

A Belgian military field radio station in Ethiopia.

and agriculturally rich neighboring plateau, the gate of which is the city of Gambela.

Everything depended upon a single Belgian battalion moving fast and intact around three sides of a Sudanese desert square bounded on the east by the White Nile, on the west by Ethiopia and advancing still further eastward along the torrid road to Gambela in time to prevent the Italian General Pietro Gazzera, now alarmed by the fate of Asosa, from striking first along the same road into the Sudan.

The battalion, composed of 700 men and about 400 porters, made the 800 mile journey through country where the temperature ranged constantly above 100 degrees in 11 days. This meant 11 days of the severest hardship for men alternately buffeted brutally in trucks, then forced to descend to heave them from the sand.

Gambela stormed

The Italians defended Gambela bitterly. They knew that if they lost the village they would be forced to retreat up into the mountain stronghold of Saio where General Pietro Gazzera, Mussolini's former war minister, had established his headquarters.

To storm Gambela, the Belgians, fatigued by their 800-mile, 11-day journey from Asosa, had to make a frontal attack on the village. The Italians had placed machine guns under sycamore trees along the river, making an attack by water impossible.

A second line of eight machine guns covered the road from the Sudanese desert as far as the "Sugarloaf", a 300-

foot, conical hill. The flanks of the peak were ringed by Italian machine guns.

The Belgians sent Congo infantrymen creeping through the brush, led by a white officer. They silenced the machine guns on the river and then prepared to handle Sugarloaf.

The Congolese asked to charge the sides of Sugarloaf with bayonets. They wiped out the machine-gun nests.

The Belgians lost three infantrymen killed and 15 Congolese wounded. The Belgian losses increased the next day, when two Caproni bombers destroyed several buildings.

The Italians refused to tell their casualties, but numerous Italian bodies were found unburied in the streets of Gambela.

After the Belgian battalion took Gambela, the Italians retreated by mountain road to Saio, in orderly retirement, well defended.

Exhausted and suffering almost to a man from dysentery, the Belgian battalion settled down to hold Gambela against the Italians behind them. The Belgians were alone between the hostile Ethiopian rampart and the Sudanese plain, without either artillery or aircraft.

The battles of the Bortai

However, the African radio brought the news that another battalion was en route across the Sudanese plains and a third battalion was assembling at Faradje, in northeastern Congo, preparing to dare the same journey across Africa.

Soon, the Belgian Congo forces started up the 40-mile road toward Saio, 4,000 feet above them. On the plateau a torrent called the Brotai, crossing the road at a right angle, was the first natural defense of the Italians.

In the first battle of the Bortai, April 15, the Belgians lost two valuable officers. Lieut. Simonet, scouting alone between the lines, stumbled into an Italian ambush and was killed. Sergt. Dorgeo, a former Foreign Legionnaire, who had arrived in the Congo after escaping from Narvik, was unfamiliar with his surroundings. He was surprised by three Italian officers who emerged from the brush holding up their hands and shouting "We are English." Not sure that the King's African Rifles, supposedly at Ghidami, 50 miles to the north, might not have sent a liaison party to the Bortai, the Belgian officer lowered his revolver. He was mowed down by Italian snipers in the bush. In the ensuing fight the Belgians lost a native corporal and four soldiers. But three Italians and 40 Eritreans were killed and 70 wounded.

During the first struggles at the Bortai, the Belgians learned to respect the Italian spotting system. The Italians posted an observer in a tree with a sniper. A squad of infantrymen hid around the tree as a guard.

But the artillery barrages following the Italian observations were often wastefully long. Usually the Italians continued pounding with 77's more than an hour after the Belgian patrols had stolen back to their own lines.

The Italians took full advantage of their superior positions and armament nine days later. After a two-hour bar-

rage they attacked. It was the first time the men from the Congo had heard the terrible concert of modern gun fire in full chorus.

Using machine guns, automatic rifles, baby machine guns and hand grenades, squads of Eritreans with Galla snipers filtered through the Belgian left and right.

One of the heroes of the unequal struggle was a Congolese porter who rushed unarmed into the gunfire to aid two radio operators. He rescued their apparatus intact. Belgian officers often were saved by their men.

The Belgians were forced to withdraw beyond a pair of hills that screened them from view. Lieut.-Colonel Van der Meersch's battalion bore the brunt of this battle.

Rations dwindle

Following the two battles of the Bortai, the Belgian situation in the rear became critical because of weather conditions and a break in the slender line of trans-Sudanese communications.

While the Italian troops ate plentifully on their highland gardens the Belgians between Bortai brook and Gambela were on half rations. The heat mounted to 110 degrees in the shade. Clouds of mosquitoes rose from the plain.

The Gambela airdrome, whose single hangar still bears the ironical words, "Roma Doma"—"Rome is master"—was

too small for food-carrying planes. Small amounts could be dropped from the skies, but it was impossible to feed 2,500 men in this way.

Lieut.-Colonel Leopold Dronkers Martens, a small man known for his exceptional ability to absorb tropical heat, was hard-tested to hold the situation together.

The Belgian hospital motorcade and a company of engineers were trapped by rains in the swamps between Gambela and the White Nile port of Malakal. They remained there nearly two months, and were fed exclusively by planes.

Several porters obliged to carry food to the front lines, 40 miles away on a cold rainy plateau, died from undernourishment and fatigue. The officers, living on canned beef and rice, were also affected.

The food supply fell so low that the officers took the camouflage nets covering the trucks and seined the river for fish.

The month of May, when no fighting took place, was the most difficult and tragic for the Belgian Force Publique. Beriberi broke out.

In the first days of June, however, reinforcements and food came from the Congo via the White Nile and it was decided to try and cut off Saio from the city of Mogi which

The Saio heights where severe fighting took place between the Congo forces and the Italians.



commanded the supply line of General Gazzera's army of 8,000 men.

Mozi is surrounded

The Belgians had only 2,000 men and in order to hold the Bortai front, they could only spare 250 men for the attack on Mozi. It was necessary for these men to descend again from the plateau and to launch an attack from Gambela.

From Gambela it was a two-day climb upon all fours by mountain goat path to the Mogi positions. It required another day for each porter to descend. The maximum burden the most courageous black bearers from the Congolese jungle could carry upon their heads under such conditions was 35 pounds each. Nine of this was food eaten by themselves en route.

The bearer's legs were cut by the razor-sharp elephant grass, their bodies weakened by dysentery and malnutrition. Porters with strange Congolese names like Katanobo, Bungamuizi, Kabome and Sawila were cited in orders of the day for bravery and endurance.

The Belgians under the command of Captain Pierre Bounameau, attacked on June 9 but the Italian garrison held their well fortified position stoutly. Perceiving that Mogi could be taken only at heavy cost the Belgians dug

in around the town and sent patrols to ambush the road to Saio along which Italian food was being carried.

Lieut.-Colonel Leopold Dronkers Martens gave orders that the Belgians should increase their patrol activities upon the Saio plateau to make the Italians believe that they were facing superior forces.

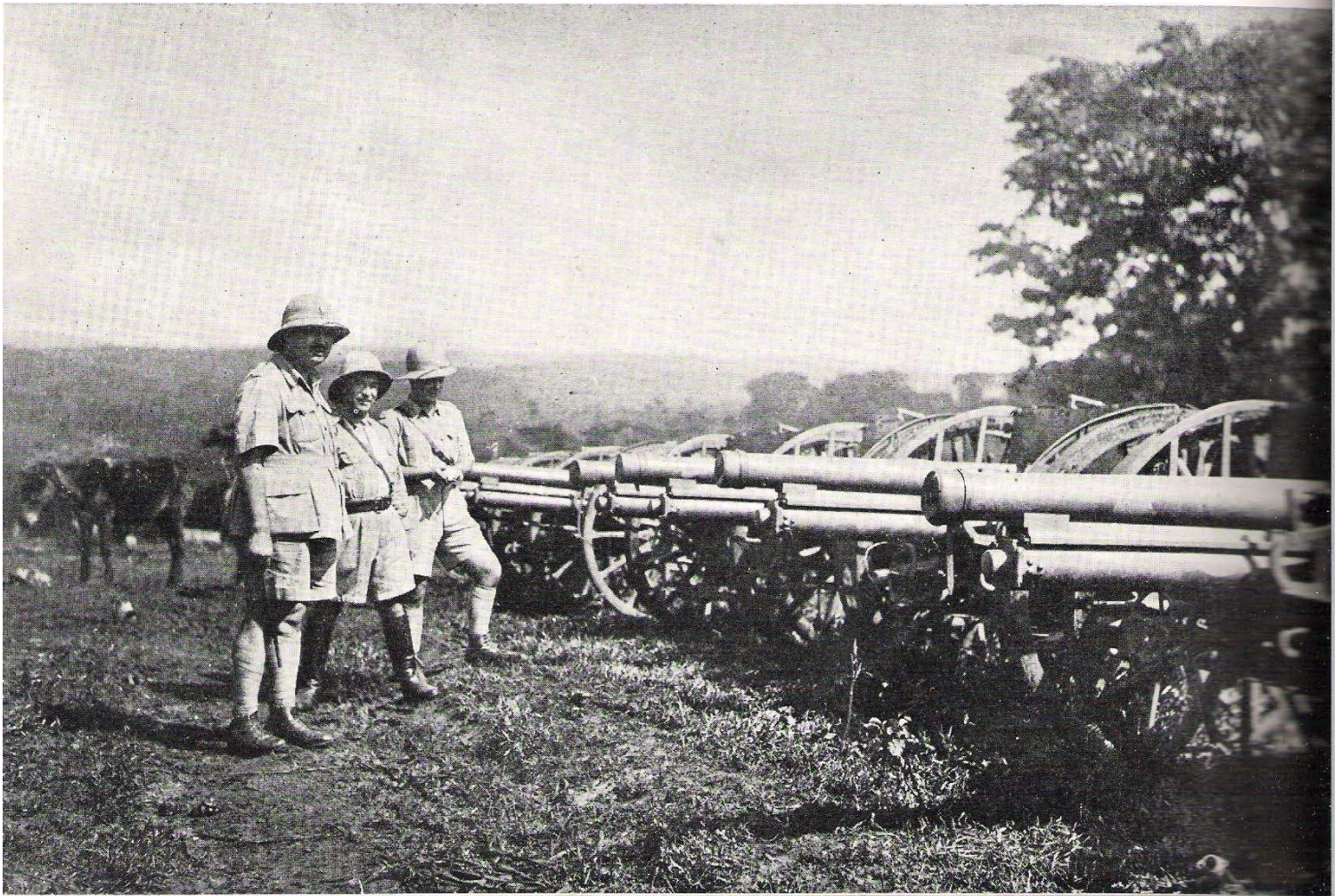
The Belgians used a ruse familiar to American pioneers in fighting the Indians. Frequently they moved their cannon and machine guns even before the Italian artillery found their range in order to give the impression of multiple points of fire. Meantime the alarmed General Gazzera tripled the Mogi garrison.

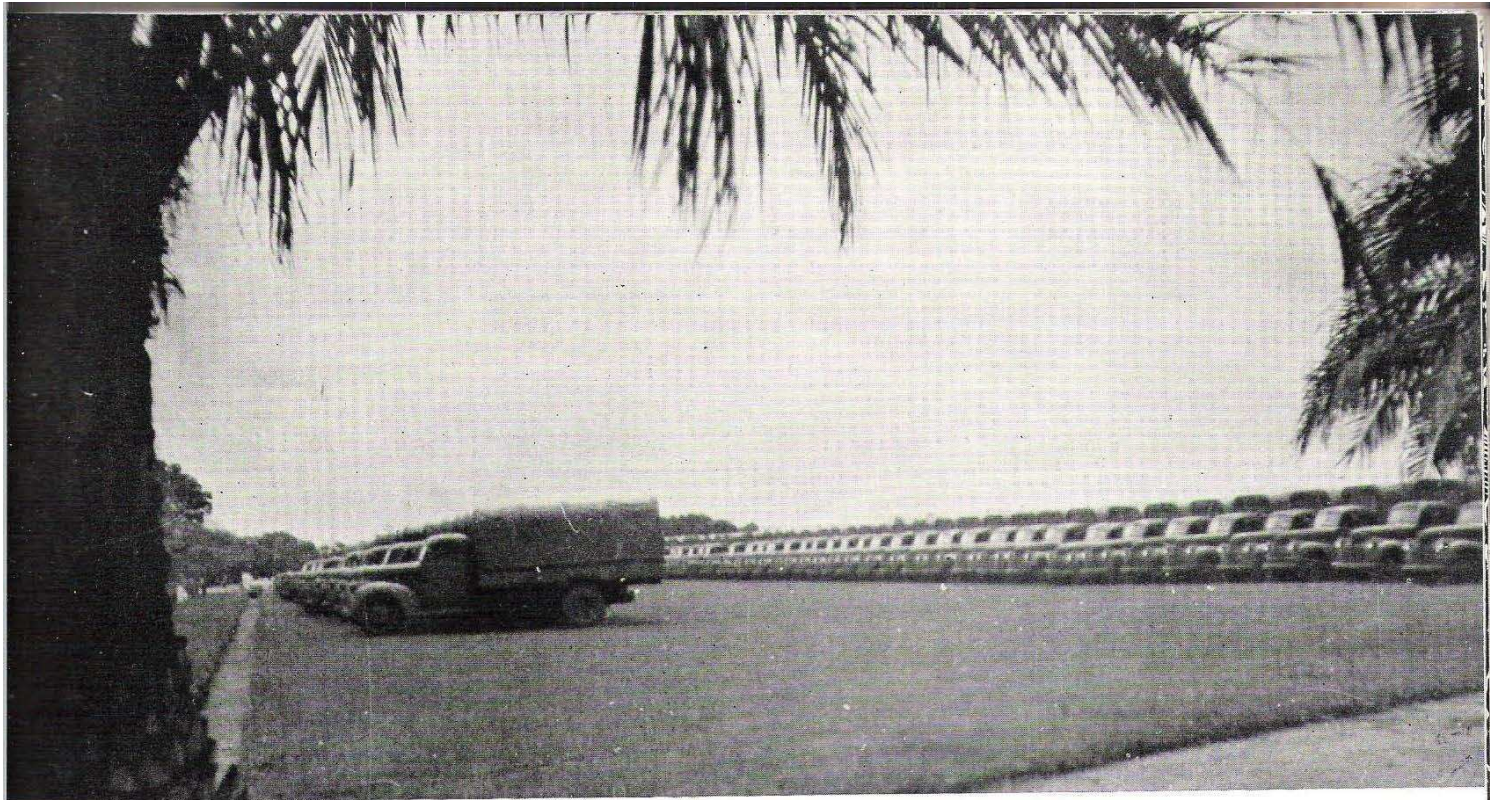
As the Belgians grew bolder the Italians grew more discreet. The South African Air Force began to send daily patrols of three Fairey-Hartebeest biplanes which bombed Saio and machine gunned the roads.

Then Major-General Auguste Gilliaert arrived from the Congo. It was decided that the plan for taking Mogi should be dropped and the meager forces entirely concentrated upon General Gazzera's headquarters at Saio.

The 3,500 Italian troops occupying Saio Heights alone outnumbered the total Belgian forces. The Fascists also had the 45th, 181st, 187th and 188th battalions of Eritreans whose battle pennons were covered with honors conferred by Mussolini. Moreover, the Italian officers and

Some of the booty taken by the Congo forces after the Saio victory.





Belgian Congo trucks used for the transport of the forces which smashed the Italians.

men retreating from Addis Ababa and Jimmi under British pressure were coming daily into Saio.

The surrender of Saio

On July 1, the British radioed the Belgians that they had cut the 450-mile long Saio-Addis Ababa road at the Midessa River, 25 miles west from Lechenti and about 200 miles from Haile Selassie's capital. Then General Gilliaert prepared to close the mouth of the Belgian bag into which the Italians were streaming, but the offensive was a dangerous gamble because the Italians were better armed and fed, held superior positions with more fire power, and outnumbered the three Belgian battalions three and four to one.

At dawn, on July 3 the Belgian advanced posts opened fire and half an hour later all the batteries of artillery entered into action. The Italians replied with the full intensity of their superior cannonading power.

The battalion under Major Duperoux went forward with orders to take the two dumpling hills flanking each side of the road. The Italians had gained the hills in the second battle of the Bortai in April. Duperoux's men crept through the brush and high grass for the dumplings which were heavily infested with machine-guns.

The battalion in reserve, commanded by Major Boniface Robyn, crawled forward behind Duperoux's left. Simultaneously General Gilliaert sent the third battalion under Lieut.-Colonel Edmond Van der Meersch upon assignment that was the key to the entire operation: a long, swinging movement around the right, through grass higher than a

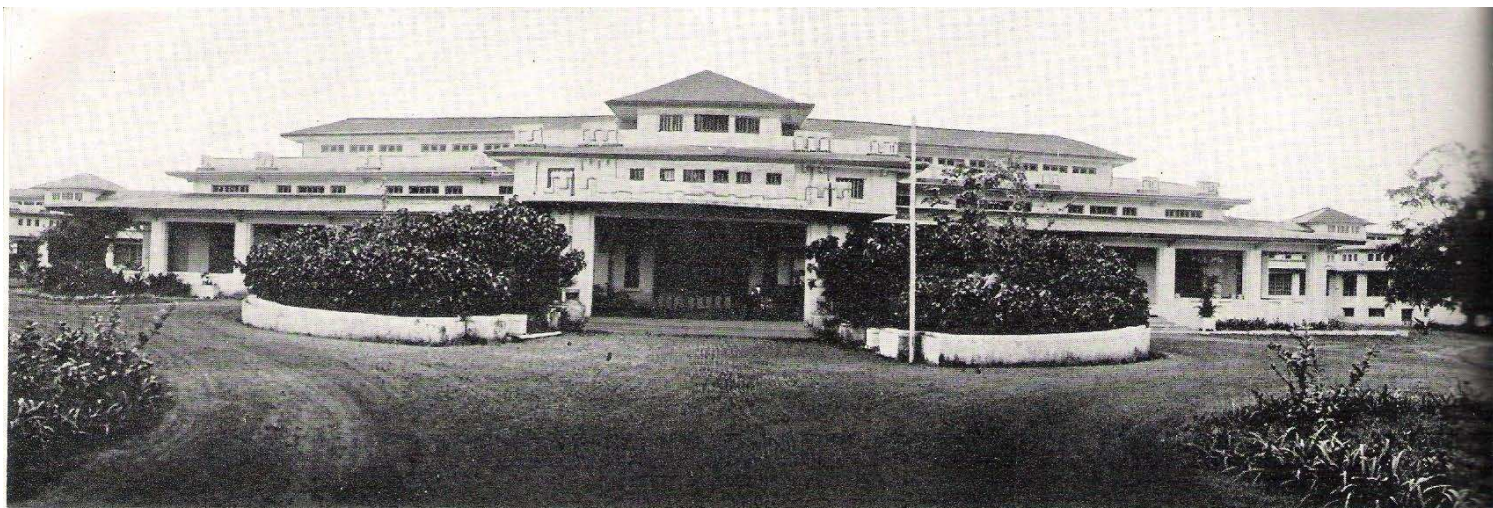
man and along a goat path that had been carefully plotted by scouting parties over a fortnight.

The entire surprise operation was successful. The Italians, after falling back from the two dumplings found themselves flanked upon their left by Colonel Van der Meersch's forces and unable to hold the ravine of the Bortai between the dumpling and the Italian secondary line of fortifications strung across the top of Saio Mountain. They melted away down hill toward the Sudanese plain upon their right. They dared not use the road for direct retreat for it was under continuous Belgian artillery fire.

At 1:40 p.m., the encircling battalion was preparing an assault upon the Italian heights. But, at that very moment, two motorcars bearing white flags were seen descending the serpentine road toward the Belgian positions. In the cars were General Gazzera's chief of staff and other high officers bringing an offer of surrender. General Gilliaert met them in front of the Belgian side of the Bortai.

Vastly outnumbered by the Italians, even after surrender, the Belgians were hard put to handle 15,000 prisoners in the whole province of Galla Sidamo. At Saio alone nine generals, 370 lesser officers, 2,575 Italians and 3,500 native soldiers surrendered to the Congolese force which, with 2,000 porters, totaled hardly 5,000 men.

Belgian deaths were 462 men, both white and black, four-fifths of them dying of disease. The Italians probably lost about three times as many, although casualty figures are not available.



One of the Congo hospitals for Europeans.

The Fight against Epidemics

The official health service of the Belgian Congo includes both clinics and prophylactic centers organized by the colonial government and completely covered in its budget.

Besides the government medical service, a number of private clinics also give medical services. Among these medical services, some are independent, others are subsidized by the government.

The medical personnel of the Official Health Service is part European and part native.

The active European personnel consists of nine medical directors, six laboratory technicians, six hygienists, 125 visiting physicians, three pharmacists, 145 sanitary inspectors and lay nurses and 127 nun nurses.

The native auxiliary personnel comprises 312 units: graduate nurses (from government schools), practical nurses, sanitary inspectors and midwives.

The stations include analysis and research laboratories, dispensaries for the treatment of movable invalids, and separate hospitals for white and black in every important center. There are certain specialized hospital units for natives such as the isolation hospitals for sleeping sickness, tuber-

culosis and leprosy. Pharmaceutical laboratories and hygiene offices in the towns and ports, as well as stores and warehouses, complete the medical set-up.

Besides these facilities, the itinerant missions, which are in fact medical camps, should be mentioned. Their job is to travel throughout the part of the country assigned to them and methodically to fight the epidemics and endemics which sweep through the native population. Their center of activity is the little dispensary maintained by the tribal chief.

Native brigades, also under the direction of a medical doctor, do the work necessary to safeguard public health in the big cities and ports.

On the average, 17,000 white and about 1,000,000 colored people are treated annually. Private organizations treat an average of 1,100,000 colored people.

Moreover, government doctors and private organizations examine 5,034,442 natives for sleeping sickness. The official medical services spend about two million dollars a year.

Besides the Colonial Health Service mention should be

Hospital for natives at Leopoldville.

