



SUPPLEMENT

TO

# The London Gazette

Of TUESDAY, the 16th of JULY, 1946

Published by Authority

Registered as a newspaper

WEDNESDAY, 17 JULY, 1946

The War Office,  
July, 1946

## OPERATIONS OF EAST AFRICA COMMAND, 12TH JULY, 1941 TO 8TH JANUARY, 1943

*The following Despatch was submitted on 31st March, 1943, to the Secretary of State for War by LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR WILLIAM PLATT, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.S.O., General Officer Commanding in Chief, East Africa Command.*

On 15th September, 1941, East Africa Force as part of Middle East Forces was abolished and replaced by East Africa Command directly under the War Office, covering the territories from Eritrea in the North to the Zambesi in the South. My predecessor Lieut.-General Sir Alan Cunningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., left East Africa on 29th August, 1941, to assume command of the Eighth Army in Middle East. Until my arrival on 5th December, 1941, Major-General H. E. de R. Wetherall, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., acted in command and was responsible for the operations against Gondar.

The Command was divided into four areas. Eritrea as an administrative area in the North: 12th (African) Division under Major-General C. C. Fowkes, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., covered Ethiopia and British Somaliland: 11th (African) Division, transformed into Central Area, covered Italian Somaliland, Uganda, Kenya, Zanzibar and Tanganyika: Southern Area comprising Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia under Major-General G. R. Smallwood, D.S.O., M.C., with Headquarters at Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia, had also an advisory brief in the last named.

West African formations which had taken part in the operations against Italian East Africa from the South, were due to return to their own countries. The 23rd (Nigerian) Infantry Brigade left in August, 1941, and was followed in October by the 24th (Gold Coast) Infantry Brigade. Owing to shortage of artillery and engineer units in East Africa, 51st Battery and 53rd Field Company, both of the Gold Coast, were retained temporarily to take part in the reduction of the last remaining Italian stronghold at Gondar. Except in that

area where General Nasi's forces were still holding out, organised resistance in Ethiopia had ceased prior to my predecessor's last despatch which dealt with operations up to the 11th of July, 1941.

Although military opposition by Italian forces had been almost eliminated, the maintenance of law and order over more than half a million square miles of conquered territory presented no small problem. The country was armed from North to South and from East to West, with rifles, ammunition, grenades and many automatics. More than 20,000 rifles, with over 20 million rounds of ammunition had been pumped into Ethiopia from the Sudan alone to aid the Patriots in their revolt against the Italian oppressor. The Italians issued arms in the unfulfilled hope that they would be used against British forces. Many thousands more were gleaned from deserted battlefields, and looted from hidden reserve dumps. None of these have yet been returned to us. None will be. Few have even been collected for use by the Regular Ethiopian Army. They are in the hands of Territorials, Irregulars, and ordinary brigands. Theft of rifles still continues in a manner worthy of the North-West frontier of India.

Many of these arms were in the hands of Patriot bands owing some form of allegiance and obedience to numerous Chiefs, who, in their turn, owed little allegiance or obedience to anyone. After action, on the elementary principle of living on the country, brigandage against local inhabitants was frequent. Despite this, the general desire of the Ethiopian to rid his country of the Italian, ensured a reasonable degree of security to the roads used by our troops as lines of communication. In attaining this our Occupied Territories Administration and the edicts of His Imperial Majesty The Emperor contributed their full share.

The number and variety of responsible administrators, civil and military, with whom Command Headquarters had to deal, often

separately, made the task no easier. These included Military Administrators in Eritrea and Somalia, the Military Governor of British Somaliland, His Imperial Majesty The Emperor as well as British Military authorities in Ethiopia, in addition to five civil Governors and one Resident in the southern half of the Command territory. The last six were to some extent co-ordinated by the East African Governors' Conference, but that co-ordination did not at that time include either the issue or acceptance of instructions. Even with the good will which has been generally accorded to me, this division into territories under independent civil Governors does not, from a military point of view, tend towards ease or rapidity of execution.

The problems of the Command were further complicated by the state of communications. Except for the short length of railway joining the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia to the Union of South Africa, the only other railways between Eritrea and the Zambesi, and there were in fact only four, ran from West to East. There is no North and South railway communication.

Save in Uganda and the small Island of Zanzibar, there was nothing in the British Colonies, Protectorates and Mandated Territory which could be dignified by the name of "road." The so-called Great North road was "great" and "road" in name only, just an earth surface without foundation which the rain put out of action for anything but the lightest traffic for several days at a time. That was our one and only road of communication by land from North to South throughout British territory.

There was a great contrast, both in accomplishment and in future planning, in the countries captured from the Italians. In Ethiopia the bankrupt nation of Italy had, in the space of five years, constructed many hundred miles of tarred and beautifully graded roads rising at points to 9,000 feet above sea level, capable of use by the heaviest of traffic at all seasons and in all weathers.

#### PART II.—GONDAR OPERATIONS.

Gondar is situated on the Ethiopian plateau at a height of about 6,800 feet. To the North-East and South-East the country rises considerably higher, the highest peak being 14,000 feet. To the south the country falls to the depression containing Lake Tana, over 1,000 feet below the general level of the plateau. Erosion has been considerable, the plateau being cut up by a series of steep-sided valleys, sometimes several thousand feet deep. Communications on the plateau itself and from the surrounding plains to the plateau are difficult.

A series of small hills surrounding the town of Gondar overlook the principal routes of approach. The country is generally open, with scattered clumps of trees and bush. Streams are numerous, and water is plentiful.

There are three main approaches to Gondar. From the North by a good road from Asmara via Axum and the Wolchehit Pass: from the South-East from Dessie by an earth road with rickety bridges: from the West from Gedaref via Gallabat and Chelga by a rough track devoid of bridges over the main waterways. The forces of General Nasi were concentrated about Gondar with strong outlying detachments at Wolchehit, Kulkaber, Feroaber and Chelga.

The enemy troops about Wolchehit and Chelga were contained by troops from the Sudan under the Kaid. Early in September, with a view to concerting operations against Gondar as soon as practicable after cessation of the rains, East Africa Command accepted responsibility for all activities from the direction of Asmara and Dessie. The Sudanese about Chelga were to conform and co-operate, the Kaid, of necessity, retaining administrative control of his troops. 12th (African) Division took over control of all operations. Plans were made for 25th (East African) and 26th (East African) Infantry Brigades to relieve Sudan troops in the Wolchehit area. 25th (E.A.) Infantry Brigade effected this relief by 26th September, 1941.

Towards the end of September, the garrison of the exceptionally strong position of Wolchehit surrendered. This came as a surprise. It was due to pressure by the 25th Brigade and by Patriot Forces, and to bombing by aircraft. The road was now clear for our troops to move forward and make contact with the enemy defences North of Gondar itself. A change of plan was made necessary since the original plan had included a preliminary operation for the capture of Wolchehit.

The new plan was, briefly, to concentrate the main forces about Amba Giyorgis while a column attacked the Kulkaber—Feroaber position from the direction of Dessie, and others operated along the Metemma—Chelga road and round the West side of Lake Tana against the road Azozo—Gorgora.

Operations were held up for a fortnight by bad weather which made transport very difficult. In the second week of November, the 2d Ethiopian Battalion under Lieut.-Colonel G. Benson, O.B.E., successfully cleared the Italians from their outlying posts between Gorgora and Azozo, after a long and tedious march round the West side of Lake Tana.

The next thrust was against the Kulkaber—Feroaber position, which was held in strength. An attack by 1/6 King's African Rifles and 1st East African Pioneers on 13th November, drove a deep wedge into the enemy's line. Unfortunately, however, our troops were unable to maintain their positions, and fell back under cover of darkness, bringing prisoners with them.

On 21st November a second attack was launched, 25th Brigade coming in from the North and 1/6 King's African Rifles and 1st East African Pioneers from the East. After stiff fighting this attack was successful.

The way was now clear for the final advance on Gondar. This took place at dawn on 27th November. Opposition was strong and our troops suffered a number of casualties, the majority of which were from mines and booby traps. The enemy's rifle and machine gun fire, though heavy, was inaccurate. By 1730 hours in the evening, the town was in our hands, though some of the surrounding garrisons did not get the order to surrender until the following day. A total of 23,000 prisoners was taken.

Spasmodic disorders and looting continued for several days in and around Gondar, but order was finally restored. The Crown Prince of Ethiopia, who had accompanied Advanced Headquarters 12th (African) Division throughout the operations, was installed on 29th November.

Throughout the operations our air forces, under Lieut.-Colonel Mostert, South African Air Force, had provided active and effective support. The enemy resistance in the air was negligible.

The change of plan brought about by the unexpected fall of Wolcheft in September had necessitated a change of line of supply, but the necessary administrative changes had been carried out satisfactorily and worked well.

The positions chosen by the enemy for the defence of Gondar were naturally strong, and he had plenty of time to strengthen them and protect them with wire, booby traps and land mines. Our artillery amounted to only 25 guns, and though we had control of the air, it was never possible to shell or bomb any centre of resistance with a really heavy concentration. Credit is due to the Infantry who fought their way forward to close quarters with their own weapons.

The fall of Gondar, the last stronghold in Ethiopia, completed, in ten months, the eclipse of the Italian East African Empire. This final surrender was accomplished by African troops, drawn principally from East Africa, with a proportion from West Africa and the Sudan. 1st Battalion The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were the only troops other than those drawn from Africa to take part. The total number of casualties suffered by troops under East Africa Command during November, 1941, was 369, the heaviest total for any one month since the inception of the campaign from Kenya.

Besides the officers and men who took part in the operations, credit is due to Major-General H. E. de R. Wetherall, C.B., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., who was generally responsible for direction, and to Major-General C. C. Fowkes, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., who commanded in the field with boldness and decision.

### PART III.—MAJOR EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA AND ERITREA AFTER THE GONDAR OPERATIONS.

The fall of Gondar removed any immediate hostile threat to the territories comprising East Africa Command. It was thereby possible to concentrate on certain important internal matters. The most pressing and complex of these problems was the evacuation of Italians from Ethiopia.

Early in November, 1941, the Cabinet gave a formal decision that all Italians were to be evacuated from Ethiopia. This decision was in accordance with the demand which had been expressed loudly and frequently for some months by most Ethiopians from the Emperor himself downwards.

The Italian population of some 34,000 were mainly concentrated in or near the five largest towns—Addis Ababa, Gimma, Dessie, Diredaua and Harrar. The evacuation was not a simple movement of a mass of people from one area to another, but had several complicated features, namely:

(a) Compulsory separation from their families of men for evacuation to British East African territories;

(b) Repatriation to Italy in Italian ships of the women, children and old and infirm men;

(c) Retention in Ethiopia of a number of Italian men (and their families) for work on essential services pending replacement by Allied nationals from elsewhere;

(d) Uncertainty regarding the arrival of the Italian ships, and which port, Berbera or Jibouti—was to be used;

(e) The need to construct, and staff, staging camps for the evacuation of Italians of both sexes and all ages in territory that was by nature short of shade and water;

(f) A last minute desire on the part of the Ethiopian authorities to retain a large number of Italians for non-essential services, thereby engendering a spirit of opposition to evacuation among the Italians.

In December, 1941, the evacuation of Italian subjects from Ethiopia commenced. By February, 1942, despite shortage of shipping, 10,000 males had been transferred to East African territories. In May over 9,000 women, children and infirm males were embarked at Berbera in Italian ships for repatriation, every body and thing being safely moved from shore to ship by lighter. The Italian staffs of these ships expressed surprise at the healthy and well-fed appearance of the repatriates whom they had expected to find in a condition of starvation.

In November, 1942, a further 8,700 were repatriated to Italy from Berbera and Eritrea. Over 4,000 have changed their location within Africa.

The moves of these civilians were in addition to those of prisoners of war.

#### *Retention of Italian technicians for essential services.*

As the fall of Gondar was to be quickly followed by the evacuation of our troops from that neighbourhood, and their replacement by Ethiopian control and administration, it was immediately apparent that valuable and modern works installed throughout Ethiopia by the Italians would fall into disuse and ruin unless some competent technicians maintained them. As qualified personnel from Ethiopia or Allied countries were not available, an interim proposal was made that a total of 500 Italian technicians should remain subject to my Intelligence staff being satisfied as regards each individual on the grounds of security. This proposal was accepted. The general Ethiopian clamour for total evacuation soon gave way to active obstruction to entrainment, to failure to disclose the presence of enemy subjects and even to hiding them. It is a matter for regret that others besides Ethiopians placed difficulties in my path in my endeavour to carry out the specific policy which I had been instructed to perform by His Majesty's Government.

Immediately on the arrival of His Majesty's Minister at Addis Ababa in February, 1942, I informed him verbally of the decision of His Majesty's Government and of my proposal for the temporary retention of 500 Italians for essential services. I explained fully my reasons, on grounds of military security, why I could not agree to that number being increased. Mr. Howe was good enough to say that he appreciated the position and that he considered my views were reasonable.

It was with some surprise that in April, after no previous consultation, I received copies of telegrams from His Majesty's Minister advocating the retention of no less than 2,800 Italians, making with their families a total of 4,000. It was with even greater surprise that I was informed by His Majesty's Minister himself, in July, 1942, that he had left Eng-

land at the beginning of the year with instructions to review the whole problem of retention of Italians and to make his own recommendations. That was the first intimation I had received from any source of the existence of any such instructions. The orders I had received were never easy to execute. My difficulties were increased by contrary instructions to one person and their non-disclosure to myself as responsible authority.

In August, 1942, approval was given for the figure of 500 retained Italians to be increased to 700. Since then 600 who had been hiding have been rounded up from country districts. It would be too optimistic to suggest that the country even now is clear of "embusqués."

#### *ERITREA.*

When the East Africa Command came into being, Eritrea formed part of it chiefly because of a political supposition in some minds that Eritrea and Ethiopia were indivisible.

Before the Command had been in existence for many weeks it became apparent that this arrangement was not workable, due to the military fact that Massawa was to be developed as a Middle East Base and that an American Air Repair and Assembly Plant was to be established at Gura. Both of these projects were being carried out mainly for Middle East requirements. On 1st February, 1942, Eritrea came once more under the command of General Headquarters, Middle East.

#### *ANGLO-ETHIOPIAN Agreement.*

Before entering Ethiopia, the Emperor made repeated attempts to obtain from His Majesty's Government a Treaty of Agreement establishing the relations between Great Britain and Ethiopia. Although His Majesty's Government found itself unable at that stage to enter into any such formal agreement, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs made a pronouncement in Parliament on 4th February, 1941, which defined the British Government's intentions as regards the Emperor and his country's future. The text of this important pronouncement was as follows:

"His Majesty's Government would welcome the reappearance of an independent Ethiopian State and will recognise the claim of the Emperor Haile Selassie to the throne. The Emperor has intimated to His Majesty's Government that he will need assistance and guidance. His Majesty's Government agree with this view and consider that any such assistance and guidance in economic and political matters should be the subject of international agreement at the conclusion of peace. They re-affirm that they themselves have no territorial ambitions in Abyssinia.

In the meanwhile the conduct of military operations by Imperial Forces in parts of Abyssinia will require temporary measures of military guidance and control. These will be carried out in consultation with the Emperor, and will be brought to an end as soon as the situation permits."

In the letter formally communicating the text of this pronouncement to the Emperor, the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, General Sir Archibald P. Wavell, G.C.B., C.M.G., M.C., enlarged upon the final paragraph of the Secretary of State's pronouncement and explained the administrative machinery which he proposed to set up to enable him to fulfil the

obligations imposed upon him as the Commander of the Army in Occupied Enemy Territory.

These obligations entailed the establishment of a Military Administration to administer the country in collaboration with the Emperor during the interval which necessarily elapsed between the return of the Emperor to his Capital on 5th May, 1941, and the signing of the Agreement some nine months later.

In accordance with the promise implied in the final paragraph of Mr. Eden's pronouncement, it was decided as soon as military circumstances permitted, to put an end as far as possible to the measure of administrative control exercised by the Occupied Territories Administration on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief Middle East and subsequently on my behalf. The text of the Agreement which was to achieve this object was prepared by the Political Branch, East Africa Command, after many discussions with the Emperor, and was the subject of two visits to London by the then Chief Political Officer, Major-General Sir Philip Mitchell, K.C.M.G., M.C. As the result of these discussions the Agreement in its final form was presented by Sir Philip Mitchell to the Emperor in December, 1941. The Emperor raised a number of minor points but eventually accepted the text with only unimportant modifications and the Agreement, and its accompanying Military Convention, were signed with due formality on 31st January, 1942.

The ability and patience with which Sir Philip Mitchell conducted these negotiations during many months against continuous difficulties, the principal and most consistent of which was that an ell was demanded for every inch offered, were beyond praise.

As a result of this Agreement, direct British control in Ethiopia became limited to the Reserved Areas comprising a belt of territory 25 miles wide along the border of French Somaliland, an area occupied principally by Somalis adjoining the British Somaliland border; the territory occupied by the Franco-Ethiopian railway; the Ogaden; and a number of cantonments of which Addis Ababa, Harrar and Diredaua were the most important.

In August, 1941, our troops were withdrawn from Addis Ababa, care of the aerodrome there being taken over by the British Military Mission to Ethiopia.

#### **PART IV.—OUTBREAK OF WAR WITH JAPAN AND ITS EFFECT ON EAST AFRICA COMMAND.**

Japan's entry into the war and her early successes brought the threat of war to the East African coast. My immediate problems as a result of this were re-orientation of the Command dispositions with the object of strengthening the defence of the coast, with particular reference to the port of Mombasa; and the preparation of East African formations for service overseas. As a corollary to these problems, some withdrawal of troops commenced from Ethiopia and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya where their retention could not be described as essential for the main war effort.

Operations against Ethiopia had naturally caused the Command to face North. It had now to face East. There were few troops along the coast. The few Coast Defence guns were obsolete British ones or captured Italian ones. There was not one anti-aircraft gun in the whole Command. There were practically no British artillery personnel. The training and expan-

sion of African artillery personnel was in its infancy.

The sudden transformation of the relative quiet of Mombasa into an active naval base and a station for sea and land aircraft, increased the defensive potential in that area, but accentuated the urgency for adequate land defences. The demands of the three Services for material, artisans and transport, most of which had to be provided by the Army, rose to unprecedented heights. The allotment of sites for defence, storage, accommodation and other necessities created the conflicting claims to priority within a limited space usual in circumstances of urgency. Although every wish and every need could not be immediately met, the general spirit of co-operation and give-and-take which prevailed reduced major difficulties to a minimum.

In April the arrival of coast defence and anti-aircraft units, guns, personnel and stores commenced, and the Island of Mombasa and its surrounding territory began to assume an aspect of stronger defence. That improvement has been maintained.

In response to a War Office request made in December, 1941, 21st and 25th (East African) Brigades were selected for service overseas. The former Brigade was located in Kenya, and the latter in Ethiopia where it had recently taken part in the Gondar operations. This was the first time during the war that the employment of East African troops outside Africa had been considered, and the usual number of administrative problems arose in connection with establishments, types of transport, scales of rations, and availability or otherwise of food suitable for consumption by Africans. The 25th Brigade was due to embark at Massawa on 21st February, 1942, but early in that month it became apparent that this brigade would not be in a fit state to be sent overseas on that date or even for several months. I was forced regretfully to cancel its departure and nominated 22nd (East African) Infantry Brigade in its place. This Brigade had fought with distinction throughout the East African campaign, but many of its personnel had been away from their homes and amenities for considerable periods. Leave was an essential preliminary to embarkation, but it required time. Such are the distances, the paucity and condition of communications in East Africa, that it may take as much as four months for the personnel of a battalion to enjoy fourteen days' leave in their homes. In consequence the 22nd Brigade could not be ready for embarkation until the middle of May, 1942.

Early in March, 1942, the 21st (East African) Infantry Brigade completed its preparations and embarked at Mombasa for Ceylon.

Events in Malaya and other parts of the Far East led the Governors of the various territories in East Africa to examine with me how co-ordination between civil and military authorities in the event of invasion could be improved. As a result of this examination, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 19th April, 1942, increased the executive powers of the Chairman of the East African Governors in matters of common interest when urgent military necessity required. This decision eased many of the difficulties of my task. I am grateful to the Chairman of the Governors' Conference, and to the Governors, for their co-operation in bringing it about.

#### PART V.—MADAGASCAR, MAURITIUS, RODRIQUEZ AND SEYCHELLES.

In the first week of May, 1942, combined forces from Great Britain, acting under the direction of the Chiefs of Staff, attacked Diego Suarez in Madagascar. At the conclusion of this successful operation, certain of the British formations which had participated were required elsewhere. As relief the 22nd (East African) Infantry Brigade Group, already prepared to move overseas, sailed from East Africa for Madagascar on 3rd June, 1942.

On 25th May, 1942, I received instructions that, at a later date, I was to take over command of all British troops in Madagascar. On 1st July, 1942, the occupied area of Madagascar came under my command.

Since the initial occupation of Diego Suarez it had become necessary to extend to the South the area occupied by the British forces as the economic life of Antsirane was dependent on the produce obtained from the country around Ambilobe. British patrols occupied Ambilobe without opposition and a British political officer was established in that place.

In Diego Suarez area, conditions rapidly returned to normal, although trade was restricted since the British blockade had effectively prevented the replacement of trade goods. Warehouses and shops were empty. With the active co-operation of the Union of South Africa, £5,000 worth of goods comprising tea, flour, and cotton piece goods were landed at Diego Suarez on 8th July, 1942. The delivery of these goods created a favourable impression among all sections of local inhabitants, being in strong contrast to the conditions prevailing in the unoccupied area of Madagascar.

On 1st September, 1942, the extent of the Command was further increased by the addition of Mauritius, Rodriguez and Seychelles, transferred from Army Headquarters in India. These Islands, together with Madagascar, were formed into an "Islands Area" under Major-General G. R. Smallwood, D.S.O., M.C., with Headquarters at Diego Suarez.

These Islands provide the Command with outposts in the Indian Ocean but their distance from the mainland, and the uncertainty of shipping and aircraft, render their reinforcement in the event of emergency problematical, and their regular visiting by Commanders and Staff Officers undesirably infrequent. Adequate air communications should be an automatic and immediate corollary to any considerable expansion of an extensive military command.

On 1st August, 1942, my responsibility regarding Southern Rhodesia was transferred to the Union of South Africa.

#### PART VI.—OPERATIONS IN MADAGASCAR SUBSEQUENT TO THE OCCUPATION OF DIEGO SUAREZ.

##### *Events leading up to further operations in Madagascar.*

After the occupation of Diego Suarez, it was hoped that the attitude of Monsieur Annet, Governor General of Madagascar, would become more reasonable and that some degree of collaboration would supervene which would enable us to secure certain military objectives from the threat of Axis aggression whilst still maintaining the machinery of French Government in the Island. The most important military objectives were Majunga and Tulcar on

the West Coast from which we could improve air and sea control of the Mozambique Channel; the port of Tamatave on the East Coast, from which most of the produce of the Island is exported; Tananarive, in the centre, the capital and seat of Government, which possessed long range wireless installations communicating direct with Paris and Indo-China. Various unofficial visitors from Tananarive arrived at Antsirane, and though they were not accredited by the Governor General, they were understood to represent his views. In July it became obvious that M. Annet, whilst toying with the idea of collaboration, was really playing for time until the rains commenced in October, was dancing to Vichy's tune, and that no sincere "rapprochement" could be expected from him. I was, therefore, reluctantly obliged to advise that further operations were essential. Sinkings of our shipping in the Mozambique Channel had increased. The possibility of enemy submarines receiving assistance from French ports had to be eliminated.

On 2nd July, the Island of Mayotte, the most easterly of the Comoro group, was occupied by English and East African Infantry landed by H.M.S. "Dauntless" and H.M.S. "Active." A seaplane base at the Northern end of the Mozambique Channel was thus secured.

On 26th June, after consultations with Field Marshal Smuts, I submitted a plan of operations for the extension of our control over Madagascar. Preparatory work in the detailed planning of this combined operation was started immediately. Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., A.D.C. and Brigadier F. W. Festing, D.S.O., were brought over from Madagascar to assist in this.

The plan of operations proposed by Admiral Sir J. F. Somerville, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O. and myself in conjunction with Air Commodore M. L. Taylor, A.F.C., was briefly as follows:

(a) 29th Independent Infantry Brigade Group to carry out a surprise landing under cover of darkness at Majunga with a view to seizing the town and harbour, supported, in the event of opposition, by ships of the Royal Navy and aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm.

(b) As soon as a sufficient bridgehead had been secured ashore, the 22nd (East African) Infantry Brigade Group to land and advance on Tananarive. A small detachment of 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade Group and South African Armoured Cars to land with 29th Independent Brigade and capture the important series of large bridges some 90-130 miles beyond Majunga.

(c) The advance of the East African Brigade on Tananarive was to be supported by an air component which was to move from Antsirane to Majunga as soon as the aerodrome at that place was fit to use.

(d) Whilst Majunga was being attacked, a diversionary landing to be made at Nosy Be while columns from the North were to advance along roads on the North-West and North-East of Madagascar with original objectives at Ambanja and Vohemar respectively. A further diversion was subsequently added by landing from warships at Morandava on the West coast.

(e) As soon as 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade could start on their advance to

Tananarive, the 29th Independent Brigade was to re-embark and be conveyed to Tamatave for a combined assault on that town. This operation was to be so timed that it would take place as the 22nd (E.A.) Brigade was approaching the capital. 29th Independent Brigade was then to advance on Brickaville, and Tananarive. 22nd (E.A.) Brigade was also to advance on Brickaville from Tananarive thus establishing communication across the centre of the Island.

In view of the approaching rainy season these operations were required to start by 8th September.

As in most plans for attack, and in all cases of landing operations, the chances of success depended greatly on surprise. Surprise in its turn depended on secrecy. The collection at Diego Suarez of the number of His Majesty's ships and transports necessary for the operation and the loading of troops, vehicles and stores, would have banished secrecy and limited surprise to the point or points selected for attack. No efforts at Diego Suarez, where both Infantry Brigades were located, could have eliminated this liability.

The ideal would have been to move all troops to be engaged to the mainland of Africa. Provision of shipping within the time available made that impracticable. 29th Independent Brigade was moved to Mombasa in the middle of August. A chance had to be taken with 22nd (E.A.) Brigade Group sailing from Diego Suarez direct to Majunga, but as they had not to be stowed tactically like the British Brigade, the dangers of leakage and intelligent anticipation were reduced.

As cover to the real plan, India was spoken of in confidential whispers as the destination of 29th Brigade. The arrival at Diego Suarez of 7th (South African) Brigade at the end of June and of 27th (Northern Rhodesian) Brigade in early August, gave colour to the rumour that 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade was being relieved. Whatever the effect of this cover on subsequent operations, it certainly diverted the curiosity of the inhabitants of Kenya onto a false scent.

Other difficulties in implementing the plan were apparent; firstly the necessity of securing undamaged the vital bridges on the road Majunga-Tananarive some 90-130 miles from the coast. The total length of the set of bridges over the River Betsiboka was some 1,600 feet with one span of 452 feet. That span was known to be prepared for demolition. If these bridges were destroyed I had no equipment capable of repairing or replacing them and the advance would have to depend on deviation or the slow and laborious use of pontoon ferries. The problem seemed an ideal opportunity for the employment of paratroops. Unfortunately the War Office were unable to accede to my request that these should be made available for the purpose. Secondly, from a naval aspect, the landing at Tamatave was likely to be difficult, as the only sheltered water is inside the harbour and the possibility of using landing craft elsewhere depended on weather which could not be predicted.

In order to provide sufficient motor transport for these operations, five-and-a-half Reserve Mechanical Transport Companies were required from the mainland of East Africa

Command. The provision of reserves of supplies, stores, ammunition and petrol, of signal equipment and personnel, and of personnel to man various installations on the lines of communication, was a severe strain on my slender resources. By reduction to the minimum elsewhere, provision was made, but on a scale of signals far below requirements.

At the end of August advantage was taken of the presence of the 29th Brigade at Mombasa to test defensive arrangements by a practice attack. In addition to the Naval, Military and Air operations involved, which were made as realistic as circumstances permitted, the whole of Kenya, the eastern half of Tanganyika and the Islands of Zanzibar were, by special legislation, placed under a state of emergency for a period of several days. Surprise landings by the Royal Navy and Royal Marines took place at various points between Mombasa and Dar es Salaam. Pseudo-prisoners of war escaped. "Fifth Columnists" interrupted road and signal communications and spread false rumours. Activities of this nature were widespread and kept even remote places alive. The Civil Governments and population, both European and African, entered wholeheartedly into the exercise with beneficial results.

On 11th August, authority was received from the Chiefs of Staff to proceed with the execution of Madagascar operations. Admiral Sir J. F. Somerville, K.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., and myself were charged with the joint Direction of the operations. We nominated Rear-Admiral W. G. Tennant, C.B., M.V.O., and Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., A.D.C., as Joint Commanders. The latter in turn appointed Brigadier F. W. Festing, D.S.O., and Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams, D.S.C., as Joint Assault Commanders for the operations against Majunga and Tamatave.

The assault on Majunga was finally settled to take place on 10th September, a delay of two days owing to the slow speed of some of the vessels in the three convoys that started from Mombasa.

#### *Landing at Majunga.*

By noon on 9th September the three convoys from Mombasa and the convoy carrying 22nd (E.A.) Brigade Group from Diego Suarez, met at their rendezvous in the Mozambique Channel. By dusk the whole force was just out of sight of land West of Majunga. Neither air nor surface craft had sighted the movement. Secrecy and surprise appeared to have been obtained. The spirit of all ranks and ratings was high. Shortly before midnight the leading ship of the column of 49 moving in single line ahead, dropped anchor. The remainder moved silently to their appointed stations. The moon had not yet risen. The Royal Navy under Admiral Tennant had, with great efficiency, brought every ship, unobserved, to its exact position with a short margin of time in hand, and gave us the chance of effecting a successful landing. Great credit is due to them.

Shortly after 0100 hours the Royal Welch Fusiliers and East Lancashire Regiment landed at a point on an open beach eight miles north of Majunga, quickly followed by Headquarters, 29th Independent Brigade. Their task was to attack the town from the North and North-East at dawn thus getting behind the coast defences.

At first light, the South Lancashire Regiment and 5 Commando landed at selected points on the sea front of the town itself.

Resistance was slight. No firing by naval guns was necessary. By 0800 hours the town was in our hands at a cost of twenty casualties. The reserve battalion and the transport of the Brigade were retained on board.

Soft sand and scrub in the dark caused some delay to the landing, behind the Royal Welch Fusiliers, of the South African Armoured Cars and one portée Company of 1/1 (Nyasaland) King's African Rifles whose task was to make a dash for the bridges over the River Kamoro and River Betsiboka. Despite this delay the first of these bridges, 90 miles inland, was secured intact by 1800 hours on the same day, 10th September, but the centre bridge of the three over the River Betsiboka, 40 miles further on, was found in the early hours of the following morning to have been blown. As the road-way of this bridge, over 400 feet long, had fortunately fallen straight down on to the river bed without turning over, the construction of ramps at each end enabled a continuous, though slow, stream of traffic to be maintained until the first heavy rains in October made it impassable.

Simultaneously with the landing at Majunga, the Island of Nosy Be on the North-West coast was occupied with its important sugar and carborundum factories. A South African Battalion Group of the 1st City Regiment began an advance from Beremanja towards Majunga. Some days later a small column started North from Majunga to meet the South Africans. When junction had been effected, both columns returned to their bases. Other small columns of South African troops went down the North East coast and cleared the road to Vohemar. A party of forty from 5 Commando landed from H.M.S. "Napier" at Morandava, a small town on the West coast of the Island. By advancing some forty miles inland on their push-bicycles, and by intelligent use of the telephone, this party created the desired impression that a column of various arms with mechanised transport was advancing on the capital from this place. After 48 hours on land, the diversion was re-embarked.

As soon as it became apparent that Majunga was safely in our hands, landing of 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade Group commenced and the 29th Brigade returned to their ships preparatory for their voyage round the North of the Island for a fresh landing at Tamatave. Their re-embarkation was completed by the 13th September. They sailed the same day.

22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade had been previously organised into three Battalion Groups so that there would be no delay in the despatch of a small self-contained force as far inland as the strength of opposition permitted. At the same time care had to be taken against becoming prematurely involved with a superior force, and the possibility of defeat in detail. From a careful examination of "form" it appeared to me that the advantage of time gained outweighed the risks. When it became a practical fact that four to five days would be required to land each battalion group complete with its transport and supplies, the advantage of an early forward move became more obvious.

Disembarkation at Majunga was disappointing even though it was known beforehand that there was no deep water quay against which the ships could unload. Everything had to be moved by landing craft or captured lighter. The landing craft had only arrived at Mombasa in August from India where they had been used for training purposes. There was no time to give them the complete overhaul they badly needed. There were neither spare craft nor spare parts. Some had to be cannibalised. The deficiency in quantity as well as quality was accentuated by the necessity to re-embark a proportion for the landing at Tamatave. It had not been possible to make a repair ship available. In these operations against Madagascar our luck held, but it may not do so a second time. The conditions as regards landing craft against which we toiled should never be repeated against an effective enemy.

The landing of a follow-up formation, and the setting of it on to an axis of advance inland, is a different operation to an assault from the sea with the limited objective of securing a bridgehead. It needs a separate staff, with vision ahead, who are neither immersed in, nor tired out from, the details of assault action and unloading tables. The assault staff and personnel have a full time task after a long night with little sleep, in dealing with the affairs of the moment in their immediate neighbourhood, which they generally, and of necessity, have to overcome in an *ad hoc* manner. They have no time for planning for more future operations. Exploitation of a successful landing requires a survey of the whole front affected; the selection of routes to the major line of advance; the utilisation of all local facilities, workshops, material, and means of transport; the accommodation of troops and siting of stores; the clearing of quays and beaches; the construction of roadways, etc. They must think days, even weeks, ahead. They must come fresh to their task.

#### *French request for Terms.*

On 13th September I moved my Headquarters ashore at Majunga and on the 16th received a wireless message from Monsieur Annet, the Governor General, asking me to receive Plenipotentiaries in order "to ask by what means we can, with honour, cease the conflict before the last battle takes place." The Plenipotentiaries were brought by South African aeroplane to Majunga on 17th September, and presented with conditions for the cessation of hostilities. They declared that these were not acceptable and returned to Tananarive the following morning.

During the advance on Tananarive opposition from fighting troops was encountered on a few occasions when Senegalese troops particularly, fought well. The chief obstacle to the advance was the number of road-blocks that the French had erected. Boulders, felled trees, craters and demolished bridges were constantly encountered. Sometimes these obstacles were continuous for a couple of miles. There were only short intervals between one area of obstruction and the next. Fortunately for us they were seldom covered by fire, but they required much time and labour for removal and repair.

As the column approached Tananarive, air reconnaissance and other intelligence made it clear that the French were withdrawing southwards towards Antsirabe, with Ambositra and Fianarantsoa beyond, blocking all roads heavily as they went. To follow them directly would be slow and would give the maximum opportunity for delaying action. I was therefore anxious to land troops on the South-East Coast of the Island and advance on Fianarantsoa from that direction as well as from Tananarive. From the map Mananjary and Manakara seemed particularly suitable. The former is connected with Fianarantsoa and Ambositra by road, while from the latter there is a railway, but no road inland fit for mechanical transport.

I flew to Diego Suarez on 23rd September to discuss the possibility of landing with Rear-Admiral Tennant. After an exhaustive examination, we reluctantly came to the conclusion that such an operation was not feasible. The swell and surf prevalent at that time of the year, and poor beaches, offered no chance of getting ashore, undamaged, even the minimum of mechanical transport. The same conditions obtained at Fort Dauphin. At Tulear in the South-West the situation was slightly better, but it was still not possible, in a reasonable time, to land sufficient mechanical transport. The port had some facilities which, together with the airfield and possibilities of establishing a sea-plane base, would make it of use for patrolling the Mozambique Channel. It was decided to establish a small garrison there. This was effected by H.M.S. "Birmingham," H.M.S. "Inconstant," H.M.A.S. "Napier" and H.M.N.S. "Vangalen" landing two companies of the Pretoria Regiment and a few armoured cars from Diego Suarez on 29th September.

#### *Landing at Tamatave.*

It had been my original intention that the assault on Tamatave on the East coast should take place as the leading troops of the 22nd (E.A.) Infantry Brigade were approaching Tananarive from the West, but the delays caused by demolitions and road-blocks made it undesirable for the convoy and escort to wait for exact co-ordination. Landing was accordingly fixed for the early morning of 18th September.

The only means of landing at Tamatave being from inside the harbour, the original plan had required a bombardment to precede the landing. As a result of negligible opposition encountered at Majunga, and in a desire to save life and avoid destruction, Rear-Admiral Tennant and I agreed to endeavour to enforce surrender without recourse to bombardment.

When the convoy was off the town in the early hours of 18th September, wireless messages were sent calling for surrender. Later a Naval Officer approached the quay in a landing craft bearing a white flag to present terms. He was greeted by machine-gun fire. Ships' guns, of light calibre only, opened fire. After very few minutes, a white flag was hoisted on land and firing immediately ceased. Troops were landed and the town occupied without opposition. Little damage had been done by the naval bombardment. Port facilities at Tamatave were better than at Majunga and disembarkation proceeded quickly.

From Tamatave the troops pushed on by rail and road to Brickaville, and thence towards Tananarive, in the face of difficulties from road-blocks and demolitions but with practically no fighting.

#### *Entry into Tananarive.*

On the late afternoon of 23rd September, after an engagement at Mahitsy necessitating the employment of the whole of the leading battalion supported by artillery and armoured cars, 22nd (East African) Brigade entered Tananarive, which had been declared an open town. They were received enthusiastically by all classes of the population who cheered and threw flowers at the passing soldiers.

During the fourteen days since the first British soldier set foot on shore at Majunga to our entry into the capital, 360 miles distant, the same battalion group was in the lead; it comprised 1/1 (Nyasaland) King's African Rifles, 28 Field Battery, 9th Field Regiment R.A., and South African Armoured Cars, and was under Lieut.-Colonel J. McNab.

Patrols were at once sent southwards to maintain contact with the withdrawing French forces, and eastwards to gain touch with 29th Brigade. The latter was effected on 25th September.

#### *Events subsequent to the occupation of Tananarive.*

The distances covered in converging on the capital from the West and from the East had been a severe drain on our resources, especially petrol, of which less than fifty miles per vehicle remained; a short pause was necessary to consolidate our administrative arrangements before any further major move could be commenced.

Fortunately, the railway, with the serious exception of two adjacent bridges just north of Brickaville, was undamaged and in good condition, and a large proportion of the rolling-stock had fallen into our hands. This enabled me to transfer my base from Majunga with its poor harbour facilities, long road carry, and broken Betsiboka bridge, to Tamatave. From this new base troops and stores could be moved by rail to Tananarive in a comparatively short time with only the one break over the bridges destroyed near Brickaville. The construction of diversions to circumvent them was estimated at, and accomplished within, six weeks.

In addition to military considerations, the machinery of Government in the capital had to be restarted. Some of the officials, notably the Secretary-General, were unwilling to cooperate and had to be removed. In a few days a successor was found who carried the support of the heads of the Political, Economic and Financial departments, and a form of Government was set up which kept the administrative machine working. The knowledge and tact of my Chief Political Officer, Major-General Lord Rennell of Rodd, were responsible for effecting this solution.

On the 26th September I moved my Headquarters from Majunga to Tananarive and on the 11th October I handed over command to Major-General Smallwood, General Officer Commanding Islands Area, who was responsible on the spot for operations subsequent to that date.

#### *The Advance Southwards.*

At the end of September the advance South from Tananarive was resumed. Antsirabe was

occupied on 2nd October and Fianarantsoa on the 29th. A few engagements took place but again opposition was mainly from road-blocks and demolitions.

On 18th October what appeared to be serious opposition was encountered at Andriamanalina. 1/6 (Tanganyika) King's African Rifles made a twenty-four hour march, all on foot without any form of transport, to the rear of the enemy. 5th (Kenya) King's African Rifles moved similarly, but a shorter distance, to one flank. At dawn on 19th October these two battalions, with perfect timing and good execution, attacked, supported by fire from 20th Field Battery R.A. of 9th Field Regiment, and by 56th (Uganda) Field Battery, East African Artillery, the whole under command of Brigadier W. A. Dimoline, O.B.E., M.C. Seven hundred prisoners, two 75 mm. guns, one 20 mm. A.A. gun, 7 mortars and 16 heavy machine-guns were captured. Such was the effect of the artillery fire, and the attack from unexpected directions, that we suffered no casualties.

On 4th November, Monsieur Annet again sent a Plenipotentiary to obtain terms for an Armistice. Our terms, the same as had been offered on 17th September, were accepted. Hostilities ceased at 1400 hrs. on 5th November exactly eight weeks from the day, and 660 miles from the place, of landing at Majunga.

The casualties in 22nd (E.A.) Brigade Group were British officers 4 killed and 4 wounded, British other ranks 5 killed and 9 wounded, Africans 21 killed and 77 wounded.

Throughout the operations air support by bombing and reconnaissance was given by the Air Component under Colonel S. A. Melville, O.B.E., S.A.A.F., consisting of:—

Special Squadron Fleet Air Arm.

1433 Flight Royal Air Force.

16 Squadron South African Air Force.

For the landing at Majunga and Tamatave air cover and reconnaissance was provided by H.M.S. *Illustrious*.

On many days, especially in the second half of October and in November, weather was bad for flying with frequent thick, low cloud. Smoke-haze from countless grass fires hampered observation. The greater part of the Island was "inhospitable," offering few chances for a forced landing. Despite these difficulties the Air Component carried out all tasks asked of them with zeal and efficiency and gave effective support to the advancing troops. I am grateful to Colonel Melville and to the officers and men of the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and South African Air Force who took part.

#### PART VII.—CAPITULATION OF JIBOUTI.

At the end of the Italian East Africa campaign, French Somaliland still adhered to the Vichy Government, and the Port of Jibouti, the terminal of the Addis Ababa-Jibouti railway, could not be used by us.

In the Autumn of 1941, after negotiations had failed to persuade the Government of French Somaliland to give us port and rail facilities, a land and sea blockade was imposed. On the entry of Japan into the war in December the sea blockade was lifted. Jibouti was able to obtain food supplies by dhow from the Yemen, and by submarine and escorted ship from Madagascar. As a land blockade without a sea blockade was useless, that also was lifted.

The capitulation of the Vichy Forces in Madagascar caused much concern in Jibouti, but the attitude of the Government towards us did not change. The Allied landings in North Africa early in November still further disturbed opinion in French Somaliland. Towards the end of the month it became clear that a crisis was approaching, and on the 28th, Colonel Raynal, Commander of the 1st Battalion Tirailleurs Sengalais, with his Battalion and a large percentage of the artillery personnel of the garrison, crossed the frontier at Zeila and announced their adherence to the United Nations. The party, which amounted to nearly one-third of the garrison, brought with it personal arms and equipment.

On my visiting Harrar on 7th December I learnt that the American Consul from Aden had flown to Zeila the previous day, and had gone into Jibouti, on direct instructions from Washington, to examine and report on the situation.

The next few days were occupied by the authorities in Jibouti endeavouring to play off the Fighting French against ourselves, and either or both of us against a hinted commitment to the American Consul. These manoeuvres were dispelled by a visit to Aden where I met the Acting Governor, Senior Naval Officer, Air Officer Commanding, American Consul and Mr. Hopkinson who arrived opportunely, having been kindly sent by the Minister of State to help me in political discussions.

In the middle of December the Acting Governor of Jibouti, General Dupont, invited the British Military Commander to visit him to discuss the situation. Although the Fighting French were excluded from the invitation, I gave instructions, with specific safeguards regarding the Fighting French, to Major-General Fowkes to accept the invitation. On 17th December he and Mr. Hopkinson presented themselves at the Frontier and were conveyed by special train to Jibouti, where they were greeted with enthusiasm by the populace and accommodated at Government House.

No agreement was reached at the meeting, but an alternative proposal was put forward by General Dupont for an economic agreement with the United Nations. This was unacceptable. General Dupont was informed in clear terms that the only means of settlement was for French Somaliland to join the United Nations as part of the Fighting French. Our representatives returned to Harrar.

On 24th December, a further communication was received from General Dupont to the effect that it was impossible for him to negotiate with the Fighting French and he returned to his previous proposals for an economic agreement with representatives of the British and United States Governments. From this reply it was clear that more drastic steps were needed to resolve the situation. My instructions from the Chiefs of Staff were to the effect that all efforts short of serious bloodshed were to be

made to bring the Colony over to the Fighting French. I felt that this could best be done by continuing to present the facts of the case to the populace who had been misled regarding the true state of affairs. To this end leaflets were frequently dropped from the air.

At the same time I had to be prepared to face the possibility of armed resistance by those whose anti-Gaullist attitude in the past made them ready to go to any lengths for their own salvation. A display of overwhelming armed strength would make it clear that fighting was useless.

The two big bridges on the railway between the frontier station at Dauonle and the town of Jibouti were a further care. One was at Hol Hol, 30 miles inside the frontier, and the other at Chebele only 10 miles from the town of Jibouti. If either of these were destroyed, the railway would be out of action for the rest of the war.

Plans were laid for a Fighting French Force under Colonel Raynal to move into French Somaliland along the railway to secure these bridges, and at the same time try and rally the remaining garrison to their side.

Should this have failed to produce the required effect, and after a last appeal by pamphlet from the air, a naval and air demonstration off the town was arranged, concurrent with an advance of British troops into the Colony. All Services had strict instructions not to open fire unless first fired upon themselves by the French.

On 26th December, Colonel Raynal's Force moved in, and successfully seized the bridges, rallying various outlying garrisons on the way. On the 27th and 28th, a large party of the garrison came over to them, and at 1000 hours on the 28th, the Acting Governor sent a message asking for an interview with General Fowkes. The interview was held that night at Chebele in a railway coach, Monsieur Chancel, Free French Delegate in East Africa, being present. General Dupont signed an agreement whereby French Somaliland took her place as part of the Fighting French on the side of the Allied Nations. The anxieties of the last few days were terminated without bloodshed. Credit for this is due to Major-General Fowkes, Mr. Hopkinson and Monsieur Chancel. The resolution, patience and co-operation of Monsieur Chancel were remarkable and made a great contribution to our common cause.

On New Year's Day, 1943, General de Division P. Legentilhomme, immediately on his arrival in East Africa as High Commissioner for the French Possessions in the Indian Ocean, visited Jibouti where he was received by a guard of honour and carried out a formal inspection of the troops. I accompanied him on this visit, and a week later at Tananarive handed over to him responsibility for the administration of Madagascar, less the defended area at and around Diego Suarez, with due ceremony and in an atmosphere of friendship and collaboration.

LONDON

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE

To be purchased directly from H.M. STATIONERY OFFICE at the following addresses:  
 York House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2; 13a Castle Street, Edinburgh 2;  
 39-41 King Street, Manchester 2; 1 St. Andrew's Crescent, Cardiff;  
 80 Chichester Street, Belfast;  
 or through any bookseller

1946

Price Sixpence net

S.O. Code No. 65-37655