirely. The advent of reinforcing Air Units, and especially of the Hurricane aircraft for the S.A.A.F., gave our Air Forces (though still inferior numerically) sufficient strength and armament to achieve air superiority over the Italian Air Force upon which the conquest of Eritrea, Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia so greatly depended. Among the exploits of our Air Forces their assistance in the capture of Keren - the vital factor in the conquest of Eritrea - and the havoc which they wrought to the enemy Air Force at Addis Ababa - the culminating episode of the wholesale destruction of the "Regia Aeronautica" - rank as outstanding achievements of our aerial operations. There can be no doubt whatever that the successful assault of Keren and the

/spectacular

1. At that period and for the type of aircraft with which the Aden bomber Squadrons were equipped, a distance of 200 miles from their base to the sphere of operations was a very real handicap and did much to minimise the strength of their attacks.

# SECRET

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spectacular drive by our troops through Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia (against enemy forces many times their own number who were equipped with numerous and powerful artillery and were generally ensconced in strong defensive positions) could not have been accomplished but for the "close-support"<sup>1</sup> rendered by our Air Forces and their continual and heavy attacks upon enemy aerodromes and aircraft. Moreover, the assistance which the Royal and South African Air Forces gave to the Abyssinian "patriots" not only encouraged this movement to a very great extent but produced a corresponding decline in the morale of the Italians and stimulated the desertion of many hundreds of their Colonial (native) levies.

In the operations for the re-conquest of British Somaliland the Aden Squadrons of the Royal Air Force played an important part by carrying out offensive reconnaissances and bombing raids of enemy aerodromes prior to our assault, and by preventing enemy aircraft from interfering with the landing of our troops. They also assisted in the establishment of a base for our ground forces at Berbera. Furthermore, at the capture of the important enemy Naval base of Assab the Aden units of the Royal Air Force repeated the activities which they had carried out in British Somaliland and thereby did much to ensure the successful issue of the attack.

During the third and closing phase of the East African Campaigns the Royal and South African Air Forces - though now depleted in strength owing to our aerial requirements in other theatres of war - maintained the high standard which they had shown throughout the previous phases of the conflict. They destroyed the few remaining aircraft of the Italian Air Force, and in

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1. "Close-support" here includes the bombing and machine-gunning of troops, gun positions and transport. /the pursuit

the pursuit of the enemy after the fall of Addis Ababa our squadrons co-operated with our ground forces to the fullest extent. The victory of the Komvolcha Pass (Dessie) and the capture of the well-nigh impregnable fortress of Amba Alagi owed much to the attacks of our aircraft and to the demoralising effect which these produced upon the enemy.

Throughout the battles of the Lakes the Royal and South African Air Forces continued their co-operation in addition to assisting the "patriot" forces, and they also made repeated attacks on enemy strongholds in Abyssinia. By this time the Italian Air Force was practically exterminated and the onslaughts of our aircraft - unimpeded by enemy opposition from the air - hastened the surrender of General Gazzera at Gambela.

In the final operations against Gondar our Air Forces operated together in daily bombing attacks and played a great part in lowering still further the Italians' now rapidly declining morale. During the last week of the assault our aircraft intensified their attacks, and on the day of the final battle (27 November) they were overhead all through the day giving encouragement to our troops and harassing the last despairing efforts of the enemy.

The work of the Royal and South African Air Forces in the East African Campaigns will have an honoured place in the history of the second World War, not only from the achievements which they accomplished but also from the spirit of duty, self-sacrifice and high endeavour evinced by all ranks of British, South African and Rhodesian personnel which united them in a bond of mutual good-comradeship and of a common loyalty to the cause which they served.

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APPENDICES



# SECRET

APPENDIX "A"

## LOCATION OF UNITS IN THE SUDAN, KENYA AND ADEN AS AT 11 JUNE, 1940.

UNIT	EQUIPMENT	LOCATION
<u>SUDAN</u>		
<u>Squadrons</u>		
No. 47 Squadron (B)	Wellesleys	Erkowit
"D" Flight No. 47 Squadron (A.C.)	Vincent's	Khartoum
No. 223 Squadron (B)	Wellesleys	Summit
No. 14 Squadron (B)	Wellesleys	Port Sudan
No. 112 (F) Squadron (1 Flight) <sup>δ</sup>	Gladiators	Summit
<u>Other Units</u>		
Station Headquarters, Khartoum		
No. 254 Wing	-	Erkowit
Headquarters, R.A.F. Sudan <sup>⊛</sup>	-	Khartoum
<u>KENYA</u>		
No. 1 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Gladiators	Nairobi
No. 11 (B) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Battles	Nairobi
No. 12 (B) Squadron S.A.A.F.	JU. 86	Nairobi
No. 237 Rhodesian Squadron (A.C.)	Hardys (and Iysanders)	Nairobi
No. 1 Flight K.A.A.U.	Various types	Nairobi
No. 2 Flight K.A.A.U.	Various types	Nairobi
No. 3 Flight K.A.A.U.	Various types	Mombasa
Station Headquarters, Nairobi		
Brigade Headquarters, S.A.A.F.		
<u>TANGANYIKA</u>		
Air Defence Unit		Dar-es-Salaam
<u>ADEN</u>		
<u>Squadrons</u>		
No. 94 (F) Squadron (Incomplete)	Gladiators	Sheikh Othman
No. 203 (GR) Squadron	Blenheim IV	Kharmaksar (Aden)
No. 8 (B) Squadron	Blenheim I (and Vincent's)	Kharmaksar (Aden)
No. 39 (B) Squadron	Blenheim I	Recently arrived from India
<u>Other Units</u>		
Armoured Car Section	-	Steamer Point
Equipment and Supply Depot	-	Steamer Point
R.A.F. Hospital	-	Steamer Point
Station Headquarters, Kharmaksar		
Station Headquarters, Sheikh Othman		
Headquarters, British Forces in Aden	-	Steamer Point

<sup>δ</sup> Afterwards known as No. 430 Flight

<sup>δ</sup> Afterwards known as "K" Flight

<sup>⊛</sup> Afterwards renamed No. 203 Group

(The above is excerpted (with some amendments) from Appendix "B" of  
A.C.M. Longmore's Despatch May - December 1940. A.H.B. II J1/7).

# SECRET

APPENDIX "B"

## ESTIMATED ORDER OF BATTLE - ITALIAN AIR FORCE ITALIAN EAST AFRICA AS ON 11 JUNE, 1940.

GRUPPI	SQUADS	TYPES	LOCATION
No.44 (Bomber) H.Q., ADDIS ABABA	6 7	CA.113 and S.79 CA.133 and S.79	ADDIS ABABA ADDIS ABABA (Abyssinia)
No.25 (Bomber) H.Q., MOGADISCHU	8 9	CA.133 CA.133	MOGADISHU (Italian MOGADISHU Somaliland)
No.28 (Bomber) H.Q. GURA	10 19	S.81 S.81	GURA GURA (Eritrea)
No.26 (Bomber) H.Q. GONDAR	11 13 41	CA.133 CA.133 CA.133	GONDAR (Abyssinia) BAHAR DAR (Abyssinia) GONDAR (Abyssinia)
No.4 (Bomber) H.Q. DIREDAWA	14 15	CA.133 and S.81 CA.133 and S.81	DIREDAWA DIREDAWA (Abyssinia)
No.27 (Bomber) H.Q. DESSIE	18 52	CA.133 and S.81 CA.133 and S.81	DESSIE DESSIE (Abyssinia)
No.1 (Land Recco.) H.Q. ADDIS ABABA	34 110	RO.1 RO.37 bis	MOJJO (Abyssinia) Section No.1 at DIREDAWA and Section No.2 Detached to ASSAB.
No.49 (Bomber) H.Q. JIMMA	61 64	CA.133 CA.133	JIMMA JIMMA (Abyssinia)
No.29 (Bomber) H.Q. ADDIS ABABA	62 63	S.81 S.81	ADDIS ABABA ADDIS ABABA (Abyssinia)
No.31 (Bomber) H.Q. NEGHELLI	65 66	CA.133 CA.133	NEGHELLI (Abyssinia) YAVELLO (Abyssinia)
No.2 (Bomber) H.Q. ASSAB	118	CA.133 and S.81	ASSAB (Eritrea)
Fighter Squadrons	118 410 411 412 413	CR.32 CR.32 CR.32 CR.42 CR.42	GURA (Eritrea) DIREDAWA (Abyssinia) ADDIS ABABA (Abyssinia) GURA (temporarily) (Eritrea) GURA (temporarily) (Eritrea)
	Staff	CA.133 & S.79	ADDIS ABABA (Abyssinia)
	Staff	CA.133	ASMARA (Eritrea)
	Staff	CA.133	MOGADISHU (Italian Somaliland)

(The above is excerpted from No.254 Wing, Op. Instruction No.1).

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APPENDIX "C"

## NOTE ON BOMBING ATTACKS AGAINST MASSAWA

(From Air Commodore Slatter's "Brief Summary of Air Operations in the Sudan etc." L.H.B. II J7/2).

Like all other targets Massawa was attacked by formations of bombers (up to a Squadron in strength) by day at the beginning of the campaign. These attacks became somewhat costly in aircraft and crews due to enemy fighter opposition and A.A. gunfire and were dropped in favour of night bombing by individual aircraft.

The formations adopted were 3 aircraft flying in V formation. The formations were compact and well handled. (It should be remembered that these were units having considerable pre war training). The aircraft were equipped with additional Lewis guns firing out of gun ports at the side of the fuselage. The C.R.42 with its  $\frac{1}{2}$ " machine gun did, however, inflict considerable structural damage to ~~our~~ aircraft from a range which made Lewis gun fire almost ineffective and inflicted casualties to the crews. The A.A. gunfire at Massawa also proved heavy and accurate.

The enemy fighters did not produce any particular tactics other than attacks from the quarter and astern. Mostly they contented themselves with long range attacks from astern on bombers, relying on their superior weapon, the  $\frac{1}{2}$ " machine gun. No single instance was ever recorded of a frontal attack being carried out by enemy fighters against our bombers.

The bombing attacks were mostly medium level ones - but occasional shallow dive and low level attacks were also carried out.

Bombs used were:-

G.P.	500 lbs. and 250 lbs. Mk. I and IV 40 lbs. and 20 lbs. Mk. I
S.A.P.	500 lbs. and 250 lbs. Mk. I and IV
A.P.	20 lbs. (F)
A.S.	250 lbs.
Incend.	25 lbs. and 4 lbs.
Fusing	- instantaneous and 11 secs. delay.
	/Results

Results obtained, subsequently revealed by visual inspection, show considerable damage on all the aerodromes in Eritrea.

The night attacks - all carried out in moonlight periods although flares were used on many occasions to further assist in location of targets and to encourage demoralisation of enemy defences and forces generally.

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APPDNEIX "D"

## LOCATION OF UNITS AS ON 31 DECEMBER 1940

UNIT	EQUIPMENT	LOCATION
<u>SUDAN</u>		
<u>Squadrons.</u>		
No. 1 Squadron, S.A.A.F. (F)	Hurricane & Gladiator	Khartoum
No. 14 Squadron, (B)	Blenheim IV	Port Sudan
No. 47 (B) Squadron	Wellesley	Carthago
No. 223 (B) Squadron	Wellesley	Wadi Gazouza
No. 237 Rhodesian Squadron (A.C.)	Hardy and Lysander	Gordon's Tree
No. 430 Flight (A.C.)	Gauntlet and Vincent	Khartoum
"K" Flight (F)	Gladiator	Summit
<u>Other Units.</u>		
No. 52 Repair and Salvage Unit	-	Wadi Gazouza
No. 251 A.M.E.S.	-	Port Sudan
No. 22 Medical Receiving Station	-	Gordon's Tree
Station Headquarters, Khartoum		
No. 254 Wing	-	Port Sudan
No. 203 Group	-	Khartoum
<u>KENYA AND TANGANYIKA</u>		
<u>South African Air Force Units.</u>		
No. 1 Brigade Headquarters	-	Nanyuki
No. 2 (F) Squadron	Gauntlet and Fury	Nanyuki
No. 3 (F) Squadron	Hurricane	Nairobi
No. 11 (B) Squadron	Battle	Archer's Post
No. 12 (B) Squadron	JU.86	Nanyuki
No. 14 (B) Squadron	In process of forming	Nakuru
No. 40 (AC) Squadron	Hartebeeste	Nairobi
No. 41 (AC) Squadron	Hartebeeste	Garissa
No. 60 Squadron	Anson	Nairobi
No. 34 Flight	Anson	Mombasa
S.A.A.F. Station, Mombasa		
Operational Training Unit	Various	Nakuru
Pilots Pool	-	Nakuru
<u>Other Units</u>		
Communication Squadron	Various	Nairobi
No. 30 Elementary Flying Training School	-	Eastleigh
No. 218 A.M.E.S.	-	Mombasa
R.A.F. Station, Eastleigh		
R.A.F. Station, Dar-es-Salaam		
R.A.F. Station, Nairobi		
R.A.F. Station, Nakuru		
R.A.F. Station, Mombasa		
Air Headquarters, East Africa	-	Nairobi
<u>ADEN</u>		
No. 8 (B) Squadron	Blenheim I	Khormaksar
No. 94 (F) Squadron	Gladiator	Sheikh Othman
No. 203 (GR) Squadron	Blenheim IV	Khormaksar
No. 1 Franch (Bomber) Flight	Glen Martin	Khormaksar
Armoured Car Section	-	Steamer Point
Equipment and Supply Depot	-	Steamer Point
R.A.F. Hospital	-	Steamer Point
No. 13 W.I.S. Detachment	-	A.H.Q.
		/R.A.F. Station

12

UNIT	EQUIPMENT	LOCATION
R.A.F. Station, Khormaksar R.A.F. Station, Sheikh Othman		
Headquarters, British Forces in Aden	-	Steamer Point

(The above is excerpted from Appendix "C" of A.C.M. Longmore's  
Despatch May - December 1940: A.H.B. II J1/7).

# SECRET

APPENDIX "E"

## No.203 GROUP OPERATION INSTRUCTION NO.7.

(NOT to be taken into the air)

Reference Map:- 1,250,000 AFRICA SHEET 57 M.

1,2,000,000 AFRICA (SUDAN) NORTH E.36-37, D.35-37.

### INFORMATION

#### GENERAL

1. On WEDNESDAY, 6th NOVEMBER 1940, the land forces are making an attack on GALLABAT FORT and METEMMA.

The Air Officer Commanding has agreed to give air assistance.

#### OUR OWN FORCES

2. The Air Forces available for the operations are likely to be:-

AT FUTA - (6 Gladiators - No.1 Sqdn. S.A.A.F.  
(3 Gladiators - "K" Flight.

AT BLACKDOWN - (4 Hardys - No.237 Squadron  
(6 Wellesleys - No. 47 Squadron  
(3 Gauntlets - No.430 Flight  
(3 Vincents - No.430 Flight

#### ENEMY FORCES

3. The following aircraft are believed to be located within striking range of GALLABAT.

AT GONDAR - (6 C.R.42  
(2 S.79  
(4 C.A.133

AT BAHAR DAR - 6 C.A.133

4. In addition to the above GONDAR can be reinforced at short notice from GURA and ASMARA where are located:-

AT ASMARA - (4 C.R.32  
(1 C.R.42  
(5 S.81  
(5 C.A.133

AT GURA - (3 C.R.32  
(3 C.R.42  
(10 S.79

It is thought that about 25 per cent of these are unserviceable.

5. How many of the above can be operated from GONDAR is unknown, but this aerodrome is thought to be of insufficient size for the operation of large forces.

6. A number of satellite aerodromes are being constructed and enlarged, notably at GONGORA (37.20 E, 12.15 N) METEMMA, CAFTA (37.12 E, 13.53 N) and UM HAGER. It is not known how far these have progressed but some of them may be suitable for fighters.

/INTENTION

34232

#### INTENTION

7. To assist the land forces in their attack on GALLABAT FORT and METEMMA.

#### COMMAND

8. SQUADRON LEADER V.E. MAXWELL (No.237 SQUADRON) is to exercise general supervision and co-ordination of the air operation as follows:-

(a) For the aircraft at BLACKDOWN - through SQUADRON LEADER J.E. PELLY-FRY, No.47 Squadron.

(b) For the aircraft at FUTA - through MAJOR VAN SCHALKWYK, No.1 Squadron, South African Air Force.

9. Major VAN SCHALKWYK is to be responsible, under Squadron Leader MAXWELL, for the general co-ordination of fighter activities.

#### EXECUTION

10. Three aircraft "K" FLIGHT are to proceed to FUTA on MONDAY, 4th NOVEMBER 1940. On arrival there they are to come under the command of Major VAN SCHALKWYK, S.A.A.F.

11. Four aircraft No.237 SQUADRON are to proceed to BLACKDOWN as required by Squadron Leader MAXWELL.

12. On TUESDAY, 5th NOVEMBER 1940, six Wellesleys No.47 SQUADRON are to proceed to BLACKDOWN accompanied by three Gauntlets No.430 FLIGHT at a time which will leave the smallest opportunity for Italian reconnaissance aircraft to discover their presence.

13. Three Vincents No.430 FLIGHT are to proceed to GEDAREF aerodrome on TUESDAY 5th NOVEMBER, 1940, arriving just before dark.

#### VINCENTS

14. Unless otherwise ordered two Vincents are to be over GALLABAT FORT at 0530 hours. From then to 0550 hours desultory bombing of the fort is to be carried out in order to cover the advance of our mechanised units.

15. The third Vincent is to endeavour to put out of action the wireless station at METEMMA.

16. The Vincents are to return to BLACKDOWN where they will re-arm and await orders.

#### WELLESLEYS

17. Three Wellesleys are to be over METEMMA at 0530 hours. From then to 0550 hours they are to carry out desultory bombing of METEMMA.

18. Three Wellesleys are to be over the area NORTH of METEMMA at 0530 hours. From then to 0605 hours they are to carry out desultory bombing of the reserve battalions which are known to be in this district.

19. After completing their attack, all Wellesleys are to return to BLACKDOWN where they are to re-arm and await orders.

#### /GAUNTLETS



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## GAUNTLETS

20. The three Gauntlets are to be armed with 20 lb. bombs and are to remain at **BLACKDOWN** in readiness for attacks on enemy strong points and concentrations, as ordered by Squadron Leader **MAXWELL**.

## GLADIATORS

21. The role of the Gladiators is to protect our aircraft and troops from interference by enemy aircraft. Their employment is at the discretion of Squadron leader **MAXWELL**, who should bear in mind that the greatest concentration of our aircraft over the target occurs between 0530 and 0605 hours. General disposition is that 2 aircraft will be detailed to be in position at **HESTON** by 0600 hours 6th **NOVEMBER** 1940. Remainder to patrol as ordered.

## HARDYS

22. The Hardy aircraft will be used for tactical reconnaissance, as required.

## BLENHEIMS IV

23. One Blenheim IV is reconnoitring the **METEMMA - GONDAR ROAD**. It will be passing over **METEMMA** at approximately 0615 hours and will return to **BLACKDOWN** after patrol, where a reconnaissance report will be dropped.

## INTER-COMMUNICATION

24. The following inter-communication has been arranged:-

10th BRIGADE H.Q. and <b>HESTON</b>	- Telephone only
10th BRIGADE H.Q. and <b>FUTA</b>	- Telephone and W/T
10th BRIGADE H.Q. and <b>BLACKDOWN</b>	- W/T only

25. Great care is to be taken to conceal the existence of new W/T STATIONS.

The **FUTA** call sign is to be used for tests.

26. During the progress of the action all telephones must be tested at least once every half hour.

## ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

27. As already issued.

## MEDICAL ARRANGEMENTS

28. One MEDICAL OFFICER is attached to **BLACKDOWN** and one to **FUTA**.

29. All personnel are to take stringent anti-malarial precautions.

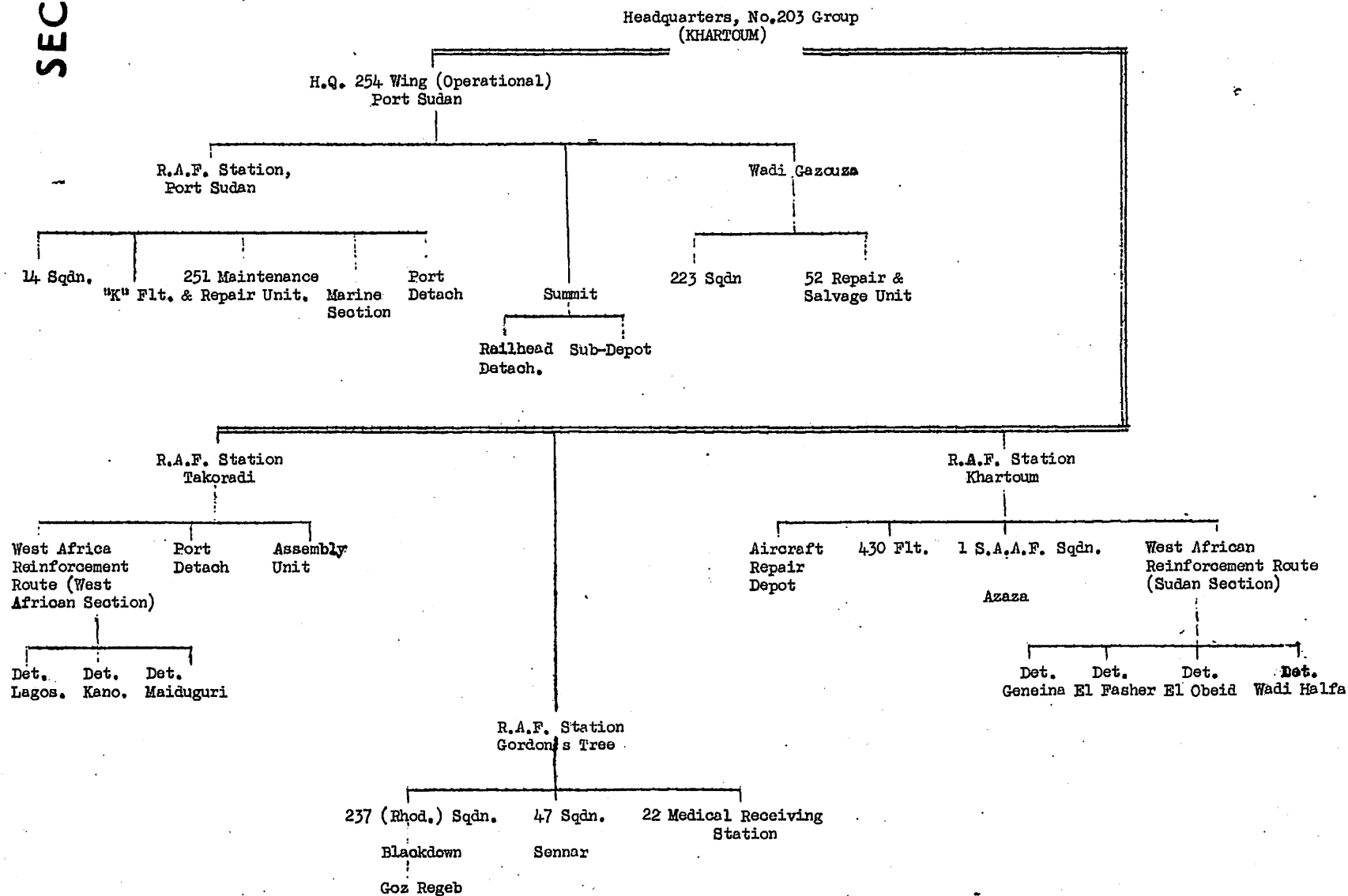
## ACKNOWLEDGE.

(Signed) ?  
Air Commodore, Commanding,  
No. 203 Group, R.A.F.

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APPENDIX "F"

NO.203 GROUP, R.A.F.: CHAIN OF COMMAND, DECEMBER 1940



(The above is taken from No.203 Group's Appendix "U" to Form 540, Entry of 31 December 1940).

# SECRET

APPENDIX "G"

## TRANSLATION OF AMHARIC PAMPHLET "A"

### PEOPLE OF ETHIOPIA - LISTEN

Your Emperor is still living.

The war from which you will emerge victorious has now started.

Rise up, put on your arms, fight for your banner (flag).

All Ethiopian-born people (sons of Ethiopia), cultivators, farmers, land-owners, traders, women and children, in order to lighten the burden of the warrior who is fighting for you, begin to do work that is right for you to do.

Until now you have been forced to live under the rule of the Italians, now the time has come to say "NO".

Openly refuse to obey their orders, disregard all their instructions.

The freedom of your forefathers will return to you.

Many of your people, with their officers have already left Ethiopia with their equipment to re-establish (hoist) your flag.

Prepare the way for them - when they arrive join them.

As we have started for a true cause, let the work (will) of God be with you and with us.

**SECRET**  
TRANSLATION OF AMHARIC PAMPHLET "B"

(SEAL)

THE LION OF JUDAH  
H.M. HAILE SELASSIE

ETHIOPIA STRETCHES HER HANDS TOWARDS GOD  
H.M. HAILE SELASSIE  
APPOINTED BY GOD EMPEROR OF ETHIOPIA

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PROCLAMATION

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To the People, Chiefs, and Heroes of Ethiopia.

During the past 5 years, waiting with courage and bravery with your spirit unbroken against your well-armed enemies, you have gained the friendship of other nations. Your crucifixion and sacrifice, your hope and courage has not been in vain.

From to-day and on, the Government of Great Britain, has given me all the help I need in order to gain the complete freedom of our country.

Here, I have come for you.

God's graciousness having turned towards us, let us praise the Lord.

The Braves who fell in the front and those who perished by the cruelty of the Italians, count into thousands.

Ethiopians, let us be grateful to them and remember them.

Ethiopian people, Chiefs and Heroes!

The Italian Government has declared war against Great Britain.

The reason is that when the enemy was invading our Country Great Britain put sanctions and tried to enforce the regulations of the League of Nations, in order that the enemy could not procure supplies and ammunition.

Now you know what you need to do.

All those who are among the enemy may join the Ethiopian Heroes and help the Country.

By word of mouth or by deeds, none of you should be a tool to the enemy.

Wherever you meet the enemy, attack by surprise, destroy the roads and smash him.

Braves and Heroes of Ethiopia!

The qualifications of each of you is known to me. I will need to see the deeds of your heroism in the coming future. The braves with their bravery, the priests and the aged with their advice to the people, the farmers and labourers should help for the achievement of this cause and each of you will be rewarded for your work.

People of Hamassen, Akolguza, Serae, Bonamer, Habak, Mensae, beyond Mareb or on this side of Mareb, all of you come to understanding with your brothers the Ethiopians. From now on none of you should be a tool to the Italians.

Do not fight against your Mother Ethiopia and your friends the English.

I know the desire of your heart. That is the desire of mine and of all the people of Ethiopia. Your fortune is tied up with the fortunes of the whole people of Ethiopia.

People of Ethiopia! As you share during the war the horrors of war together in peace time you will share the fruits of progress and civilize together with the help of Great Britain. We shall achieve great improvements in our Country.

A new order will be established. We shall make agreements with other peoples. Trading, Agriculture, etc., will be allowed to these peoples in our Country. In free and rich Ethiopia we want  
/you to

# SECRET

you to be a civilised people with freedom, equality and unity to all. This depends on the brave children of Ethiopia.

For this end, big or small, child or grown up, with burning hearts, fight for the uprooting of the enemy from our Country.

People of Ethiopia!

Let us show that we are worthy of the help that Great Britain is giving us.

It is only for the re-establishment of our complete freedom for us by a victory over the Italians that the British are helping us.

They have no other expectations from us.

Therefore, wherever you meet British Officers or soldiers you should help them and receive them friendly because they are bringing our freedom.

Live Ethiopia forever in freedom!

Long live Great Britain.

# SECRET

## TRANSLATION - PAMPHLET "D"

4th Issue.

5th November, 1940.

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS OF HIS MAJESTY THE EMPEROR: When H.M. the Emperor heard of the aggression of Italy against Greece he sent a message to King George of Greece, a message in which the Emperor condemned and poured scorn on the aggressor; admired the strong resistance of the Greek army and assured him that with the aid of England, our ally, who watches steadfastly that the law shall not be broken, final victory must necessarily be ours.

When Italy made war on Abyssinia she made it a pretext that she wished to civilise the inhabitants of the country. Now that she has started to make war on Greece - the starting point and very source of civilisation for hundreds of years - what reason is there for her to give? There is only one: by this war she shows that she intends to commit an act of banditry and of despair.

KHARTOUM: The renowned Mr. Anthony Eden, Minister for War of England, who has been inspecting the armies of the Middle East has inspected the armies on the frontiers of Ethiopia and has paid a visit to the Headquarters of the Emperor. Mr. Eden has been a friend of the Emperor for many years. When he was representing England at the League of Nations he defended courageously and sincerely the rights of the Ethiopian people. In many ways he has shown that he is truly and deeply attached to our people. "Banderachin" wishes wholeheartedly good fortune and outstanding successes to His Excellency the Secretary for War, whose consistent object it has been to impose respect for Right Justice and Liberty.

ROYAL AIR FORCE: The outstanding event of this week has been the bombing and partial destruction of a large Italian column consisting of 93 lorries near Chilga. On the first day 31 Oct., our aircraft bombed and machine-gunned the column destroying and damaging many of the lorries and causing the whole force to stop and take cover. Next day our aircraft returned and found that the column had only moved 8 miles. In spite of heavy machine-gun  
/fire from

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fire from the ground they again dived and inflicted terrible casualties. More lorries were destroyed and the whole force disorganised. On the way to this battle two of the English aircraft met and shot down an Italian fighter that tried to intercept them. Asosa also has been bombed and a store shed hit, whilst in Maji barracks and workshops were set on fire and a large explosion caused.

DESERTERS: All the many deserters and prisoners in many sectors of the front tell of the disgraceful conditions in the Italian forces. Underfed, badly clothed, riddled with every form of sickness, and disease, they are forced by the cruelty of their temporary masters into battle against the strong and healthy armies of Ethiopia and against English steel. What chances have these wretched men of survival? Unless they seek our protection at once they have only the choice between a slow death and a quick one, both of them in dishonour.

ATHENS: GREECE: The stubborn resistance to Italian aggression is being steadily maintained. Italy herself admits that everywhere her advance is being held up, and tries to blame the weather and the conditions of the roads for what is in reality her own unpreparedness for the strength of the Greek forces. On land, in the sea and in the air, Greece is holding her own. Italy was counting on an early victory by a mere show of force. Instead, she has strengthened the spirit of her enemy, and of Greece's friend and neighbour Turkey.

True to her promise England has been quick to help. Moltessana, the Italian Air Base nearest to Athens, has already been severely bombed. British troops have arrived on Greek soil.

CENTRE OF ETHIOPIA: As we learn from an authorised source, the national Ethiopian army in Lasta, Sokota and Belesa, with its thirst for independence gets stronger every day. Among the Ethiopians who were crushed under the yoke of the oppressor there are many who are regularly deserting the Italian ranks, to serve their country and their Emperor and to die for their flag if need be. This number increases all the time.

END.

(The above translations are taken from S.A.A.F. Records ).



# SECRET

## APPENDIX "H"

### NOTES ON THE BATTLE OF KEREN

(From Air Commodore Slatter's "Brief Summary of Air Operations in the Sudan" etc. (A.H.B. II J7/2).

#### AIR SUPPORT TO LAND OPERATIONS.

##### (a) Communications.

For the battle of Keren the most complete system of communications was developed. From Corps Headquarters situated in a Wadi between Agordat and Keren R.A.F. Operational Headquarters exercised full operational control by telephone of the Army Co-operation aircraft Advanced Landing Grounds., the Advanced Landing Grounds used by a Medium Bomber Squadron and the Fighter Squadron, and to the Advanced Landing Grounds used by the Close Support aircraft unit. Furthermore the A.O.C. had telephone communications direct from Corps Headquarters in the Field to 254 Wing Headquarters at Port Sudan by using the priority vested in him, for operations (i.e. nearly 400 miles away).

Both Divisions were also on the telephone and the demands for close support came through to R.A.F. Operational Headquarters at Corps Headquarters through this medium.

Wireless Observation Signal Units were used in the forward area to give warning of the presence of enemy aircraft. The warnings were received at the Fighter Advanced Landing Ground and acted upon by Fighters at "Stand by". As there was no breadth in the Army front, however, very few interceptions were made - enemy aircraft escaping to one flank or another in nearly all cases.

W/T communications were also set up at R.A.F. Operational Headquarters and established with Khartoum, Port Sudan and Advanced Landing Grounds.

##### (b) Close Support.

This consisted mostly of bombing of enemy troops holding the heights about Keren, the bombing of enemy concentrations of troops preparing for counter attacks and of enemy gun positions. All these forms of close support gave satisfactory results. The  
/presence of

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presence of aircraft made most of the enemy troops holding forward positions go to ground. This fact did enable our troops to make advances up the precipitous slopes of the Keren hills with little interference. The bombing of enemy troops massing for counter attacks was also highly successful. On one occasion two fresh enemy battalions preparing to counter attack were devastated by bombing.

(c) Reconnaissance.

The two Flights of 237 (A.C.) Squadron supplied the most detailed tactical reconnaissance information to both Divisional Commanders throughout the campaign. The Air Intelligence Liaison Officers of both Divisions were most efficient and helpful and the keenness and initiative of the Rhodesian pilots and air gunners of this Squadron produced the most complete and up-to-date information at all times.

The longest reconnaissances demanded by the Army were made at the early stages of the campaign to ascertain the movements of troops towards Agordat and Kassala from Asmara. As this represented a reconnaissance to a depth of approximately 200 miles it was necessary to employ Blenheims for this task.

STORES DROPPING AT KEREN.

This was done by Vincents and Wellesleys.

The dropping of supplies during the battle of Keren was done in improvised containers. This was necessary owing to the large quantity of ammunition and hard rations that had to be dropped at short notice and the limited area in which these supplies had to fall (accurate parachute dropping in the hilly country of Keren would have been very difficult). This ammunition and rations represented the immediate requirements of a battalion cut off from all supplies, and which was unable to carry normal loads with it owing to the precipitous country. The ammunition was placed in bags, carried in a Vincent and pushed through the observer's panel in the floor of the cockpit. The rations were carried by Wellesleys in the bomb nacelles - packed in bags, boxes and petrol tins. It was surprising how successful this method turned out to be - most of

/the

# SECRET

the ammunition was useable and very little of the rations were damaged.

## ARTILLERY OBSERVATION AND BOMBING AT KEREN.

### (a) Artillery Observation.

Limited spotting for "twenty five pounder" and for 6" Howitzer batteries by Lysander aircraft using R/T was carried out during the battle of Keren, with good results.

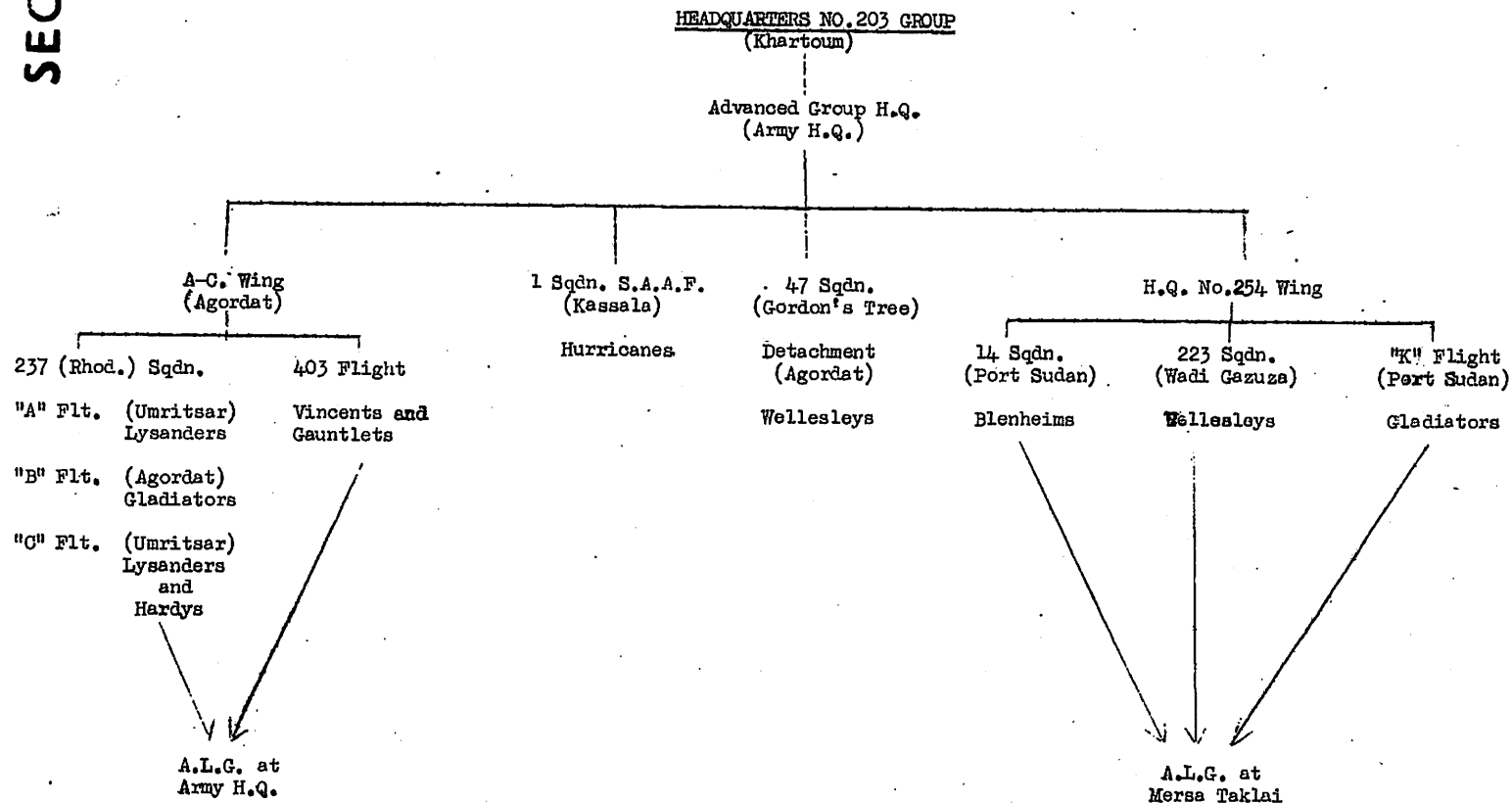
### (b) Bombing at Keren.

Targets consisted of gun positions, troop concentrations in reserve, troop concentrations massing for counter attack (there were eleven enemy counter attacks delivered against Fort Dologorodoc), front line positions. Bombing was carried out by Wellesleys, Blenheims, Hardys, Gauntlets, Vincents and Gladiators. Wellesleys and Blenheims from 4/5,000 ft. in back areas. Vincents Hardys, Gauntlets and Gladiators on front line positions. This latter bombing had to be most accurate as the front line positions held by the enemy were on the hill tops and ridges with our own forces on the slopes below which in plan form (i.e. the bombing plan) gave little margin for error. No single case of "unfortunate" bombing of our front line troops was reported in this battle.

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APPENDIX "J"

NO.203 GROUP, R.A.F.: CHAIN OF COMMAND, MARCH 1941



(The above is taken from No.203 Group Records)

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## APPENDIX "K"

### SUPPLY OF FUEL, BOMBS, AMMUNITION ETC.

The commencement of the East Africa campaign, directed in its initial stages against KISMAYU, found the Air Force with a unit intended not only to deliver supplies of Aviation fuel, oil and explosives to forward areas, but also to undertake the maintenance of stocks at aerodromes, and their issue to Squadrons or detached Flights.

The unit chosen for these duties was the Bomber Brigade Maintenance Company and their attachment had been arranged some months previously, so that with the start of operations on a large scale they had already gained considerable experience.

Whilst the organisation had been entirely satisfactory with only small-scale operations in progress it was appreciated both by the B.B.M.C. themselves and by those responsible at Air Headquarters East Africa that their establishment of vehicles and personnel would not permit them to undertake efficiently any large increase in the sphere of their activities or the loads to be carried. In consequence, approaches were made to Force Headquarters for assistance, but unfortunately the demands on Army resources were such that they were only enabled to offer the temporary attachment of a small section of the Cape Coloured Corps, and subsequently spasmodic help at times when a break-down in supply seemed imminent.

There can be no gainsaying the assertion that throughout the campaign the Air Force barely managed to survive a hand-to-mouth existence, when it was a case of managing with a minimum quantity of fuel and of endeavouring to make one lorry perform the task of two, or even three. For the fact that there was no serious break-down and that only one air operation was delayed a large measure of credit is due to the officers of the B.B.M.C. through the first two vital months of the campaign.

/Much has been

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Much has been said of that side of the picture, but the other factors militated against a constant and adequate supply of those supplies so essential to the successful prosecution of the air effort. These were fourfold:-

Firstly, the appalling conditions of many of the roads traversed by supply columns, and this feature naturally aggravated a condition where vehicles and personnel were over taxed.

Secondly, the rapidity of the advance and its unexpectedness and the advance beyond KISMAYU which was also unexpected.

Thirdly, the exceedingly poor landing facilities at Italian Somaliland Ports and the shortage of shipping from MOMBASA.

Fourthly, insufficiency of W/T communication.

It is hoped to show during the course of this despatch how these difficulties made themselves felt.

GARISSA: As is now known, the plan of attack against KISMAYU provided for two lines of approach, thus main reserves were demanded at GARISSA, HUSSENI and BURA with advance dumps at LIBOI on the one line and at KOLBIO on the other.

That the stocks at BURA and KOLBIO were barely breached by aircraft working with the 12th Division was a mixed blessing, since although they were eventually moved to breach gaps in the continuity of supply at GARISSA and KISMAYU respectively, much transport and stocks themselves were virtually immobilized at a time when every available gallon of fuel, and every vehicle, was required for the advance on AFMADU and KISMAYU. This comment is not made in any spirit of criticism, since it is well appreciated that a more determined resistance from the enemy might well have required the 12th Division to play the part for which they were originally cast.

It is not intended to give more than a broad outline of events as they were affected by the supply position, but it may help to demonstrate the demands made on the resources of the B.B.M.C., if a review is made of the disposition of the section and of the lengths of the Lines of Communication.

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At all times the Company had to divide its attention between the major scene of operations and the front served from NANYUKI. Prior to the launch of the attack on KISMAYU their Headquarters had been at NANYUKI, but it was found necessary to transfer this to GARISSA in contact with Advanced Air Headquarters, and throughout the advance it became the policy to maintain this contact.

The total strength of the Company was:

6 Officers  
144 British Other Ranks  
43 Three-ton vehicles  
55 One-ton vehicles

Of the vehicles and British Other Ranks, the following were confined to work on aerodromes:-

46 British Other Ranks  
1 Three-ton vehicle  
15 One-ton vehicles.

The balance were dispersed:-

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OFFICERS</u>	<u>B.O.R.'s.</u>	<u>1-TON</u>	<u>3-TON</u>
GARISSA	4	61	27	24
NANYUKI	2	13	3	6
MARSABIT	-	20	10	9
KIPKARREN /	-	4	2	1

\*(Engaged in essential duties handling large stocks of explosives arriving from the U.K.)

When it is remembered that the whole fuel, oil and explosives requirements for six Squadrons and communication aircraft were carried, and when the length of the Lines of Communication is borne in mind, in addition to the fact that, in some cases, Flights were detached from Squadrons, the immensity of the transport difficulties may be envisaged.

The Lines of Communication served whilst NANYUKI and THIKA<sup>2</sup> remained the sources of supply were:-

/THIKA - GARISSA -

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1. Situated approx. 28 miles north-west of Nairobi.

THIKA - GARISSA - THIKA	400 miles
THIKA - BURA - THIKA	500 miles
GARISSA - KOLBIO - GARISSA	210 miles
GARISSA - HUSSENI - GARISSA	100 miles
GARISSA - LIBOI - GARISSA	228 miles
GARISSA - AFMADU - GARISSA	404 miles
GARISSA - KISMAYU - GARISSA	542 miles
NANYUKI - NDEGE'S NEST - NANYUKI	460 miles
NANYUKI - MARSABIT - NANYUKI	410 miles
NANYUKI - LOKITAUNG - NANYUKI	1200 miles
MARSABIT - NORTH HOR - MARSABIT	240 miles
MARSABIT - DURHAM - MARSABIT	380 miles
MARSABIT - KUNCHURO - MARSABIT	550 miles

Some assistance was provided by the Army, this taking the form of a section of the Cape Coloured Corps, comprising 34 vehicles attached for duty at NANYUKI, and one comprising 30 vehicles attached to operate from THIKA. In connection with the latter section, a note of condemnation must be struck, since the Officer in charge showed the greatest disinclination to co-operate with the B.B.M.C., or to accept orders from them. A crisis which was only averted by the withdrawal of stocks from BURA can be laid entirely at the feet of this Officer, who, contrary to instructions given to him at THIKA by a senior officer kept 12 vehicles there under load for four days rather than split his convoy and so despatch a section with fuel urgently needed at GARISSA. Had it not been possible to rush stocks through from BURA, the main raid on AFMDU, designed to break the outer defences, could not have taken place according to plan, and the progress of the entire campaign may have been affected.

The following further assistance was provided by Army Transport Companies:-



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1 trip of 100 vehicles THIKA - GARISSA  
1 trip of 50 vehicles THIKA - GARISSA  
1 trip of 25 vehicles GARISSA - AMADU  
1 trip of 50 vehicles GARISSA - KISMAYU  
1 trip of 15 vehicles GARISSA - KISMAYU

KISMAYU: It had been stated by Advanced Force Headquarters that the capture and opening of the Port of Kismayu would immediately relieve the pressure on transport and release vehicles to assist in the supply of Air Force requirements. Such, however, was very far from the actual state of affairs. The port facilities proved themselves to be extremely limited and shipping opportunities quite inadequate. One pier only (over which it was essential that aviation fuel and explosives should be landed) was available. It must be admitted that in an endeavour to accelerate deliveries, every form of sea-going vessel was used, to wit, ocean-going ships, coasters, lighters and dhows, but with the vast amount and variety of supplies required by the Forces as a whole, the shipping did not suffice.

In the early stages, labour was short, the road of approach to the pier difficult for the manipulation of the traffic traversing it, and advance information as to cargoes lacking. Further problems were presented by the stowage of cargoes at MOMBASA, where no thought appeared to have been given to the probable priority of discharge that would be required. Equipment which was required to be off loaded first had been loaded first and could only be discharged last.

An example of the absence of advice and the problem of stowage was found at one stage, when the risk of dislocation appeared certain. Daily inquiries were made and it was then disclosed that a ship carrying aviation stocks had been lying in harbour for four days, awaiting discharge. Priority was then accorded to Air Force requirements and off-loading commenced. Stowage, however, was such that access to the aviation stocks was

/only possible

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only possible by working down through other cargoes. Finally, the state arrived where nothing further could be moved without risk to life for fear that the sides of the stacks would collapse, and so once more the flow of supplies for Air Force purposes was arrested.

To make good as far as possible the short-fall by sea, no alternative offered than to draw on the B.B.M.C. transport which had left at GARISSA to supply HUSSEINI. In order further to assist, the Army were approached to uplift stocks from KOLBIO and in these ways it was just possible to maintain supplies.

The assistance provided by the Army consisted of 13 vehicles sent to withdraw stocks from KOLBIO.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty at this stage was presented in maintaining adequate stocks for Valentia type aircraft then being used to evacuate wounded from JELIB. These aircraft used large quantities of 77 Octane and it was difficult to maintain stocks.

MERCA: Here landing facilities were very little better than they had been at KISMAHU. The same lack of advice obtained and supplies were still inadequate.

With the advance still continuing it became necessary to establish the majority of B.B.M.C.'s available transport at MOGADISHU, but one section remained at MERCA to supply 11 Squadron on Vittorio aerodrome, and to handle stocks on landing.

MOGADISHU: Although MOGADISHU was declared an open town soon after the approach of the British Forces, the port itself was not available to receive shipping for approximately 10-14 days afterwards. Thus the system of transferring stocks from MERCA remained in force. Eventually, with the opening of MOGADISHU part cargoes were transferred from MERCA, as they had been from KISMAHU to MERCA itself. The result of this was that bombs were, in some cases, landed at one port and their components at another. Further, certain consignments of bombs and special type ammunition were mislaid temporarily, a fact which aggravated appreciably the difficulties of supply.

/From MOGADISHU,

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From MOGADISHU, the advance continued at a very rapid rate and it became abundantly clear that the B.B.M.C. could not hope to deliver stocks over the Lines of Communication which were constantly increasing. A stage was reached where a number of landing grounds on a return Line of over 1,100 miles had to be served.

From MOGADISHU, for some 230 miles, the road was asphalt surfaced, but thereafter conditions became extremely arduous and lorries carrying supplies to DAGAHBUR could not be expected to return to MOGADISHU in less than 12-14 days. Consequently, the A.Q.M.G. was once again approached for assistance, and despite the acute transport shortage which prevailed, he agreed to attach the 74th R.M.T. Company to the B.B.M.C.

An appreciation must be recorded here of the co-operation offered by this Company; although the driving personnel comprised African natives, convoys reached their destinations in good time and the Unit, as a whole, proved of very real assistance to the B.B.M.C. Credit is due to the Commanding Officer of the 74th R.M.T. Company for the very willing manner in which he worked in with the existing organisation.

With the extended Lines of Communication and the very bad state of the roads, it appeared that staging would be necessary, and the B.B.M.C. dispersed their sections at BELET UEN, GORRAHEI, and DAGAHBUR, leaving the 74th R.M.T. Company to deliver from MOGADISHU to BELET UEN.

A side-light on the whole campaign, and one which shows how essential an adequate supply of fuel was to the advance, is reflected in the situation which occurred when the attack on BELET UEN was to take place. Instructions had been received from Force Headquarters necessitating refuelling aircraft at dawn on a certain day. This request was made on the estimate that BELET UEN would have fallen by the previous evening. In point of fact, it did not do so, but this did not deter the drivers on the B.B.M.C., whose instructions were at all costs to deliver their load by dawn. Consequently, the Commander of the attacking /troops was

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troops was approached, and the small transport section delivered their load accompanied by four armoured cars, which held the aerodrome until aircraft arrived to refuel, and ground troops had secured the surrounding district.

Earlier in this despatch, mention has been made of the inadequacy of W/T communication. Advice as to the movement of fuel, the resultant stocks at various places were dependent on signals. To enlarge on this statement it must be recorded that where Air Force W/T Stations existed, communication was excellent, but the fact remains that insufficient equipment and operators were available at other points with which communication was essential. It might be argued that Army Communications were available, but nevertheless these proved themselves to be most unreliable, and signals through Army channels were subject to inordinate delays.

How necessary W/T communication is to the supply organisation may be gauged from the fact that a very successful air attack on DIREDAVA could not be launched until confirmation could be obtained that fuel and ammunition supplies had reached DAGAHBUR. No W/T was available to transmit advice on this matter, and therefore the only course open was to despatch a long-range aircraft to obtain the information. This is the one instance in which operations were somewhat delayed because of the possible absence of stocks, and such delay can be attributed to transport difficulties and the absence of W/T communications. Operations were not affected by this delay.

JLJJIGA: With the recapture of BERBERA and the almost immediate flow of supplies through that port, the problem of maintaining stocks at forward landing grounds showed the first signs of improvement. Some days naturally elapsed before the full effect of the improvement could be felt, but the organisation for distribution from then on definitely relieved the pressure on the B.B.M.C.

/Discussions were

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Discussions were held with Force Headquarters, and it was agreed that Army vehicles would undertake the transport of supplies from BERBERA to JIJJIGA. From thereon to DIREDAWA, MIESSO, and in turn ADDIS ABABA, the B.B.M.C. undertook the transport until the railway could be utilised.

DIREDAWA: The final stage was now reached. With the opening of railway facilities between DIREDAWA and AWASH, and again from AWASH to ADDIS ABABA, Army convoys previously dropping their loads at Jijjiga continued through to Diredawa. This left the B.B.M.C. free to move their transport further north, eventually at ADDIS ABABA: the final disposal of their Company being a detachment at AWASH to supervise stocks by road across the river, two sections at MOJJO to maintain supplies at ALGATO, SHASHAMANA and DALLE, and one section at ADDIS ABABA to augment the MOJJO sections if necessary, to move supplies from railhead to ADDIS ABABA aerodrome, and to carry stocks to any aerodrome which may be served from ADDIS ABABA itself.

NANYUKI: Nothing has been said in detail of the supply position on the front served from NANYUKI (i.e. the NEGHELLI, YAVELLO, LOKITAUNG front). No serious breakdown occurred there, despite most arduous conditions. In some cases, the transport of stocks was over mere tracks, and in later stages, during the rainy season, convoys only got through after days of arduous travel, and at points with the assistance of tractors to remove otherwise hopelessly bogged vehicles.

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(Too much praise cannot be accorded to those who have assisted so materially in prodiving the life-blood of the Air Force in the East African campaign).

(The above is transcribed from Appendix "H" to A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Air Ops. I.E.A. 10 Feb. - 5 April 1941. A.H.B. II J7/1).

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APPENDIX "L"

## DISPOSITIONS OF THE S.A.A.F. UNITS AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF OPERATIONS AGAINST ITALIAN SOMALILAND

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>
Advanced Air Headquarters. H.Q. and Detachment No.2 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F. Communication, Transport and Ambulance Aircraft.	Garissa East
H.Q. No.2 Wing. H.Q. and all Flights No.12 (B) Squadron S.A.A.F. H.Q. and Detachment No.3 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F. Detachment No.2 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Garissa West
"C" Flight No.41 (A.C.) Squadron S.A.A.F. (under 12 (A) Div.) Detachment No.2 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Ndege's Nest
"B" Flight No.41 (A.C.) Squadron S.A.A.F. (under 11 (A) Div.) Detachment No.3 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Galmogalla.
Detachment No.3 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F. H.Q. and "A" Flight No.41 (A.C.) Squadron S.A.A.F. (under 12 (A) Div.)	Ali Gabe <sup>1</sup>
H.Q. and all Flights No.11 (B) Squadron S.A.A.F. Detachment No.2 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Husseini <sup>2</sup>
"A" Flight No.40 (A.C.) Squadron S.A.A.F. (under 1 (S.A.) Div.)	Lokitaung
H.Q. and "B" and "C" Flights No.40 (A.C.) Squadron S.A.A.F. (under 1 (S.A.) Div.) Detachment No.2 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F.	Marsabit
H.Q. No.60 (S) Squadron S.A.A.F. Glen Martin Flight	Nairobi
Detachment No.3 (F) Squadron S.A.A.F. H.Q. and Detachment No.34 (S) Flight S.A.A.F.	Mombasa
Detachment No.34 (S) Flight S.A.A.F.	Dar-es-Salaam

1. Situated approx. 5 miles south of Liboi.

2. Situated approx. 27 miles north of Garissa.

(The above is compiled from A.C. Sowrey's "Report on Air Ops. I.E.A.  
10 Feb. - 5 April 1941"; A.H.B. II J7/1 and Draft Despatch, Feb -  
May 1941, File M.151/1 and S.A.A.F. Records.)

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APPENDIX "A"

## FUEL CONSUMPTION OF THE S.A.A.F. AIRCRAFT<sup>1</sup>

	<u>Tank Capacity</u>	<u>Average Consumption per hour</u>	<u>Average Endurance or Range</u>
<u>Hurricane</u>	94 gals.	35 gals.	3 hours at the most economical speed and allowing $\frac{1}{2}$ hour for fighting
<u>Fury</u>	50 gals.	35 gals.	Slightly under $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours
<u>Hartbee</u> 1 main tank of 65 gals. 2 gravity tanks of 19 gals. each = 38 gals.)	103 gals.	20 to 25 gals.	3 to $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours
<u>Fairey Battle</u> Some were and others were	257 gals. 290 gals.	40 to 50 gals.	1,000 miles
<u>JU.86</u> 2 tanks of 170 gals. = 340 gals. 1 extra tank of 50 gals.)	390 gals.	70 gals.	5 hours
<u>Glen Martin</u> 2 tanks of 210 gals.) = 420 gals.) 1 tank of 218 gals.)	638 gals.	75 to 80 gals.	$6\frac{1}{2}$ hours (at a speed of 220 m.p.h.)
<u>Communication and Transport Aircraft</u>	The statistics vary according to the type of aircraft (ranging from Valentias to Rapides and other small types).		

1. Compiled from A.C. Sowrey's Draft  
Despatch Feb. - May '41. (File M.151/1).

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## APPENDIX "N"

### GENERAL NOTE ON THE CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF LANDING GROUNDS IN EAST AFRICA, ITALIAN SOMALILAND AND ABYSSINIA

(From Report by Captain Mullins to  
the C.R.E.)

A short note on the Engineering aspect of the construction and maintenance of landing grounds in British East Africa, Somaliland and Abyssinia would not be out of place.

Geologically, Kenya, Somaliland and Abyssinia can be divided into three sections:-

1. The Highlands of Kenya bounded by KITALE, MARSABIT, KITUI and MAGADI, which is mainly volcanic in erection and ranges in height from 4,000 to 8,000 feet.

Where a flat piece of country suitable for a landing ground is found in this area, it is generally grass covered but based on black cotton soil. In dry weather the landing ground is very good but in wet weather becomes extremely soft and unsuitable. The only method of constructing permanent landing grounds is to lay down hard surfact runways as was done at NAIROBI and NANYUKI. RUMURUTI<sup>1</sup>, which has a large sand content in the earth, is a notable exception and is virtually all weather.

2. The Somaliland Low Country bounded roughly by MARSABIT, GARISSA, LAMU, ITALA-GORRAHEI.

This area, as a very general rule, is not higher than 1,500 feet above sea level and consists of a sea deposit clay with either black soil or red earth as an overlay. It is heavily bush covered, usually by light scrub and bush 6 inches in diameter. Occasionally large trees up to 18 inches in diameter are also encountered.

For dry weather landing grounds any flat area may be selected and cleared. Ant heaps which grow to a large size present the only difficulty. When no mechanical plant was available, experience showed that the best method of getting rid of these was to saw them off, using a thick steel cable tied between two lorries. The lorries were tied back to back with approximately 50 feet of cable between them. The cable was then hooked round the

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1. Situated approx. 125 miles north of Nairobi.



ant heap and then the lorries placed at right angles to each other. One lorry was then driven forward towing the other lorry with its brakes on. The second lorry then tows the first lorry. In this method the ant heap was very quickly disposed of and could thereafter be broken up and carted away.

The ant hills were seldom large enough to cause any trouble as the ants build flat cavities underground, usually not more than 3 inches deep - unlike South Africa and Rhodesia.

In this area, if hard red soil is encountered, an all-weather landing ground is easily constructed, which is soft in dry weather but hardens up well during rain, the only difficulty being that after the first rain the holes caused by the removal of tree stumps subside and have to be filled in.

Where black cotton soil is encountered, all weather landing grounds cannot be made without hard surfacing. An example is AFMADU.

An example of landing ground built on red soil is HUSSEINI, where the surface improved with each shower that fell on it. Where ant heaps were removed, as at HUSSEINI, it was found that new ant heaps 12 inches high were re-built within 24 hours, and practice showed the most effective way to deal with these (as digging out was undesirable) was to pour 87 Octane fuel down the main hole and then close up all ventilation holes.

### 3. The Abyssinian Highlands which comprise virtually the whole of Abyssinia.

The landing grounds are difficult to find in this area owing to the softness of the ground and the hilly country. Isolated areas are good and these have natural all weather landing grounds. For example JIJIIGA, CHIDELE and the area near LAKE ALGATO. The rest of the country consists of heavy turf even where it is level, and it is almost impossible to find all weather landing grounds at ADDIS ABABA. The tarmac was over a foundation of 18 inches of hand packed rock and even in this case there had been a subsidence in several places.

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## 4. GENERAL NOTE.

During the campaign the provision of landing grounds was well within the power of a Unit consisting of three Europeans and 30 Africans for the construction and maintenance of aerodromes in enemy territory. It is advised that Units should not be larger than this in order to facilitate mobility; bigger convoys are slow in moving. Where more permanent work is required appeals could always be made to road gangs or Army Units.

With regard to tools, the most suitable are mattocks and shovels with large quantities of light wire rope: many spare handles for the tools must be carried.

## 5. History of the Aerodrome Maintenance Unit.

In order to deal with the maintenance and construction of landing grounds during the campaign it is:-

- (a) Necessary to explain the position at the outbreak of war in September, 1939. At this time in Kenya some of the main aerodromes were under R.A.F. control, and others were constructed and maintained by the Civil Government. This continued until June, 1940, when a small Unit consisting of Sgt. Scott and nine Africans, with one lorry, was put in charge of Aerodrome maintenance and construction in the forward areas of the Northern Frontier District.
- (b) In September 1940 it was realised that further construction and maintenance would be necessary and the Aerodrome Maintenance Unit was constructed (under the D.C.E., L. of C.). The Unit consisted of one Officer, nine British N.C.O's and 70 E.A.M.L.S. Africans. It was divided into four sub-units, each of which had a section of landing grounds under its care.
- (c) When the advance started at the end of January 1941, there were then four sub-units each consisting of two British N.C.O's and 20 Africans, with one 3-ton truck and one 1-ton truck each. Captain Mullins, and under him Sgt/Major Scott, was in charge of all these Units and carried out the /inspection and

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inspection and supervised construction of landing grounds.

Captain Mullins also did all the necessary liaison work between the Air Forces and the Engineers.

- (d) When the advance started, two of these sections were at ALI GABE and had just constructed ALI GABE and GAIMA GALLA. These two sections under Sgt/Major Scott, went forward with the advance, leaving Abyssinia to be dealt with by the other two Units.

ALI GABE (dimensions 900 yards x 150 yards) had been constructed by one section with the help of two machines of the 26th Road Coy, and aircraft were placed there at the beginning of February, as soon as it was ready. As is well known, it was from this landing ground that a Hurricane Fighter operated within two days of being located there and in all accounted for one C.R.42 and three Capronis in the air and one Caproni on the ground.

- (e) As the Army advanced from LEBOI the general policy was that immediate support from the air would be given as soon as a suitable landing ground could be constructed. This necessitated reconnaissance work being done by a senior member of the Unit who, of necessity, had to be right up with the advanced troops, and Captain Mullins usually carried out these reconnaissances. As soon as a suitable site was located the rest of the unit was brought up.

- (f) At BELLES GUGANI it was necessary to construct a landing ground for A.C. aircraft and fighters primary to the attack on AEMADU. One was constructed in record time (dimensions 1,000 x 60 yards). The country consisted of thick bush and ant heaps were plentiful.

On 6 February, instructions were issued that a landing ground suitable for Hurricane fighters was necessary by the evening of the 8th. The most suitable site was selected and the unit immediately started clearing the bush with the aid of one Platoon of the K.A.R. As no machinery was  
/available the

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available the method of clearing was to chop the small bush by hand, but the larger trees were loosened by cutting their roots or by the use of explosives. A 3-ton truck was then hitched on to the tree and towing in jerky fashion proceeded until the tree came out.

By the morning of the 7th it became clear that only 700 yards would be ready by the evening of the 8th, unless mechanical plant was used. A Bulldozer and Autopatrol were borrowed from the 26th Road Coy. and these arrived on the morning of the 8th. Work was started at 06.00 hours and by 09.00 hours the remaining portion of the bush and three large ant heaps over an area 1,000 yards x 60 yards was cleared. The surface was still rough and uneven. The section tried to level it by hand and by towing a large tree up and down. The Autopatrol had broken down and a detail was sent back to LEBOI for spare parts. He returned at 21.00 hours and the levelling of the landing ground proceeded. A car was driven next to the Autopatrol with one headlight turned sideways to indicate to the driver where his blade was, and by 02.00 hours on the 9th the whole surface had been graded. At 06.30 hours the first Hartbees arrived and by 12.00 hours there were 8 Hartbees and three Hurricanes on the landing ground. The only difficulty which then had to be dealt with was the dust question. When any aircraft took off, vast clouds of dust were sent up and visibility for a few minutes was almost nil.

- (g) From BELES GUGANI the section went forward with the Infantry to AFMADU, which was the first Italian landing ground to be captured. Mines were expected on the landing ground, or other devices to render it unserviceable, but in no instance throughout the campaign were mines found on any landing grounds and, in fact, until DIERAWA was reached, no attempt had been made by the enemy to render any of its landing grounds unserviceable.

/AFMADU

SECRET

AFMADU landing ground itself consisted of black cotton soil and was slightly rutted, but after the holes and ruts had been filled in and scrub cut, aircraft used the landing ground for some time, although great care had to be shown. Thorns on the landing ground presented a problem which could not be overcome, and punctured tyres were frequent.

- (h) From AFMADU the section proceeded to KISMAYU. The existing runways at GOBWEN, which was the main Italian aerodrome, were extended and improved. They consisted of bad black cotton soil but fortunately during operations there dry weather prevailed.

GOBWEN Satellite was used by aircraft of the O.T.U. but was far from suitable, and it was felt unwise to base any other aircraft there.

- (j) Once the JUBA RIVER had been crossed, MARGHERITA landing ground was improved and extended and JELIB also was cleared.

- (k) As the advance proceeded towards BRAVA, investigations were carried out and as the result of reconnaissance it was decided that the landing ground at BRAVA, used by the Italians, was unsuitable. It was on the beach and was only 500 yards square. A new site was chosen in the light bush at MODUN. The site was far from good, but necessity required its use and it was in fact used for a few days by Hartbees and Hurricanes.

- (l) After BRAVA, the next landing ground used was VITTORIO d'AFRICA. This needed very little work; was a good landing ground, not all weather and very dusty. It was used by a Bomber Squadron for some time.

- (m) MOGADISHU was entered on 25 February and here both the aerodrome buildings and hangars were excellent. The aerodrome itself was one of the roughest and the surface the worst that our aircraft had to operate on /during the

# SECRET

during the entire campaign. The soil consisted of white sand with scrubby grass. No attempt was made to level the surface, although the A.O.C. suggested that a heavy rail could be dragged across it in order to level the sand.

Captain Mullins and his staff felt that nothing could be done to improve the surface, as he contended it could only be levelled by removal of the grass, and if this was done the sand would have been blown away by the wind.

- (n) From MOGADISHU the advance party of the landing ground section went forward with the Armoured Cars to BELET UEN to test the landing ground. They accompanied the party carrying fuel for the Hurricanes. The advance had been delayed by four days at MOGADISHU.

BELET UEN was required urgently in an attempt to make contact with the retreating enemy.

On the way to BELET UEN, BELEB, MAHADDEI AND BULO BERTI were inspected. These landing grounds were suitable for light aircraft, but the soil was very bad.

- (o) After BELET UEN, GORRAHEI was the next large landing ground used. The surface was bad in wet weather, which was fortunately not encountered. In dry weather the surface, which is approximately 2 miles square, is excellent. From GORRAHEI heavy bombers operated for some time.

- (p) DAGAHBUR was the next large landing ground used both by fighters and bombers. Between GORRAHEI and DAGAHBUR the nature of the country changed abruptly. DAGAHBUR was the first all weather landing ground encountered. It was small and had to be extended to enable the Hurricanes to operate with safety. Whilst based at DAGAHBUR the Hurricanes operated against DIREDAWA with such marked success, and it was here too that the hand of providence showed itself on our side.

Lieut. Dudley, while taking off, was shot down by 2 C.R.42s. At the crucial moment Captain Theron and /lieut. Venter,

Venter, returning from a patrol, saw the incident and accounted for the two enemy fighters.

(q) From DAGAHBUR the next move was made to JIJJIGA. The existing landing ground was soft but could be used safely by all types of aircraft in most conditions. Its obvious position, however, rendered it unwise for the location of operational Squadrons. Satellites were, therefore, selected on the plains, and on these Fighters, the Communication Squadron and the two Bomber Squadrons were based. Five satellites were built in all, the work entailed being very little and was completed within five days.

(r) Once the advance passed beyond the MARDIA PASS attempts were made to locate a suitable landing ground near HARRAR, but despite careful investigation and the enlistment of the aid of the Infantry, nothing suitable could be found until 15 miles beyond HARRAR, near the approach to the DIREDAWA PASS. Here an open ground patch was selected and used for a few days, but rain intervened and the landing ground became unsuitable, not so much as the direct result of the rain on the surface as the seepage of water from the surrounding hills. No operational Squadron was ever based on this landing ground, as this was not necessary owing to the speed of the advance.

(s) At DIREDAWA a landing ground, largely used by the enemy, had its surface furrowed in lines very widely spaced in an attempt by the enemy to render it unservicable. Two hours work with 20 men sufficed to render a runway safe for aircraft. It seems that unless at least 30% of the entire area of a landing ground is completely ploughed up, very little work is required to repair damage by furrowing.

DIREDAWA landing ground itself in wet weather was soft, but not unsafe except for aircraft heavily bombed or laden, and this because at certain times when taking off into wind, the runway was uphill and the take off was over the town. Communication aircraft heavily laden found difficulty in using this landing ground.

/(t) Owing

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(t) Owing to the above difficulty, CHINELE, a satellite of DIEREDAWA, was immediately inspected and it was found that a Company of Nigerians had, of their own accord, already repaired the damage done by the enemy. They had done the work well and aircraft were able to use this landing ground instead of the main landing ground: it was in fact all weather and infinitely better than the main.

(u) The Army expected the enemy to hold them up at the AWASH for some time. MIESSO and ARBA landing grounds were considered unsuitable for operational work, as they were too close to the enemy and their exact location was known. Alternative landing grounds were looked for. Eventually a site was selected some six miles back from AWASH, but as it would have taken not less than three days to prepare, and the expected hold-up at the AWASH did not materialise, this was abandoned.

MIESSO was then used for a few days as the enemy had not successfully resisted us at the AWASH. The landing ground at the AWASH was also used for one operation by Hurricanes and for one day by the Hartbees. Its dimensions are 1,500 x 100 yards and although it dries very quickly after rain, it was not considered sufficiently healthy to base a Squadron there.

(v) ADDIS ABABA was entered on 5 April. The tarmac had only a few bomb holes in it and the main work consisted of the clearing of burnt out enemy aircraft from the runways, and the filling-in of the new bomb holes. Despite its altitude, all aircraft, including the heavy bombers, used the landing ground with safety. The heavy bombers at all times took off down hill and landed on the non-macadamised surface parallel to the tarmac runway. This enabled landing up-hill and it was also far easier on the tyres of the aircraft: experience showed that at the moment of impact on landing, tyres were badly damaged by the tarmac.

(w) ADAMA and



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(w) ADAMA and MOJJO had been looked at on the way to ADDIS, but were considered unsuitable at that stage. Eventually the need to have a forward base for operations for a Bomber Squadron was so great that the main and satellite landing grounds at MOJJO were repaired, (the enemy had furrowed these) and bombers and fighters were then located there.

(x) After ADDIS had been taken, the Army advanced towards DESSIE and a landing ground was very badly needed for the A.C. aircraft in order to support them, especially in their attack against DESSIE. Unfortunately no suitable landing ground was located nor could one be built. Geological and weather conditions precluded this and no suitable landing ground was located, and none was used until DESSIE had been taken.

KOMBOLCHA was then used. This landing ground, despite the fact that it is tarmac, gave all save the most experienced pilots great difficulty. There is a decided slope on the runway and the runway runs across the prevailing wind.

(y) In addition to the advance northwards towards DESSIE, the Army were also contemplating an advance southwestwards towards JIMMA, and south eastwards towards SHASHAMANA. A landing ground at WALCHITTI was located but not used as it was considered unsuitable.

Towards the South, ALGATO was located and extensively used. This proved to be a good operational landing ground and was extensively used in the later stages of the campaign.

(z) Once ADDIS had been taken the need for landing grounds for communication aircraft on the run between NAIROBI and DIREDAWA became great and the Aerodrome Unit was recalled in order to attend to the maintenance of landing grounds which these aircraft would use. The route followed was - NAIROBI, NEDEGE'S REST, LUGH FERRANDI, GORRAHEI, JIJIGA, DIREDAWA Emergency Landing Ground. At GORRAHEI a satellite landing ground had been built 10 miles east of the main landing ground, and it was found that this landing ground, unless rain was so plentiful as to flood it, was all weather.

/The main

# SECRET

The main aerodrome, however, continued to be used as well as the satellite.

In conclusion it should be pointed out that in addition to the construction and maintenance and inspection of landing grounds carried out by Captain Mullins and his staff, it was found advisable in all cases to inspect landing grounds before landing the bombers or fighters there, and this inspection was normally carried out by Colonel Preller, the Senior Air Staff Officer, or a member of the Operational Staff. In order to do this, aircraft of the Communication Squadron were placed at their disposal when occasion demanded.

The great work done by the Aerodrome Maintenance Unit during adverse conditions assisted air operations very materially.

(The above is transcribed from Appendix "E" to A.C. Sowrey's Report on Air Ops. I.E.A. 10 Feb. - 5 April 1941: A.H.B. II J7/1).

APPENDIX "O"

NOTE ON THE SIGNALS SECTION, ADVANCED AIR H.Q., EAST AFRICA, DURING THE OCCUPATION OF ITALIAN SOMALILAND AND ABYSSINIA

1. It was realised from the beginning that for an Advanced Headquarters to operate at all successfully, it would need a considerable amount of W/T equipment and personnel to maintain continuous communication.

Three Mobile Ground Stations, each fitted with one Dainty M.150, were earmarked for this purpose but unfortunately, owing to the lack of power supply, these sets were never used with the Advanced Headquarters. Urgent requests were sent to the Union early in December to have generating sets here by the end of December. These plants had not yet arrived by the middle of January and a further request was sent to despatch the plants by air. The union agreed and we heaved a sigh of relief but unfortunately the Union later found it impossible to move the plants by air. It then became clear that the three Mobile Ground Stations were virtually useless, and some other action had to be taken to provide the Advanced Headquarters with communications.

2. There were two courses open to us:-

- (1) (a) It was assumed that the Advanced H.Q. would always be within Despatch Rider distance from the Wing H.Q. and that if their staff and equipment were augmented, they would be able to do all the advanced H.Q. Communications.
- (b) No.41 Squadron, which would be working with No.11 and 12 Divisions, was badly in need of operators, and operators originally intended for the Advanced H.Q. could be posted to them.
- (c) Provide two of No.3 Squadron's Flights, moving up in close support of the Army, with G.P. Sets mounted on 1-ton Trucks.

- (2) Utilise the 2 G.P. Sets intended for, and badly needed by No.3 Squadron and post no operators to No.41 Squadron.

The first course was decided upon.

3. GARISSA - 9.2.41. - 16.2.41. Distance from Nairobi 200 miles.

Advanced Air Headquarters was established at GARISSA. 2 Mobile Ground Stations were attached to No.2 Wing (No.2 Wing had power) plus two mechanics and four operators.

/2 G.P. Sets

2 G.P. Sets were given to No.3 Squadron and four experienced operators were posted from Air H.Q. E.A. to No.41 Squadron.

Communications:

No.2 Wing maintained the following communications:-

7120 Continuous pt. to pt.

5910 Continuous pt. to pt.

x 6525 Aircraft Watch

5600 Pt. to pt. Naval Co-operating Force and MOMBASA

(As required when Army set failed).

Theoretically, the above arrangements should have worked well but Wing Headquarters were approximately 20 miles away on a very bad road and the line communication provided by the Army was not very reliable, and it soon became clear that the best course had been followed. Communication while not being good was not bad and urgent messages were flown over in cases where a Despatch Rider would have been too slow.

However, at this stage, nothing could be done as power was not yet available and the G.P. Sets, at this stage, could not be withdrawn from No.3 Squadron.

x Note 1. The Glen Martin was frequently sent out to do long strategical reconnaissance flights, of up to six hours duration. Two way communication from the H.Q. controlling the operation, to the aircraft doing the special, was shown to be of utmost importance, in order that information obtained by the aircraft could be quickly acted upon. A Mobile Ground Station at an Advanced Headquarters to fulfil this function, therefore, was very necessary. A case in point:-

The Battle aircraft which reported that merchant ships were leaving KISMAYU harbour, only reported this on it's return. This information was of extreme importance to the Navy and an immediate report by W/T would have simplified the Navy's task of capturing the merchant vessels.

/4. KISMAYU:

# SECRET

4. KISMAYU: - 17.2.41. - 26.2.41.  
Distance from NAIROBI - 368 miles.

Advanced Air Headquarters moved to KISMAYU, while No.2 Wing remained at GARISSA. In order to provide communication, the following action had to be taken.

One G.P. Set was taken from No.2 Wing (2 Wing when on the move, had used this set as their Advanced W/T Station and taking it away adversely affected their communications during their subsequent move to KISMAYU).

A further G.P. Set was withdrawn from No.3 Squadron (See notes on No.3 Squadron communications).

## Communications:

Good communications were maintained on 7120 and 5910 Kcs. with all Units in EAST AFRICA and AIR H.Q. E.A., Nairobi. Daily average of Signal Groups - 4,000.

## Note 2. General:

Only one 28 ft. mast was available at that time and both aerials were strung on to the same mast. In spite of this, the interference between the two sets was very slight.

Distilled water was made by using a brazing lamp for heating a normally electrically operated plant, the elements having been first removed.

5. MOGADISHU: 27.2.41. - 2.3.41.  
Distance from NAIROBI 504 miles.

Section arrived MOGADISHU.

Equipment: Three aircraft W/T sets T.1083-R.1082 (One of these sets had previously been used by Sgt. Rosen aboard H.M. Ships for communication with our aircraft during the Naval bombardment of KISMAYU and BRAVA).

Communications: Communication was carried out on two frequencies, 7120 and 5910 Kc's. with all Air Force Units in East Africa and AIR H.Q. E.A., NAIROBI, but was not continuous due to:

/(a) Bad

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- (a) Bad fading periods<sup>2</sup>, (b) W/T-sets insufficiently powered.
- (c) Atmospheric conditions.

■ Bad fading was experienced at periods by all units in East Africa.

At one period, the Army, Air Force and commercial W/T Stations in NAIROBI could receive no signals at all. Daily average of signal groups - 3500.

6. MOGADISHU: 12.3.41. - 21.3.41.  
Distance from Nairobi, 584 miles.

Section re-opened MOGADISHU

Equipment: Two aircraft W/T sets T.1083-R.1082 ■  
One T.1090 - R.1084

One set T.1083 - R.1082 returned to No.218 A.M.E.S.

Communications: It was realised that as the Headquarters continued to advance, W/T Communication with base, with small-powered W/T sets would be unsatisfactory. A permanent, remotely controlled W/T Station was therefore erected at MOGADISHU to act as a W/T link between Advanced Air H.Q. and Air H.Q., E.A.

The Station consisted of:-

- Ø (a) One M.150 transmitter (returned from No.2 Wing H.Q.)  
working on 10005 Kc's.
- (b) One locally constructed transmitter (60 watts input)  
working on 7120 Kc's.
- (c) Typex machine.

Note 3.

- Ø This transmitter had to be completely overhauled. Its construction and suspension is definitely unsuitable for travel over bad roads.

- (d) Enemy mast gear.

This W/T Station took over all W/T communication for No.41 Squadron H.Q. while they were at MOGADISHU; communications for No.2 Wing H.Q. during the period the Wing H.Q. was on the move, and Army communications between Adv. Force H.Q. and Rear Force H.Q.

Daily average of signal groups - 4000.

/7. GABREDARRE:

# SECRET

7. GABREDARRE: 21.3.41. - 23.3.41.  
Distance from NAIROBI 770 miles.

Section arrived at GABREDARRE.

Equipment: Two aircraft sets T.1083 - R.1082

One T.1090 - R.1084

Two M.15's (15 watts)

Communications: Communication was opened on 10005 K's. and 5910 Kc's with Air Force Units in East Africa and Air H.Q. E.A., at NAIROBI, and was satisfactory. Bad fading was experienced on 5910 Kc's. during the day.

It was found necessary to have direct communication with Air H.Q. ADEN. This was arranged and ADEN joined the 10005 Kc's. Except during fading periods there was not one minute's pause on the 10005 Kc's channel and ordinary traffic was delayed 24 hours. This was due to the large number of lengthy priority signals transmitted for the Army, via ADEN, to Army Authorities at ADEN and BERBERA and to the fact that Army signals bear much higher degrees of priority than our own signals, which are therefore delayed.

The Station had only three W/T Operators for two channels. It was, therefore, necessary for the W.E.M's and the C.S.O. to keep watches. The whole section suffered from lack of sleep (one W/T operator had no sleep for 42 hours).

Two accumulator charging sets had to be kept running continuously.

Distilled water had to be made by using a brazing lamp as no electric power was available for the distilling plant.

The Typex machine was installed and efficiently maintained. Power was obtained from a 1 k.w. Lister paraffin-electric plant. Paraffin for this plant could not be obtained except by air from NAIROBI.

The T.1090 transmitter gave very poor results and was not used as man hours could not be spared for overhaul.

One M.15 trans-receiver was loaned to Force H.Q. as one of their channels of communication had broken down. Daily average signal groups - 4500.

8. JIJJIGA. 26.3.41. - 1.4.41.  
Distance from NAIROBI 900 miles.

Section arrived JIJJIGA.

Equipment: Two aircraft W/T sets T.1083 - R.1082

One T.1090 - R.1084

One M.15.

Communications: Communication was established on 10005 Kc's with Air Force Units in East Africa, (except those at JIJJIGA); Air H.Q. East Africa and ADEN, and with NO.41 Squadron H.Q. when that Squadron advanced. Conditions for a free flow of traffic were excellent.

The Typex machine was maintained in use throughout the stay.

The staff was reinforced by two W/T operators and it was therefore possible to commence the reception of operational summaries direct from ISMAILIA instead of through Air H.Q. E.A., thus easing the flow of traffic on the 10005 Kc's channel.

Average daily signal groups - 4200.

9. HARRAR: 1.4.41.  
Distance from NAIROBI 370 miles.

Section arrived HARRAR.

Equipment: Two aircraft W/T sets T.1083 - R.1082

One T.1090 - R.1084

One M.15

Communications: Communication was maintained with all Air Force units in East Africa, Air H.Q. East Africa and Air H.Q., ADEN.

It was found necessary to have more direct communication with Advanced 203 Group (Sudan Command). This was obtained by ASMARA joining the 10005 Kc channel.

Power supply was now obtainable from the town mains, therefore an M.15 transmitter was obtained from 2 Wing H.Q. and used on 10005 Kc's. During the periods 17.30 hours to 23.00 hours daily the main supply was insufficient to work the transmitter, whilst on Sunday afternoons the supply was cut off. The Lister I K.W. set would not work the transmitter and Typex machine at the same time, so they were operated alternately.

/An enemy



# SECRET

An enemy P.E. 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  K.W. set was obtained from S.A. Force H.Q. Signals section in return for:-

- (a) The Lister 1 K.W. plant,
- (b) Repairing Force H.Q. Typex machine,
- (c) The maintenance of Force H.Q. Typex machine,
- (d) Two enemy P.E. sets giving 220 Volt lamp D.C.

Settled conditions at HARRAR permitted of improvements to the W/T Station. Efficient aerials and transmission lines were erected and the aircraft W/T sets were remotely controlled with relays obtained from enemy sources.

An aircraft W/T set was obtained from No.2 Wing H.Q. overhauled and rewired, and despatched by air to LUGH FERRANDI, for use on the aircraft line of communications.

During the period when the Force H.Q. Typex machine was being repaired by this section, opportunity was taken to thoroughly overhaul our own machine.

Average daily signal groups to date: 5300.

## SUMMARY

10. It was most unfortunate that the Advanced Headquarters was unable to operate with it's full complement of equipment and personnel.

The devotion and hard work of the operators, mechanics and cypher staff of the Advanced H.Q. Signals and Cypher Section made up for the shortage of equipment and personnel and too much credit cannot be given them for the high standard of communications maintained.

To have maintained ideal communications, the following equipment and personnel would have been necessary:-

- 3 Complete Mobile Ground Stations, consisting of two Transmitters each.
- 2 E.L. & P. Vehicles.
- 1 Cypher Van.
- 2 Three-ton Trucks, for carrying personal kit of W/T personnel.

/1 Signals

1 Signals Officer  
6 Cypher Officers  
2 Sgt. W/Ops.  
4 Cpls.  
16 A/M Operators  
1 Sgt. W.E.M.  
1 Cpl. W.E.M.  
2 A/M. W.E.M.

When a H.Q. is moving forward with such rapidity it is necessary at all time for one complete section to stand by to move to the next position and open up communications there before closing down the rear H.Q.

It will be seen from the above report that this was not possible with the equipment and personnel available.

Note 4: During this period, it was hoped that much more assistance could have been rendered to B.B.M.C. Sections operating from remote landing grounds where no Air Force Unit was stationed, but the lack of equipment and personnel made this impossible, and the consequent delay in communicating with these Sections meant a delay in one raid and also possibly in the movement of the Squadrons.

A good reserve of operators and transportable sets under the control of the Advanced H.Q. would appear to be necessary therefore, in a campaign like this to meet contingencies.

#### SQUADRONS

##### 12. No.41 Squadron:

This Squadron arrived from the Union without any W/T equipment or signals personnel. Two Army No.2 Sets, mounted on 1-ton trucks, were sent from the Union, but No.41 Squadron never succeeded in making them work.

The Squadron was stationed at NAKURU at the end of November without any equipment or personnel and they were required to commence operations by the middle of December.

Note 5: No.11 Squadron had insufficient plugs, sockets and switch units for all their aircraft sets. Four G.P. Sets were therefore taken from No.11 Squadron and utilised as Mobile Sets on 1-ton Trucks.

/A General

# SECRET

A General Purpose W/T vehicles, fitted with a T.1090 and R.1084 was returned by No.40 Squadron, it being too cumbersome for mobile work. The equipment was removed and split between two 1-ton trucks and transferred to No.41 Squadron. The new arrangement proved much more satisfactory. A few signals personnel were posted from almost every other Unit in East Africa to meet the immediate requirements of the Squadron. The Squadron was still short of equipment and personnel, but fortunately, the H.Qs. always remained with one of the Flights, thereby easing the situation.

Only fifty per cent of the aircraft were fitted with TR.1091 Sets and coupled with the shortage of Ground Equipment, ground to air and air to ground communications were very 'seldom used', although on the few occasions when needed it was used to good effect.

## Artillery Co-operation:

No sets were available in this Squadron for Artillery Co-operation and in any case no operators were available, even if sets had been found.

On the few occasions when Artillery co-operation was possible, R/T was used ground to air, the Artillery using their broadcast Receivers to receive the observations.

## 13. No.40 Squadron.

The equipment of this squadron consisted of

- 1 Mobile Ground Station (2 M.15)
- 6 G.P. Sets mounted on 1-ton trucks made up in East Africa from sets robbed from aircraft.
- 6 TR.1091 Sets on 4-tonners for Artillery Co-operation.

All aircraft were fitted with TR.1091 Sets but it was some time after the Squadron commenced operations before all pilots were provided with W/T fittings for their helmets.

Ground to air and air to ground was not extensively used at the commencement of operations for the following reasons:

- (a) Recces. were mainly strategical and out of W/T range.
- (b) Pilots were not as interested as they should have been.
- (c) W/T Personnel had no experience on the sets.
- (d) No Test Equipment or Wavemeters were available.

/During the

During the last six months air/ground/air Communications were used, to much better purpose, steps having been taken to overcome (b) and (c) above.

The W/T equipment was kept serviceable under most difficult conditions and communications were at all times good.

Army Co-operation:

Whenever an intelligent and serious attempt was made to use the W/T, as in the case of the EL WAK operations, good results were obtained. Example:-

The position of an enemy concentration was reported to Divisional H.Q. The attention of a Flight was drawn to the presence of an enemy aircraft, which was shot down. A party was called up and directed to the scene of the crash, where two prisoners were taken.

After the above experience, the pilots became more interested and subsequently used their W/T much more intelligently.

In the advance on MEGA and MOYALE, a ground set was allotted to each Brigade H.Q. Brigade Commanders were thus in the picture and always had the latest dispositions of their own troops.

Communications were also provided between Advanced Divisional H.Q., and Squadron H.Q. This is normally a function of the Army, but in this case, the 1st S.A. Division were shorter of equipment than the Air Force, making it necessary for No. 40 Squadron to provide the link.

On one occasion, a 1083/1082 was fitted into a S.A.-built Armoured Car. A test was carried out by sending the car on a 240 mile trip, starting from KUNCHURRO. The conditions encountered were a good test of the working of the set. Over three days, dust, bad roads and heavy rain were encountered. Working back to KUNCHURRO, a range of 12 miles on R/T and 50 miles on C/W was found practicable. The car was heard at a greater range, however. These results were obtained on the move and the difficulty of tuning and also the local noises have been taken into account.

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# SECRET

It was found that results could be decidedly improved while stationary.

While at rest at the furthest point reached by the car an aircraft from No.40 Squadron, on a road patrol, worked the car in both R/T and C/W while in the neighbourhood.

Note 6: In a combined operation, where the Air Force is closely supporting the Army, this latter form of communication is most important and, for effective co-operation, cannot be too strongly emphasised. Whenever a Squadron is detailed for a close support operation the Air Force Commander should always have at his disposal sufficient mobile W/T Sets (if necessary mounted in armoured cars) to attach to the Army formation with which he is to co-operate.

## Artillery Co-operation:

Artillery co-operation was carried out successfully whenever it was requested. This, however, was only done on a few occasions.

## 14. No.2 WING:

No.2 Wing had available one Mobile Ground Station (2 M.150) and one G.P. Pack Set. The latter being used for the Advanced Wing during moves.

Communications with 2 Wing were always excellent but a second Mobile Ground Station would have made all the difference especially during the rapid move into Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia.

Note 7: The lack of transport and the use of the Technical vehicles as load carriers was well illustrated in the case of 2 Wing. Having a large W/T Section to move, the technical vehicles were piled up to the roof with personal kit and other equipment. This, naturally, seriously affected the mobility of the Wing H.Q. Signals Section.

It is most essential that separate transport be allotted to a large Signals Section for moving the personnel and kit.

15. No.11 SQUADRON.

Ground Equipment, 1 Mobile Ground Station (2 M.150) Aircraft Sets, T-1083/R-1082. Sufficient sets were available to fit all aircraft but a number of essential components were missing and the sets were therefore not fitted to all aircraft.

Note 8: This proved a blessing in disguise, as the sets were made available for ground use, the essential components, like switch units, not being necessary for ground operation. Were it not for these sets No.41 Squadron would have been without ground W/T equipment.

Some of the components were at a later stage provided by the R.A.F. Stores at Eastleigh<sup>1</sup>, making it possible to put the aircraft sets into working order, although certain components were still missing. This squadron used its W/T most effectively on raids.

16. NO.12 SQUADRON.

Ground Equipment: 1 Mobile Ground Station (1 M.150)  
1 Aircraft Set.

All aircraft were fitted with wireless. This Squadron was fortunate in that all pilots and operators were experienced in the use of W/T, the Squadron having been formed mainly from ex-Airways personnel.

Note 9: Normally in a Bomber Squadron the Gunner operator works the W/T Set, but No.12 Squadron found that if Gunner operators were used their wireless was absolutely valueless as the Air Gunners were not sufficiently trained in its use. Therefore, to make effective use of their W/T they were forced to use Ground W/T Operators.

W/T was extensively used by this Squadron and very often in bad weather the aircraft set in the ground station was used as a beacon station on which the aircraft were able to home.

Note 10: A low power beacon station should be included in the ground W/T Equipment of each Bomber Squadron.

# SECRET

## 17. NO.2 SQUADRON.

All the aircraft in this Squadron were fitted with TR 9Ds but owing to the shortage of ground W/T equipment, pilots' helmets, W/T and R/T fittings, wireless was never successfully used on operations, although every effort was made by the Squadron Signals Officer.

Note 11: A set of the 32 RB type is necessary for each Fighter detachment for the control of Fighters within 20 miles of the aerodrome.

## 18. NO.3 SQUADRON.

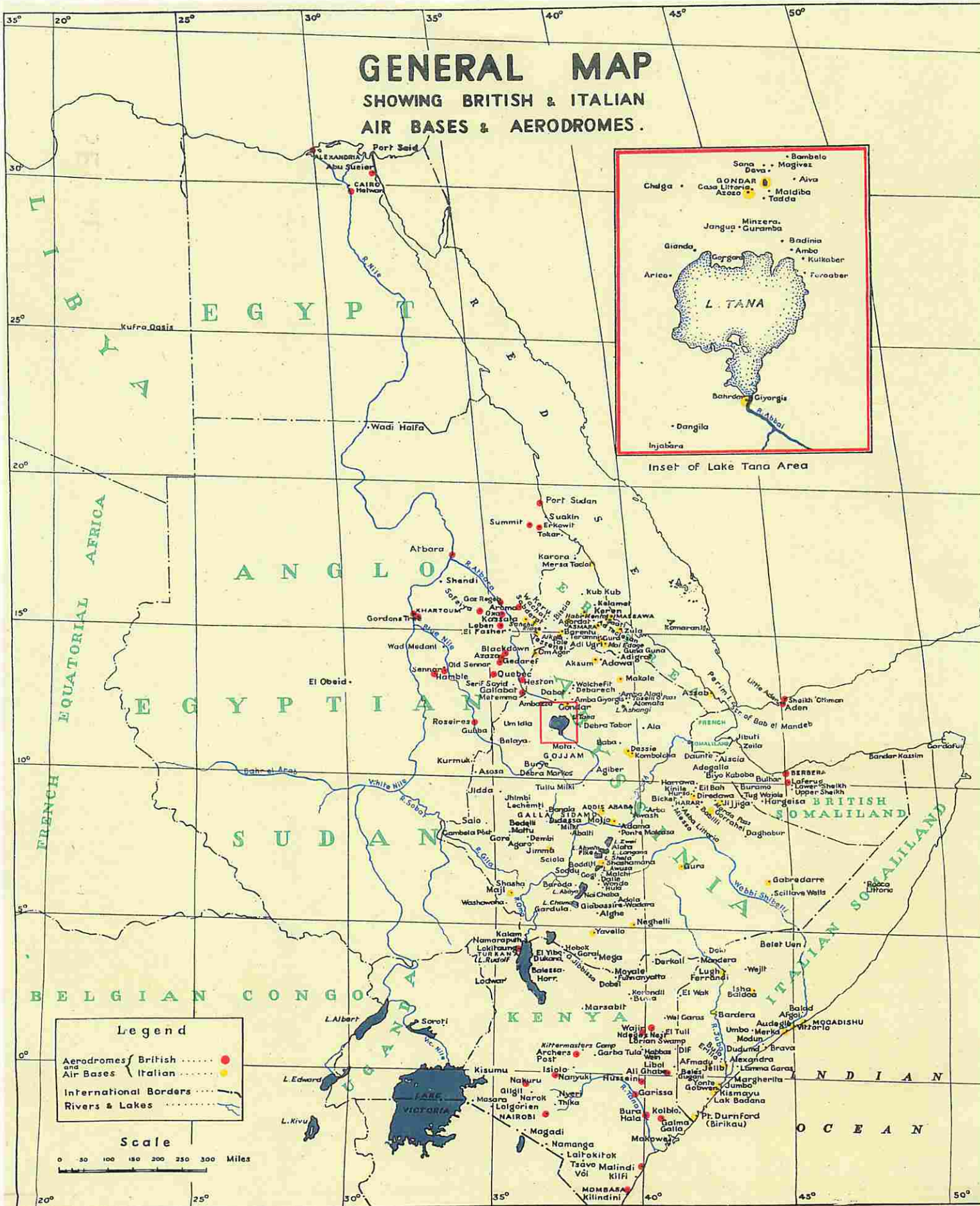
All aircraft were fitted with the TR. 9D. Pilots had W/T fittings but air to air communication was never successful. Good Ground to Air and Air to Ground communication was obtained in tests but here again lack of ground W/T equipment made the use of Ground to Air control of Fighters impossible.

Aircraft of No.3 Squadron were employed as close support flights to the Army striking force. To make full use of the speedy striking power of a Fighter Flight, W/T communication to it must be infallible.

Note 12: For such a mobile air striking detachment the following communications are essential:-

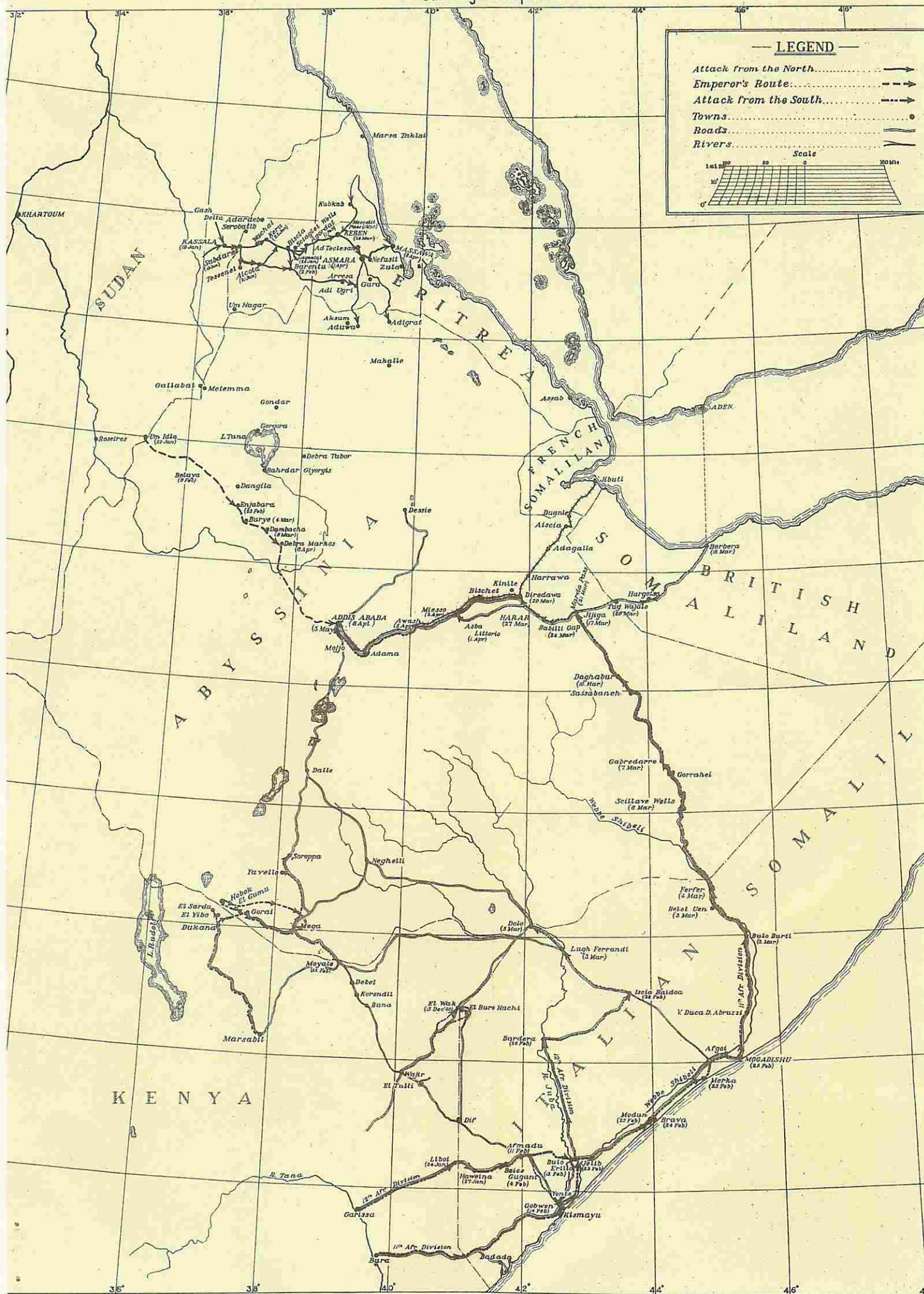
- (a) Direct communication from the Army formation to the supporting Fighter Flight:
  - (i) For purpose of calling for support
  - (ii) For purpose of reporting enemy aircraft.
- (b) Direct communication from the operational H.Q. (in this case Advanced Air Headquarters) to the Fighter detachment in order to take immediate advantage of Intelligence or Recce. Reports of enemy aircraft locations.

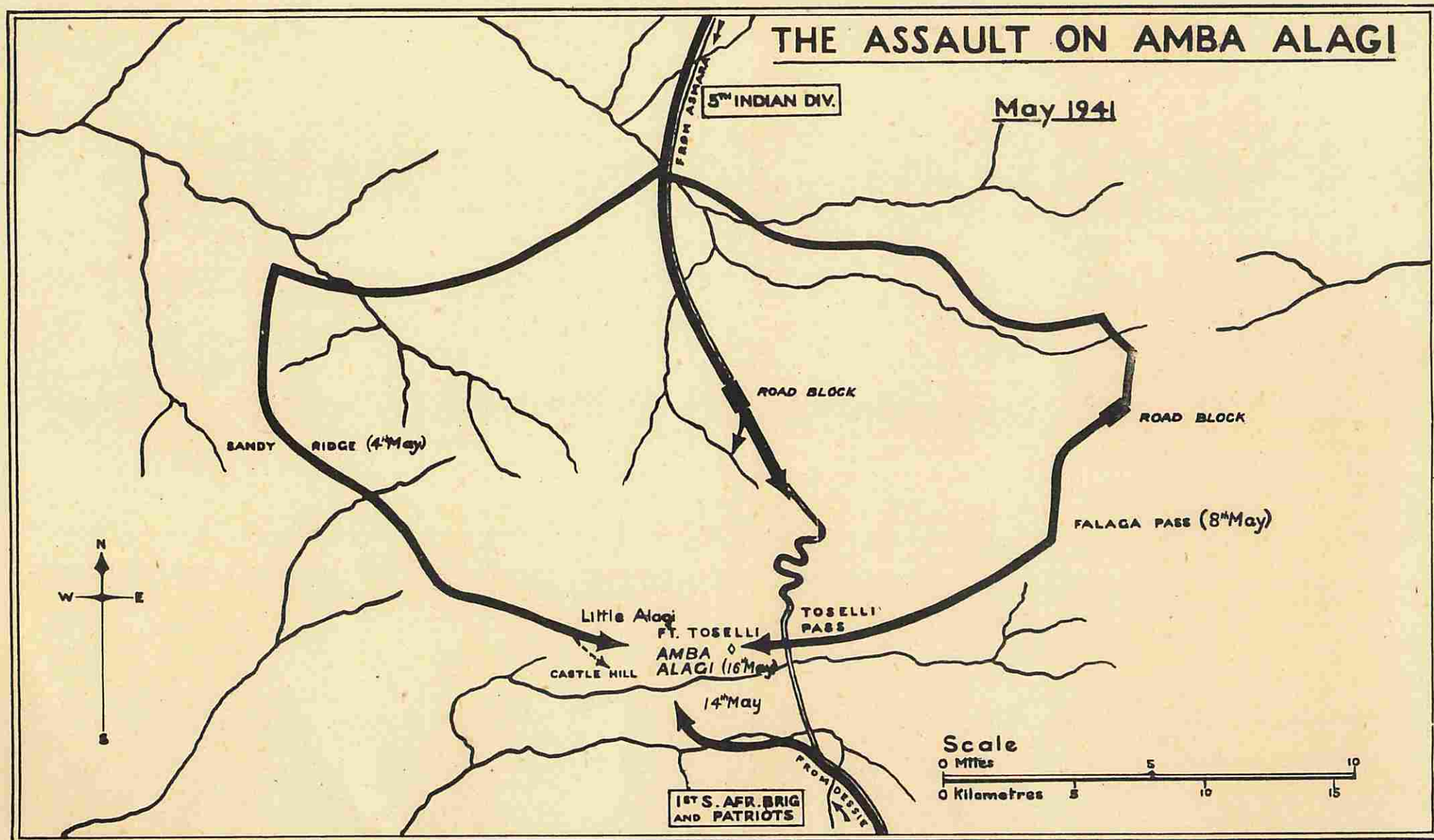






January '41 - April '41



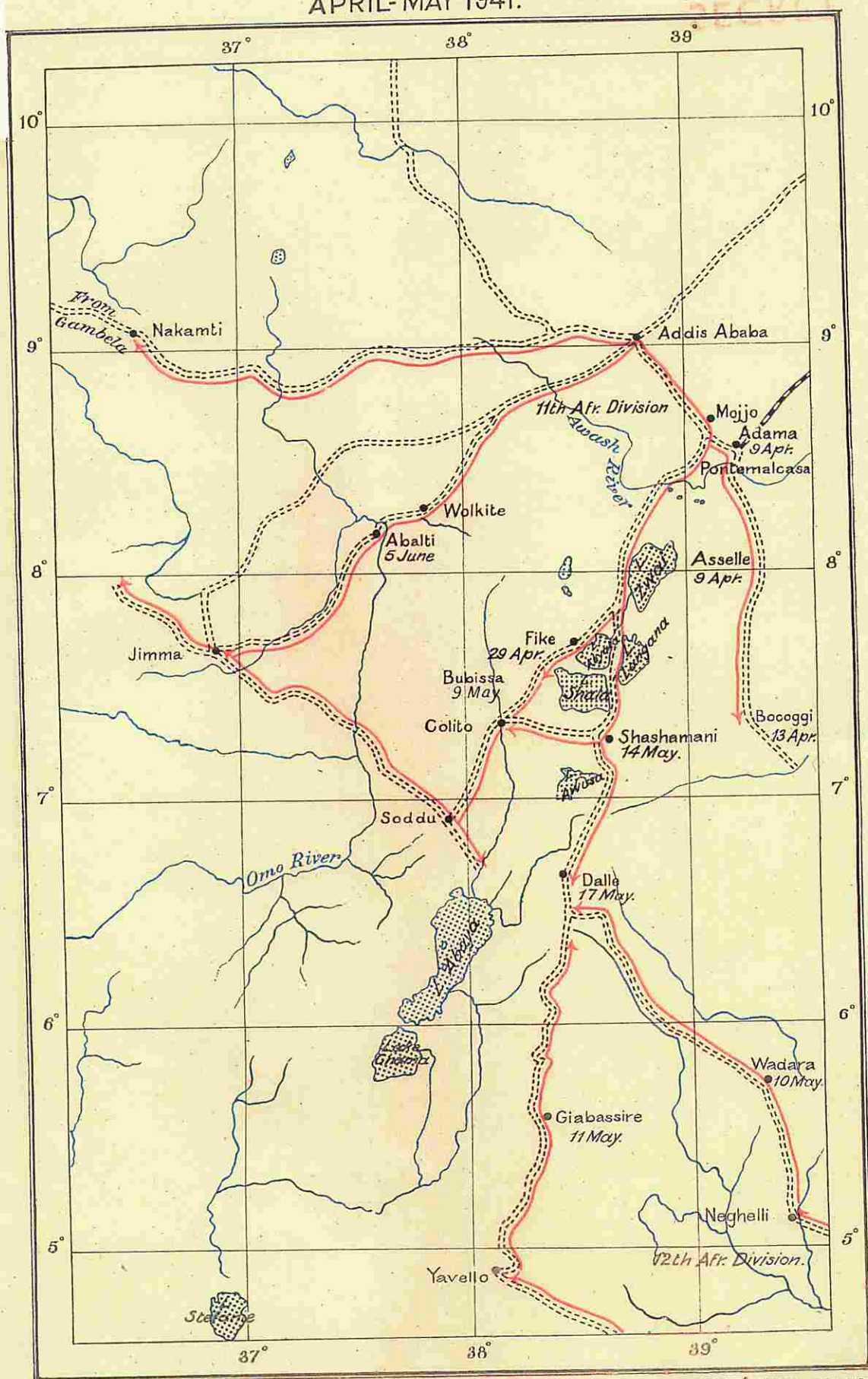


Map No. 134 Drawn at A.H.B.



# THE BATTLES OF THE LAKES.

APRIL-MAY 1941.



MAP N° 123 COMPILED & DRAWN AT A.H.B.I.

Scale 1:2,000,000.