

funnel dumping fleeing Italian officers and Eritrean subalterns down a chute which fed eastward and southeastward into the Nilobic valleys of the Baro and Sobat rivers.

At Asosa the Belgians discovered porters who receive wages of 1 franc (about 2½ cents), the same amount that second-class infantrymen would have spent on sandals from the Congo. The terrific heat of the Ethiopian paths had burned their bare, calloused feet nearly to the bone.

Asosa finished with virtually no losses except by disease. The battalion was given the far harder task of doubling back across the Sudanese desert to the Nile port of Melut, a distance of about 225 miles, ascending the river to the point where it meets the Sobat at Malakal, then doubling back eastward again parallel to the Sobat and Baro rivers, 275 miles to the Ethiopian foothills to close the open mouth of the bag. The Italians had already killed the single Englishman guarding the Sudanese highway frontier post in this utterly lonely land of yellowed grass

and mosquito-infested swamp.

The camouflage complete



Italian raid on Sudan feared

There was the growing danger in this period of the campaign, when the Italians were still strong and well organized, that the withdrawal into western Ethiopia, which in general was orderly, might abruptly turn into a dangerous attack upon British



Camouflaging a truck in Ethiopia

positions in the Sudan. At almost all points the Italians were better armed and more amply provisioned than any allied troops.

Had they been able to repeat the Belgian maneuver in the reverse direction and cross the burning Sudanese plain to the big airdrome beside the Nile at Malakal there was the prospect that the British might have to withdraw troops from the Libyan front, where the Germans were making themselves sharply felt, in order to hold the Sudanese rear.

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 Italian Gen. 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.

Throughout the journey the Belgian commanders knew that the battalion could not hope to enter the first habitable place, Gambela, at the foot of the Ethiopian mountain rampart below Saio without fighting for a foothold. Lacking air protection of any kind, they were completely exposed to reconnoitering Italian planes.

Duce's legions halt British

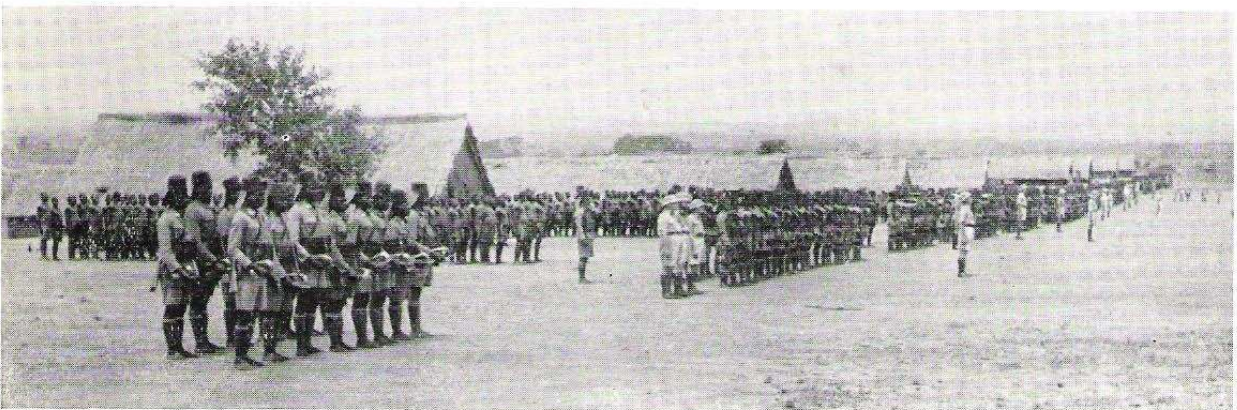
The King's African Rifles who had elected to try to force the Italians southward from Asosa toward Ghidami, along 120 miles of ravines of Italian highland, were in the meantime halted by Gen. Gazzera. It was unmistakable to the Belgians that the Italians were planning, if not to strike at the Sudan immediately, to summon all their energies for a bitter defense of Saio's natural fortress and agriculturally rich neighboring plateau.

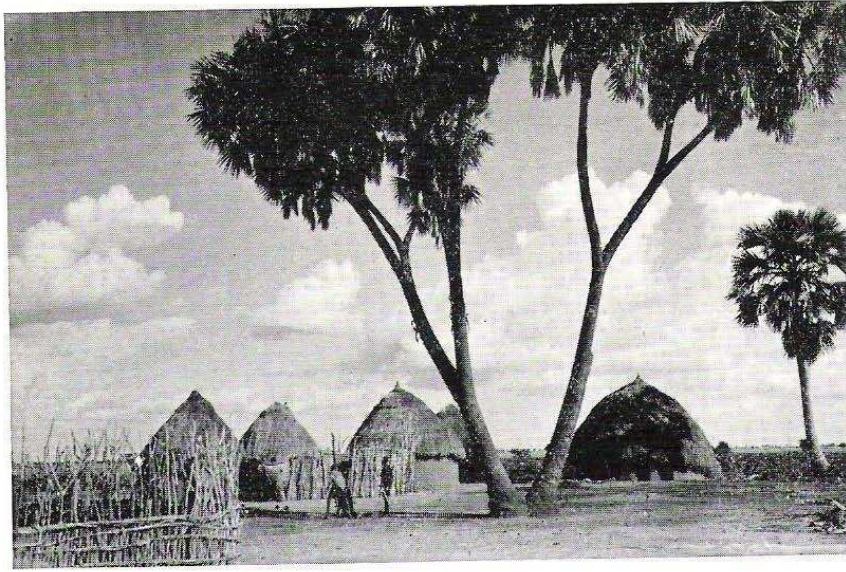
Besides having ample munitions, an excellent system of trenches and artillery emplacements and a first-hand knowledge of the country, the Italians had selected in the Saio base one of the few areas in Ethiopia capable of supporting a colonial army living upon the land.

Although the harsh Sudanese swamp lies below Ethiopia's high back doorstep, the mountains themselves are comparable only to Switzerland for green fertility. Here is the same rich, reddish soil which, passing down the Baro and Sobat rivers into the White Nile, helps furnish lower Egypt every floodtime with virginal top soil.

Native Gallas, although despised by Ethiopia's ruling Amharites because they are second-

Troop inspection in a Sudanese village behind the front





Sudanese village on the plains

rate warriors, are excellent farmers and cattlemen, and from the writer's window standing corn rivaling Iowa's can be seen in dozens of upland pastures. Galla Sidamo is the storehouse of western Ethiopia. It was in the pantry of Saio whose door is Gambela at the mountain's feet that the Italians pressed by the vanguard of Belgian forces, gathered to combine defense with the Duke of Aosta's resistance in the central plateau.

3. First assault after African trek

GAMBELA, marking the head of navigation upon the tributaries of the White Nile, lies where the Sobat River emerges from the Ethiopian mountains into the Sudanese plain, about 40 miles and 4,000 feet below the Italians' headquarters at Saio. Today its dusty little square beside the 200-foot-wide river is lined with Italian motor vehicles, fast little Fiat campaign cars beside seven-ton Lancia trucks.

On the Lancias are painted designations like "Gruppo Motorizzata di Harar" ("Motorized Unit of Harar"), showing the distance that the Italians had retreated across Ethiopia when striving for a final punch against the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. The single battalion of Belgians forestalled the blow.

Keep 80 Italian drivers

Belgian subalterns, some with experience at Narvik in the French Foreign Legion, sleep on cots in these Italian trucks, like American long-haul drivers. By day they watch 80 Italian drivers temporarily saved from the British prison camp at Jubdo because they alone know the secret of the Lancia's eight changes of gearshift.

The Italian chauffeurs are thankful that their knowledge has saved them from crossing Ethiopia as prisoners of the Ethiopian guerrilla patriots, whose notion of squaring old accounts is mutilation.

They are being paid wages plus living expenses, in accordance with international law and appear happy that their war is over.

Defended the town bitterly

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 Gen. Pietro Gazzera, Mussolini's former war minister, had established his headquarters.

Furthermore, an Italian offensive against the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan had been planned, for possession of a chain of airdromes along the White Nile and aiming at cutting off of the West African sources of American supplies.



Setting up machine guns

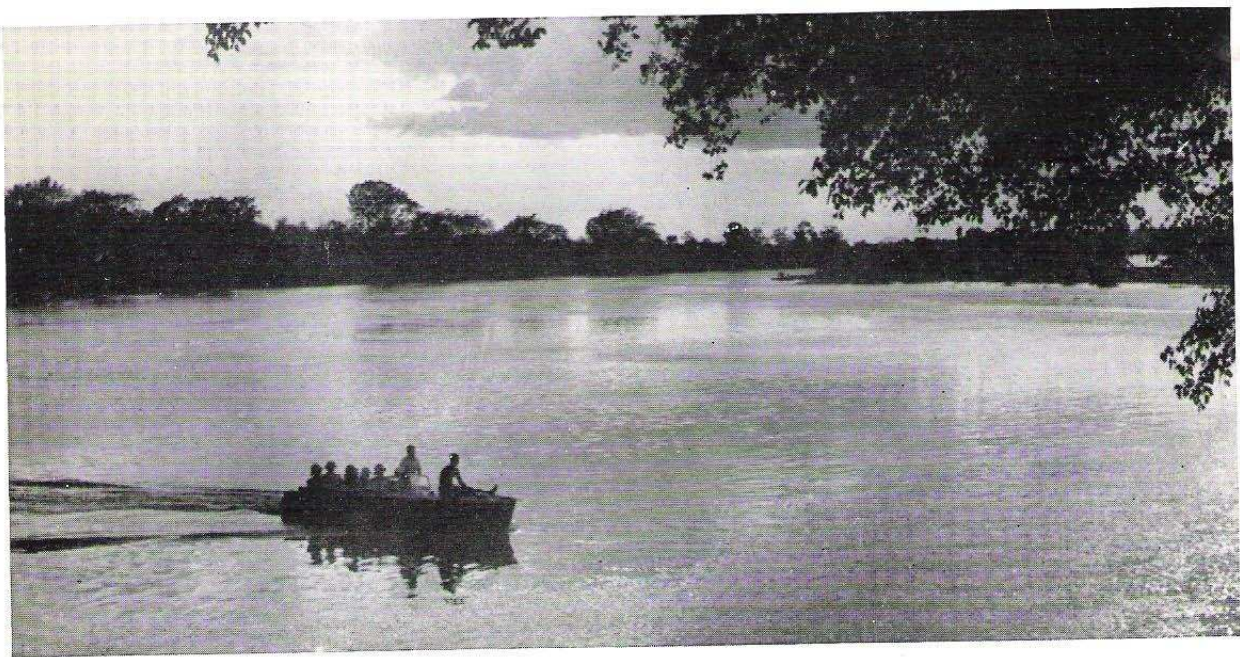
If this drive had been launched by Gen. Gazzera, Gambela was the only point whence either a motorized or river expedition could start. As long as Gen. Gazzera held Gambela, he knew he might be able to take the offensive. But if the Belgians were able to win Gambela, the Italian position would become defensive only, and the Fascists would be walled inside Ethiopia.

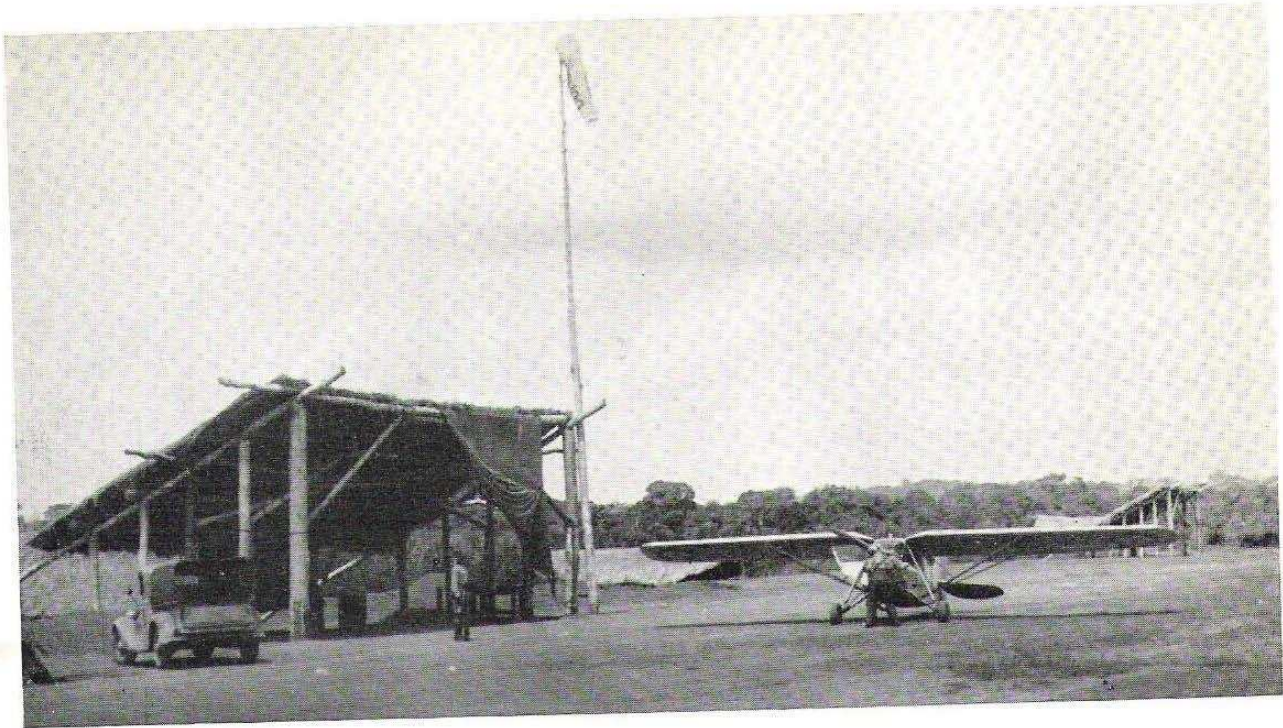
A little British spot

Gambela is barely large enough to support its country store, full of tin pans and cheap candy beads, operated by an Ethiopian Greek.

However, several one-story barracks and a radio station near the Baro River show that England has understood Gambela's political importance. Here, many miles inside the Ethiopian frontier, the British flag floats overhead. The Sudanese policemen—recruited from the tall, cranelike Shilluk people—defend this tiny British possession.

Commander-in-Chief crossing the River Baro near Gambela





Liaison plane in an Ethiopian airport

The British had obtained from Haile Selassie a territorial concession here only the size of an American city block. This outpost of empire serves as an excellent listening post for politics along the Ethiopian watershed and is legally as British as Hyde Park. Curiously, the Italians had allowed Maj. John Morris, who has been with the Gambela concession for 16 years, to remain with the garrison of Sudanese constabulary.

Maj. Morris is a tall, blonde Briton in his late 50's. He spent several rough and tumble years in the western United States before America became too tame for his taste. His friendship with the Duke of Aosta in prewar years was rewarded when Aosta, then Italy's viceroy, sent a private message to "Little England" in Gambela warning that a declaration of war by Mussolini was impending. This enabled Maj. Morris to escape to Nasir in the Sudan. Aosta, now a British prisoner, also gave orders that the Gambela territory should be respected regardless of the war situation.

Three months after the Belgians gained Gambela, Aosta was himself a prisoner in the same Sudanese resthouse at Malakal where Maj. Morris proceeded for refuge after receiving Aosta's warning. When Maj. Morris returned to Gambela he found everything intact.

The attack on Gambela

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.

'Meat-Meats' alarm foe

The Italians had called the Belgians' Congo tribesmen, "Niam-Niams." "Niam" means