

meat, and a "Meat Meat" is a black so meat-hungry that he is a cannibal. Although he used Gallas and Amharites officered by Eritreans, Gen. Gazzera called the Belgians' use of "Niam-Niams" barbarous.

Aware of the Italians' worries about the Congo appetites, the Congolese asked to charge the sides of Sugarloaf with bayonets. They wiped out the machine-gun nests.

The Belgians lost three infantrymen killed, plus three white officers 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 here.

Belgians hold against foe

After the Belgian battalion took Gambela, the Italians retreated by mountain road 4,000 feet to Saio, in orderly retirement, well defended.

Belgian officers here pay tribute to the fighting qualities of the younger Italian officers and particularly the Askari subalterns from Eritrea.

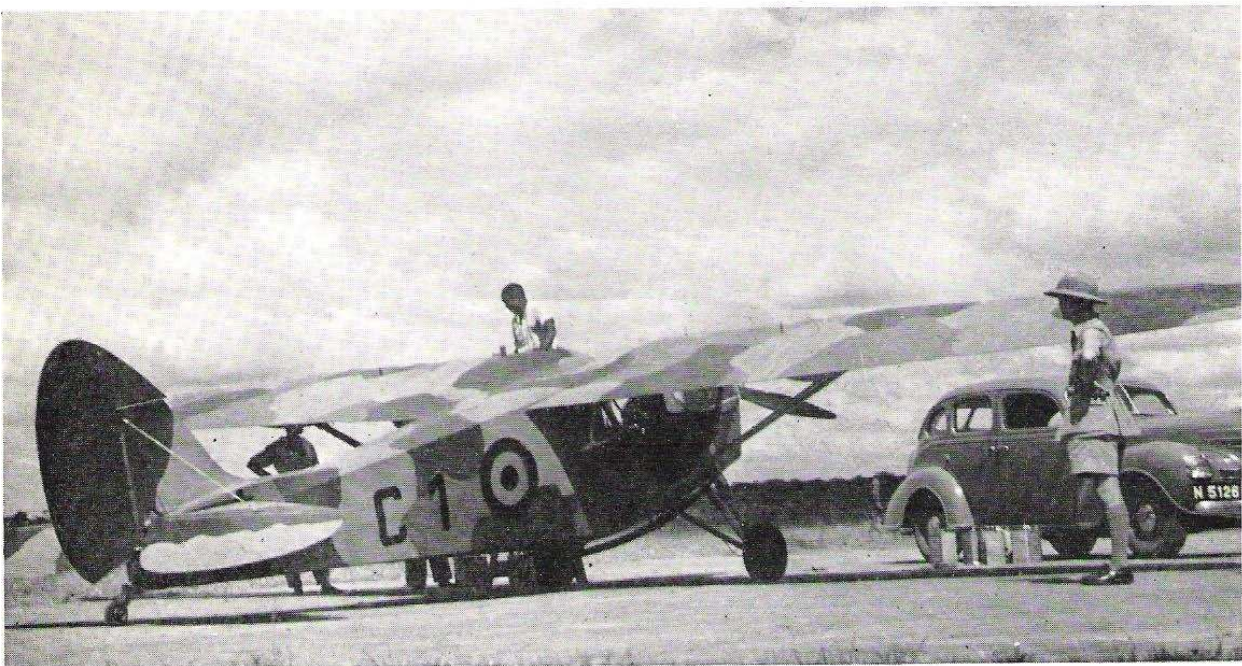
Exhausted and suffering almost to a man from dysentery, the Belgian battalion settled down to hold Gambela against the Italians behind and above them. The Belgians were alone between the hostile Ethiopian rampart and the Sudanese plain, without either artillery or aircraft.

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

4. Belgians fight for a mountain

THIS chain of mountains, source of the White Nile's waters and lower Egypt's life-renewing soil, is criss-crossed by ravines. Here, although Belgium's battle against Italy is over, death still lurks.

Camouflaged liaison airplane





Truck parking field at Malakal—Belgian troop base in Ethiopia

Everywhere along the steep road up to the Italian headquarters at Saio signs protrude in the eight-foot elephant grass: "Warning! Land mine!"

The Italians, although ill-starred upon the battlefield, are probably the world's best experts at making pursuit dangerous. They not only mine the roads but they set sensitive traps in the tall grass, some so close that if two cars meet along a one-way mountain road whichever turns outward has an excellent chance of being blown up.

Lt.-Col. Edmond Van der Meersch, crossing Gambela's airport the other day in an American field car, saw through the windshield the forepart of the chassis jump skyward. Luckily he and his native chauffeur escaped the explosion without a scratch. The car's only damage was a blown tire.

Belgians creep up mountain

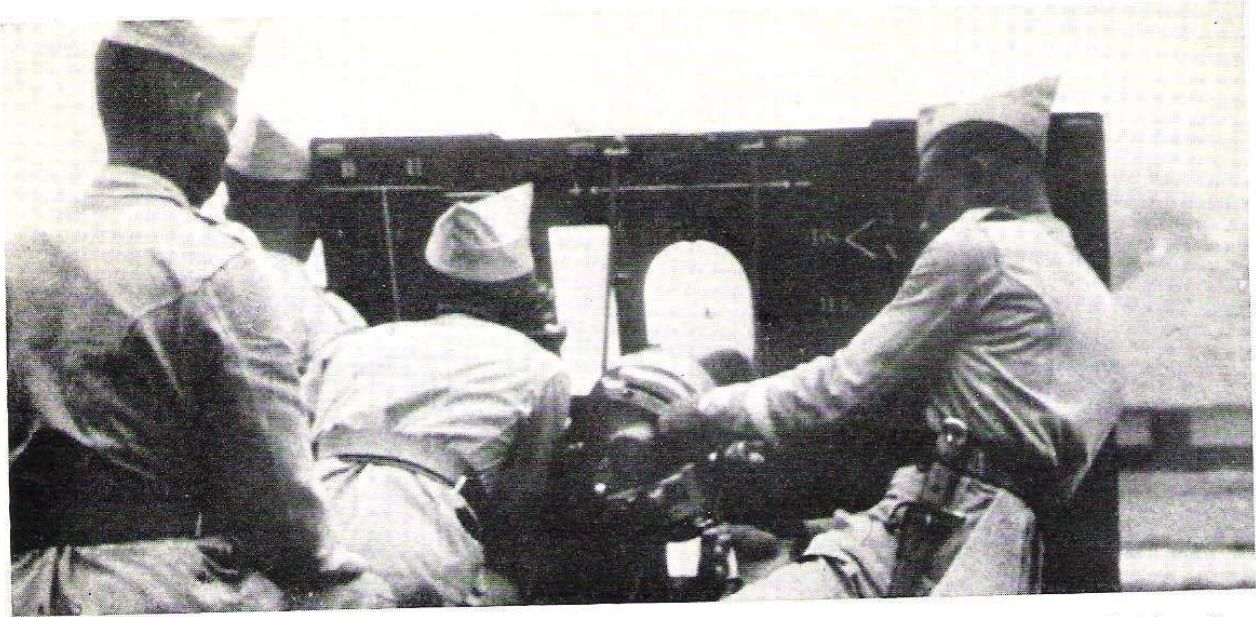
Despite the mines, the Belgians, after taking Gambela, key port of the Ethiopian head-

Field officers' staff



quarters of the White Nile and gateway to the Sudan, started up the 40-mile road toward Saio, 4,000 feet above them.

The columns of reddish rock rising from the grass offered an ideal situation for guerrilla warfare. But the Italian general, Pietro Gazzera, waited to make his first resistance atop the plateau. There a violent torrent called the Bortai, crossing the road at a right angle, was the first natural division between the Italians on the heights and the Belgians in the bullet-swept ravines.



Field artillery

The Belgians strengthened by a company of Stokes 80 mm. mortars and a battalion under Maj. Isidore Herbeit, moved into the attack, led by Lt.-Col. Van der Meersch, who, because of his exceptional height is called "Kasongo Mulefu," "awfully tall."

Their forces, totaling about 1,500 men and 600 porters, were insufficient to seize the heights. The Italians were reinforced from Gore, Bure and Jimma until they had 7,000 men. The Italians became so bold that the Belgians had to take the offensive to conceal the small number of their forces.

Italians kill two officers

In the first battle of the Bortai, April 15, the Belgians lost two valuable officers. Lt. Simonet, scouting alone between the lines, stumbled into an Italian ambush and was killed.

Sgt. 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're 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 were killed 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 barrage they attacked. It was the first time the men from the Congo had heard the terrible concert of modern gunfire 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.



Belgian trucks on rough Ethiopian terrain

One of the heroes of the unequal struggle was a 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. Lt.-Col. Van der Meersch's battalion bore the brunt of this battle.

Belgian rations dwindle

Following the two battles at 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.

From May 1 until June 15 is the end of the dry and the beginning of the rainy season. During these six weeks the single road across the Sudanese plain turns into mud. The water levels of the rivers Sobat and Baro, flowing into the White Nile, are insufficient for Nile barges.

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.

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

Engineers trapped by rain

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.

Beriberi broke out and even today the writer finds cases still being treated at Gambela. 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.

5. Surprise move traps Italians

TRAPPED by rains rendering both the river and the road to the Sudan impassable, the trans-African expedition was in a precarious situation until the rise in the level of the Rivers Sobat and Baro, during early June, enabled reinforcements coming from the Congo via the White Nile to reach them.

The Belgians' first plan was to cut off Gen. Pietro Gazzera's army, strongly encamped in this mountain town of Saio from Mogi, another town upon the uneven, 5,500-foot plateau. The Italian porters were bringing the principal fresh foodstuffs for the Saio garrison, numbering about 8,000 men against the Belgians' 2,000, from Mogi, which is the truck garden center of the thickly ravined highland.

To hold simultaneously the Bortai Brook front, atop the plateau facing Mogi, the Belgians were able to spare only a company and a half from their own two battalions—that is, about 250 men. It was necessary for these Belgians to descend from the plateau again and launch

Ethiopian landscape around Saio





Trucks taken from the Italians after the siege of Saio

an attack from Gambela, the fever-infested port where the Congolese themselves had been isolated for the past six weeks.

A two-day climb

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 jun-

gle could carry upon their heads under such conditions was 35 pounds each. Nine of this was food eaten by themselves en route.

The bearers' 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 are still being cited in orders of the day for bravery and endurance as their valor finds expression in the officers' reports.

The hope of the expedition to cut the lines from Mogi was that the King's African Rifles and the British East African Regiment, blocked further north in an attempt to take Ghidami, might be able to press south and join forces with the Belgians. The Mogi siege was even more expensive in soldiers than porters.

The Belgians under Capt.-Commandant Pierre Bounameau attacked Mogi on June 9, shortly after taking Gambela. Their position in the rear was covered by the arrival by river from the Congo of another battalion under Maj. Antoine Duperoux.

Ambush food road

The Italian garrison, numbering about 300, 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.

Lt.-Col. 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. Elephant grass, which the Italians had burned in April in order to have a sweeping line of fire, had now grown high again.

The Belgians used a ruse familiar to American pioneers in fighting the Indians. Fre-

Italian trench captured by Belgian troops

