

two months, due to the impassable roads and ebb conditions on the tributaries of the White Nile, the Congolese troops were cut off from supplies. Their condition was continuously more precarious than that of their antagonists.

Weather traps U. S. trucks

How formidable natural barriers here can be is illustrated by a cavalcade of American-manufactured Belgian trucks, bearing prisoners to Addis Ababa, which is today trapped by weather conditions in the mountains and will not be able to return until the dry season turns mud into dust. The Italian-built network of smooth autostrade ends more than 300 miles from the Province of Galla Sidamo.

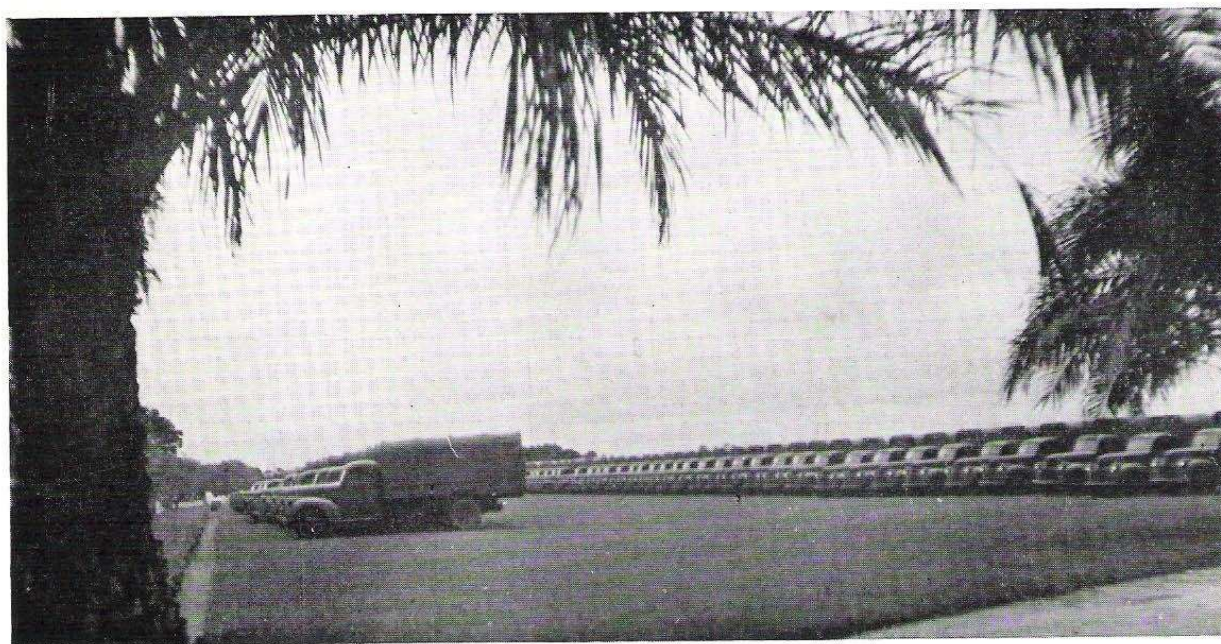
Risks of taking the Congolese defense force upon a trans-African expedition several times as long as any similar caravan ever had attempted, and through virtually uninhabited country, were closely studied and warmly discussed before hand. Gov.-Gen. Pierre Ryckmans and Lt.-Gen. Paul Ermens, commander-in-chief, took part in the discussions with the South African and British military missions in Léopoldville.

Act at opportune moment

Suggestions a year ago that Italy should be attacked were considered premature. The Congolese army, organized chiefly as a colonial constabulary, was considered to have defense obligations of greater importance as long as Germany's intentions toward Portuguese Angola, the Congo's neighbor to the south, and the extent of Vichy influence in French Equatorial Africa, the Congo's neighbor to the north, remained undefined.

When the de Gaullist putsches in the Moyen Congo, Gabon, Ubangi-Shari colonies and the Chad territory (all in French Equatorial Africa) ended the uncertainty on the northern frontier, and Germany's drive into the Balkans made the possibility of her seizing Portugal more remote, the Congo's war staff and the refugee cabinet in London judged the moment opportune.

Tractors for Ethiopian expedition





Coastal defenses of Belgian Congo

Mussolini's forces had deeply indented the British in Kenya and there was the possibility that they might attempt to seize Sudanese air bases along the White Nile, severing Africa horizontally and preventing American arms from reaching the Middle East.

Italian bombing planes had begun using Belgian fields in Europe for take-offs against England and a Belgian steamer had been sunk by an Italian submarine. Gov.-Gen. Ryckmans' proclamation on November 25, that a state of war existed between Italy and the Congo, was the signal for launching the counter-invasion of Ethiopia which developed rapidly after the Sudan frontier was crossed on February 2.

A dangerous maneuver

The heroic progress of the trans-African campaign has been curtained in secrecy not only for military reasons but because, from the time the campaign opened, Congolese troops were inaccessible. Foreign correspondents following the South African army's progress around Asmara, Eritrea, or northward from Mogadiscio, Italian Somaliland, were separated from the Belgians by the Italian lines.

2. A sick army beats disease to win a battle

BEFORE reaching the Ethiopian rampart held by Italian troops, Belgian colonials from the Congo had to hold together an armed column of trucks carrying soldiers, porters and munitions 1,400 miles across almost uninhabitable country. The first aim of the attack was Asosa in the region drained by the Blue Nile, about 300 miles north of the Italian headquarters at Saio.

Starting from Watsa, in northeastern Congo, the first battalion to depart climbed slowly out of the Congo watershed, whose crest is marked by the Congo-Sudanese frontier, and

descended by way of Yei to Juba, head of navigation of the White Nile. En route the troops pitched camp in the region where the aging Theodore Roosevelt came before the great war for his last shooting expedition; where the scarce white rhinoceros still hides and giraffes and elephants abound.

At Juba, with the burning bowl of the Sudanese plain before them, the column turned northward along the White Nile, then still in the dry season. River boats, with the current favorable, brought them in five days to Malakal where dwell the strange, long-legged Shilluk people, a cattle-keeping tribe of extremely thin physique who wear tan, knee-length tunics. When the clothespole Shilluks first saw the sons of Congo cannibals, with their sharpened teeth and tattoo-corrugated faces, it was difficult to say which were the more surprised.

Belgians push to aid British

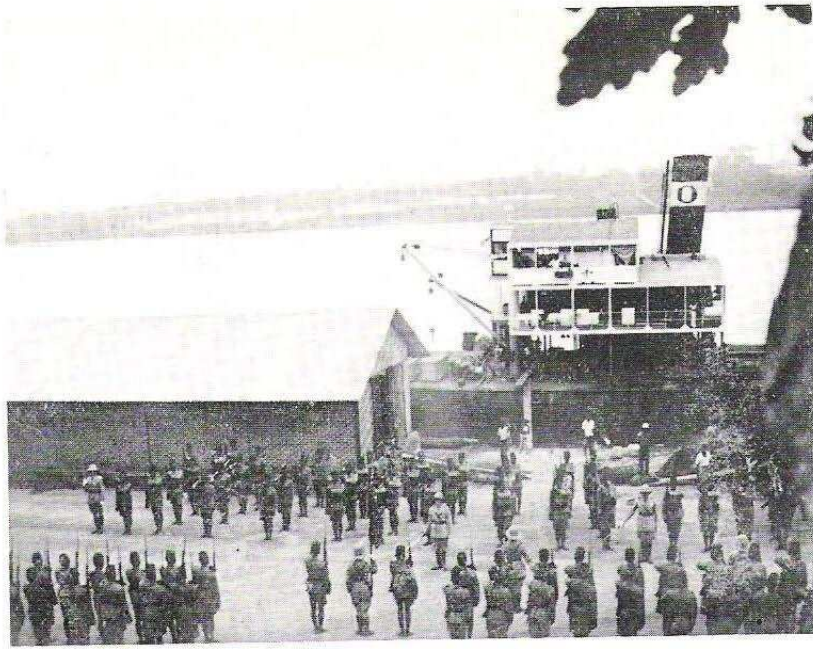
At Melut the column turned eastward, pushing their American trucks through two days of blistering, waterless desert to Kurmuk. Maj. Isidore Herbiet, known to his battalion as Tata—meaning father—prepared for attack upon Asosa. The King's African Rifles, consisting of natives from East Africa, commanded by Col. William Johnson, were already moving into line at Asosa and awaited Belgian help.

Asosa, also called Bari Cossa, is located in a depression surrounded by hills and possesses barracks, a radio station, a hospital and an airdrome. It required three days for the battalion, with sweating porters carrying machine guns upon their heads, to mount from Kurmuk, Sudanese border town, to positions outside Asosa, which is over 5,000 feet in altitude.

The combined attack of the Congolese troops and the King's African Rifles began on March 11, just six weeks after the Belgians left the Congo. The Italians were too completely taken by surprise to meet the combined thrusts. They abandoned Asosa, pushing southward to

Fusileers leaving for the front





Colonial troops embarking for the Sudan

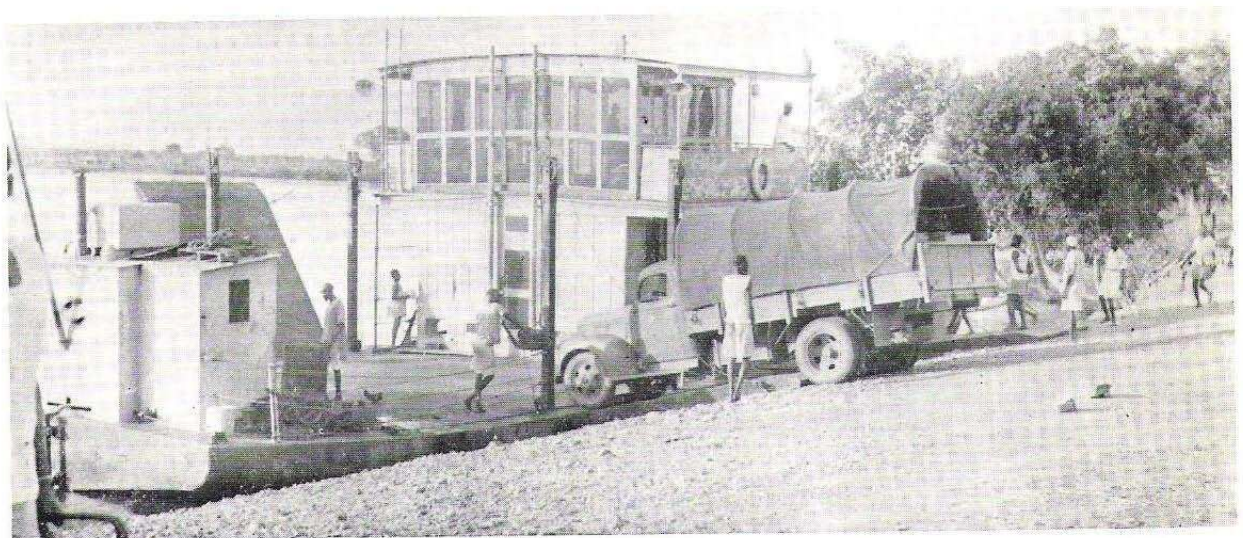
and grassy Sudanese lowland, where days were hot and windless and nights chilly and breezy.

Pattern of strategy is set

Asosa's fall set the pattern for the eventual allied campaign in western Ethiopia, whereby the British thrust against the headwaters of the Blue Nile became part of a general conflux of forces from Kenya to the Red Sea, all tending to thrust toward Addis Ababa and leave the Sudanese doorway held by the Belgians as the only available Italian refuge and stronghold.

In the broad conception which Gen. Sir Archibald P. Wavell, then chief of the British Middle East Command, had of the campaign, the Belgians were the anvil and assorted Scot, South African, Gold Coast, Nigerian and Ethiopian "patriotic" troops were the hammers. The central system of autostrade centering around Addis Ababa eventually began to work like a

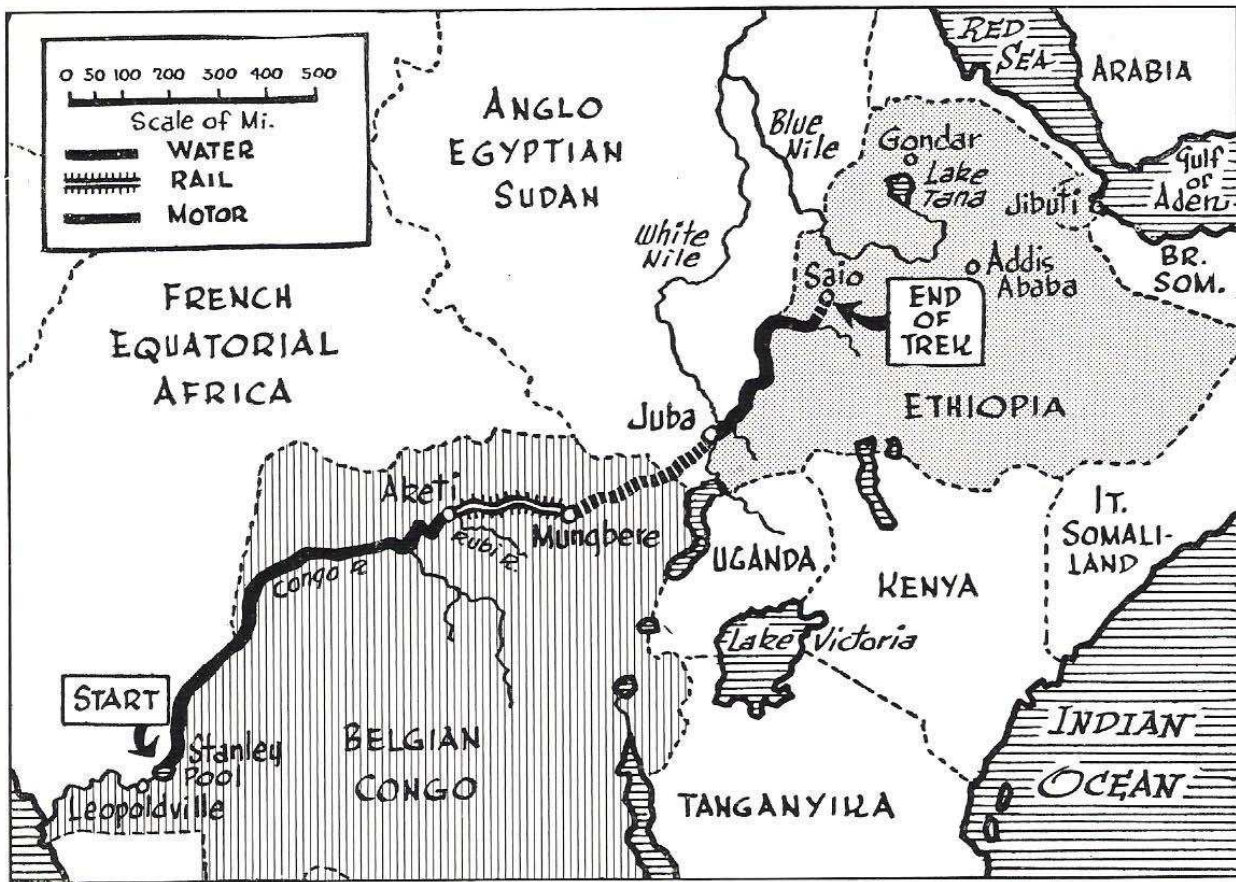
Loading trucks in a Sudanese port for shipment to the Ethiopian front



join their next garrison along the Ethiopian massif at Ghidami, 120 miles distant.

The Belgian losses were chiefly through bacillic dysentery, whose mortality is 30 per cent, and amoebic dysentery, whose death rate is 5 per cent. Sudden changes of climate worked devastatingly upon the Congolese porters, who also suffered from pulmonary diseases caused by exposure aboard the double-decker Nile barges. Accustomed to the warm, damp nights of the humid Congo basin, they caught bronchitis and pneumonia due to climate changes in the parched

MAP OF THE ETHIOPIAN EXPEDITION



NEW SAGA OUT OF DEEPEST AFRICA has been written by a tiny Belgian force which traveled 2,500 miles across the continent to attack the Italians in Ethiopia from the west. Transported by twelve 10-ton barges and a 33-foot baby tug, the troops started from Stanley Pool just above Léopoldville and went 1,000 miles up the Congo through jungle swamps to the narrow gauge railroad which starts at Aketi. From Aketi, the midget navy rode on flatcars 450 miles to the railhead at Mungbere. Thence it motored 400 miles to Juba on the White Nile where it was relaunched.

The rest of the journey across the Sudan's wastes was by the turbulent waters of the White Nile and its tributaries to the foothills of Ethiopia, where Italian strongholds were stormed.