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THE ITALIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE.

By COLONEL G. A. FURSE.

THE unexpected attack and the defeat of the small Italian column at Dogali, in the month of January last year, and the ill-advised measures which followed that event, produced such a want of confidence in the Italian Ministry of the day that it was compelled to resign. General Ricotti, who was saddled by the verdict of the country with the responsibility for these events, was succeeded in the Ministry of War by General Bertolè-Viale.

The Italian Premier, in his speech at the banquet given in his honour, at Turin, and the King in his address, when opening the Chambers a few weeks later, explained that the policy of Italy in Africa would be, first to avenge the attack on the Italian troops at Dogali, and after that, to enter into such commercial relations with Abyssinia as would turn to the benefit of both countries.

Amongst the first measures of the new Minister of War were a demand for a credit of 20,000,000 of Italian lire for extraordinary expenses in connection with the military operations in Africa, and the formation of a special corps of 5,000 volunteers, with the object of freeing the regular army from a continuous service on the Red Sea stations.

This corps was to be composed thus :—

Officers	238
Staff, personnel, and analogous services, men	85
Two regiments of infantry (rifles), each of three battalions with four companies	3,420
One squadron of cavalry (mounted rifles)	150
One brigade of four companies of artillery	572
One company of engineers.....	185
One company of medical corps	100
One company of supplies	150
One company of transport	100
	<hr/> 5,000

The first infantry regiment, and the squadron of cavalry for this special corps, were raised in Rome, and the second infantry regiment was raised at Maddaloni.

The command of the troops in Africa was conferred on Lieutenant-General Asinari di San Marzano. This Officer, born in Piedmont in 1830, commenced his military career in the cavalry, then, having in 1866 joined the Staff, became chief of the Staff of General Bixio's division. He enjoys the confidence of the Officers who have served under him, and in recognition of his services with the Italian expeditionary force has been quite lately decorated with the Grand Cross of the Order of San Maurizio e Lazzaro. Colonel Vigano is the chief of his Staff, with Major Arimondi as his under chief.

A remarkable instance of the progress made by the Italians in military matters is the completeness of all the arrangements connected with the present expedition. The conditions imposed on the press correspondents have, however, been so rigorously kept that very little detail information can be gathered from the public press as to the doings, numbers, &c., of the Italians about Massowah.

Supply Corps.

1st supply company of Africa.
A platoon of ditto.

The formation of a squadron of mounted Infantry was decreed in General Orders of the 24th of November, 1887.

On the 20th January the four brigades occupied the following positions :— General Gené, 1st Brigade, was at the entrenched camp at Takback South on the Agbalo; General Cagni, 2nd Brigade, was at Takback North; General Baldissera, 3rd Brigade, in rear of the Apes plateau; General Lanza, 4th Brigade, at Arkiko.

Besides many redoubts and field works constructed by the troops, Fort Abdel-Kader has been placed in a proper state of defence, and new forts have been built, such as Fort Victor Emanuel, Fort Umberto the first on the Canfour hills, Fort Queen Margherita to the south west of Monkullo, near Tata. The Italians have also three new armoured portable forts to be erected near Dogali.

Great efforts have been made to collect transport animals, mules and camels, for the conveyance of water, supplies, and war material. A large number of these animals have been purchased from the natives, who have offered them for sale. Mules have been despatched from Italy; 300 camels have been received from Aden, and the Kaitibai of the Hababs has supplied 1,000 camels.

A General Order (No. 75) issued on the 7th of December last, lays down how the impedimenta are to be distributed amongst the pack animals allotted to each body of troops. It may be instructive to give this order here in *extenso*—

"The distribution amongst the pack animals assigned to each company, battalion, and regimental staff, of the articles indicated in the General Order (No. 31), of the 20th November, will be as follows :—

"1st. Transport for each company, 10 mules. Mules Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4, two kegs of water each.

"Ditto 5 and 6. Officers' effects (*viz.*, baggage, field blankets, tents, canteens, and reserve provisions), stationery, and sack of reserve shoes.

"Ditto 7 and 8. Provisions and company cooking utensils (except camp kettles).

"Ditto 9. Camp kettles or ammunition boxes, as may be ordered from time to time. The pack saddles consequently must be so prepared as to be able to carry either description of load.

"Ditto 10. Spare, or to carry the pioneers' tools.

"2nd. Transport for the staff of a battalion, 10 mules.

"Mules Nos. 1 and 3. Officers' effects (*viz.*, baggage, field blankets, tents, canteens, and reserve provisions), stationery, and water keg.

"Ditto 3 and 4. Medical effects (*viz.*, panniers, field medical companion, and stretchers).

"Ditto 5, 6, 7, and 8. Reserve water kegs.

"Eventually depositing the kegs, these may be employed to convey ammunition.

"N.B. The battalion will demand, at once, 8 kegs.

"Ditto, 9 and 10 spare.

"3rd. Transport for the Staff of a Regiment, 6 mules.

"The loads will be distributed in the manner the Commander of the Regiment may deem best.

"N.B. The forage and grain for the mules of each company, battalion, and regimental Staff will be distributed amongst all the mules as it may be found

most practicable, keeping in view the condition of the mules and the weight of their respective loads."

The railway in course of construction, from the base to Sahati, will greatly facilitate the transport of the water, supplies, and war material. This railway, it is understood, will be completed by the end of this month, and has been laid down on an average at the rate of 252 metres a day.

The same day in which the above General Order was issued, another, No. 76, laid down the equipment to be carried by the soldier.

"The equipment for the soldier on the march will be as follows:—

"Cape, folded with pole and pegs in the tent cloth, carried on the back, or *en banderole*, as each Brigadier may be pleased to order. The mess-tin will be so fastened to the load as to ride behind the shoulders.

"In the bread-sack six packets of cartridges (for rifle regiments three packets of cartridges), reserve provisions, and bread for the day.

"The water-bottles always, when possible, will be filled with water."

The following General Order (No. 4) issued by General Lanza, commanding the outposts on the 30th November, 1887, deserves to be noticed:—

"In addition to the dispositions contained in General Order No. 1 with respect to the outpost service, I deem it desirable to arrange as follows:—

"The outpost service will be conducted in accordance with the prescriptions contained in the regulations for field service, with the following special instructions:—

"1st. No one will enter or proceed beyond the line of detached posts unless furnished with a pass issued from headquarters or from the superior direction of the outposts.

"2nd. Natives will be permitted to go and cut wood or graze their animals beyond the line of detached posts as long as one of them, warranted by the Naib, is furnished with a pass for the total number of individuals who accompany him.

"3rd. The natives referred to above will not be allowed to proceed in front of the line of detached posts beyond the limits of the radius of observation assigned to these.

"4th. Free transit through the line of detached posts will be permitted to all such as can furnish, as a countersign, a quill closed with sealing-wax at both ends, containing on a piece of paper a progressive number.

"5th. Any individuals who should attempt to elude the vigilance of the outposts, or who may present themselves without a pass, will be arrested and conducted to the reserves of the outposts. The commanders of the forts of Arkiko, Monkullo, and Otumlu will inquire into the personality of the arrested, and, if necessary, will hand them over to the Royal Carbineers, telegraphing at once to headquarters. The commander of the reserve Ghaufur will have the prisoners accompanied to the forts near Arkiko and Monkullo.

"The Grand Guard of Emberemi will under this head correspond direct with the commander of the Otumlu fort.

"6th. Prisoners coming from the exterior will be invariably blindfolded.

"7th. At Emberemi there is a buluc furnished by the 1st Italai with orders to exercise from that locality a close supervision over the territory, giving information to the commander of Fort Otumlu whenever it may become necessary. A continuous service of intercommunication will be carried out between Emberemi and Otumlu by three patrols by day and the same number by night (composed of Bashli-Bazonks), by means of which the commanders of the 15th and 16th Grand Guards will be kept informed. The patrols will ordinarily proceed by the track which goes from Otumlu by the Grand Guard of Emberemi. The commander of the Otumlu fort will order these patrols to report themselves both in going and returning to the Commandant of the latter.

"8th. The regulations contained in General Order No. 49 of the Commander-in-Chief will be borne in mind with reference to signals by night, noting that the Grand Guards must provide themselves with rockets.

"By day the signals will be made in compliance with the instructions contained in No. 335 of the regulations for field service."

Three star-rockets are the signal for alarm, when all the troops must turn out at once, and take up the positions assigned to them, remaining there until dismissed by other rockets.

A captive balloon equipment has been supplied to the Italian forces under the direction of Captain Pecori and Lieutenant De Gennaro, of the Engineers. Electric lights have been mounted on Fort Abdel Kader, and at Dogali.

The Italian Commander-in-Chief has endeavoured to captivate some of the Chiefs of the neighbouring country. Debeb appears to be the most prominent Chief who has thrown in his lot with the Italians. The tribes of Akrué, Hevo, and Digsá have joined him, and he expects four more from the Halai to do likewise. His numbers are said to be increasing daily by the continual accession to his ranks of discontented Abyssinians. He is apparently the Abyssinian Deboob who was sent to Suakim by Suleiman Pasha, as recorded in "The Insurrection of the False Prophet," Part II. He is not to be trusted.

It has been arranged, so as to recognize the friendly tribes, that each man will wear a blue veil, either round the head or transversely over the shoulder.

On the 23rd of November last the medical officers were detailed for duty with the various Staffs, battalions, batteries, and departmental services in addition to the field hospitals. The S.S. "San Gottardo," has been turned into a floating hospital with beds for sixty patients. The medical, in fact, as well as the Commissariat and other departments, have proved themselves thoroughly efficient. Great forethought has been exercised in the preparations, and portable huts, water-tanks, and land torpedoes for defensive purposes have been provided.

The General exercised his troops by giving them a false alarm by which it was ascertained that everyone perfectly understood the position he had to occupy in case of actual attack. From all reports the spirit of the troops appears excellent.

Under date of the 6th December, 1887, a direct postal service was arranged between Massowah and Italy. Every Friday, commencing from the 9th December, at 10 A.M., a postal steamer is due to leave for Naples, a corresponding one leaving Naples every Thursday afternoon, and reaching Massowah in the first days of the week. Every Wednesday a postal steamer leaves Assab, proceeding thence to Aden, and thus affording a second postal line.

General Order No. 72 of the 6th December, 1887, gives the necessary details as to the distribution of the letters after the arrival of the postal packets, as well as to the latest hours for posting registered letters and ordinary correspondence.

Whilst the Italian people show a certain amount of discontent because no actual hostilities have yet been reported, General San Marzano, as a prudent commander, has been unremitting in his attention to organize his forces and make his position secure from attack. The inaction of the Abyssinians has given him—what is not often found—plenty of time to effect all this, and by all accounts he has turned the time so gained to advantage.

Every appliance that modern science has given to war—railway, electric light, torpedoes, balloons, &c.—have been supplied to the Italian expeditionary corps; and people acquainted with the country manners and ideas of the Abyssinians are on the spot to give the benefits of their knowledge to the Italian Commander-in-Chief.