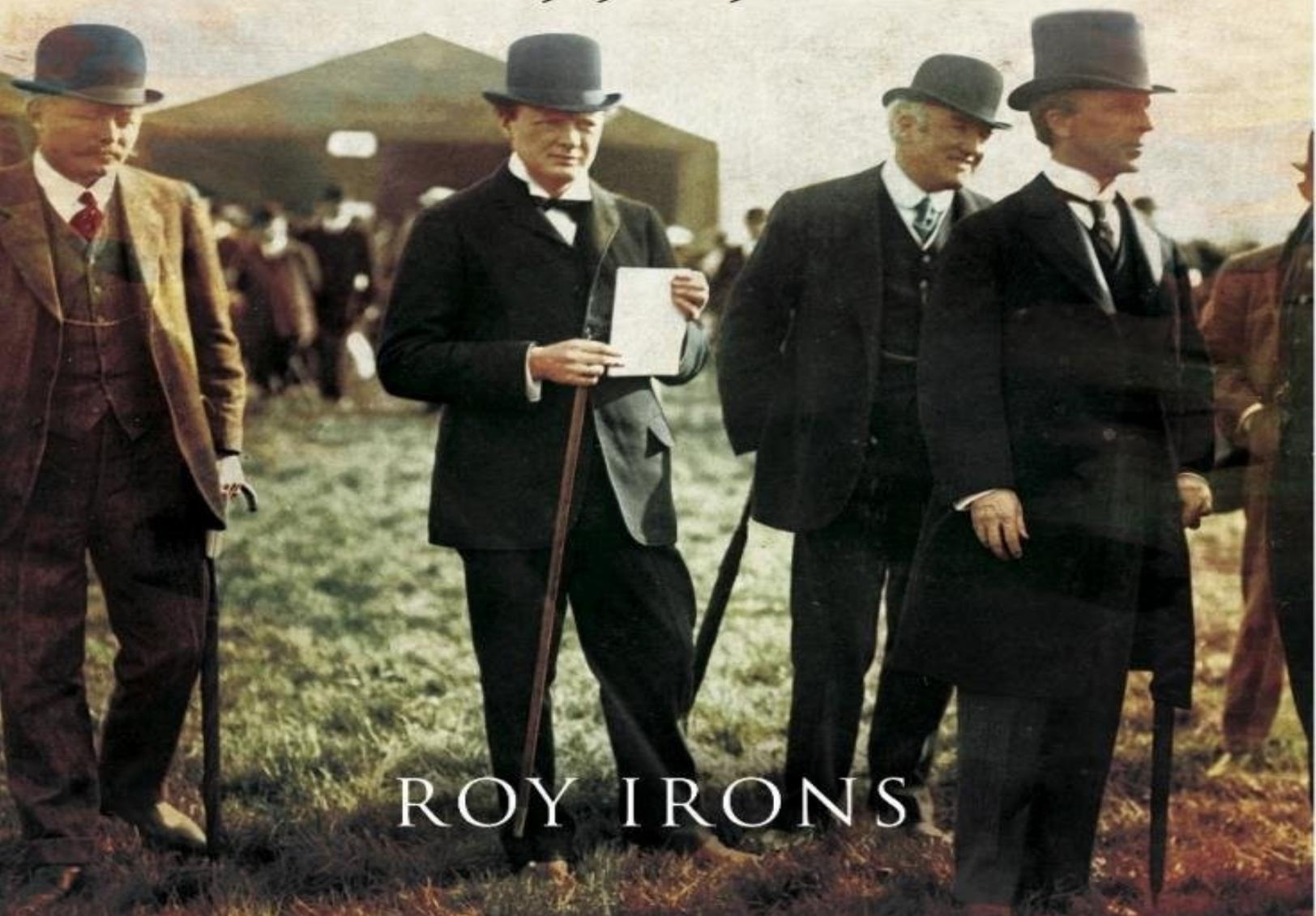


CHURCHILL AND THE MAD MULLAH OF SOMALILAND

BETRAYAL AND REDEMPTION
1899-1921



This book is dedicated to my wife and best friend

Erica Rae Irons NNEB
13 September 1947 to 7 August 2010

A woman of great independence of mind and spirit, always true to herself, whose love, compassion, strength and humour enthralled and empowered children, delighted and inspirited her family and friends, and forever captivated, and mended, her husband; to whom she was everything.

For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings

Churchill and the Mad Mullah of Somaliland

Betrayal and Redemption
1899–1921

Roy Irons



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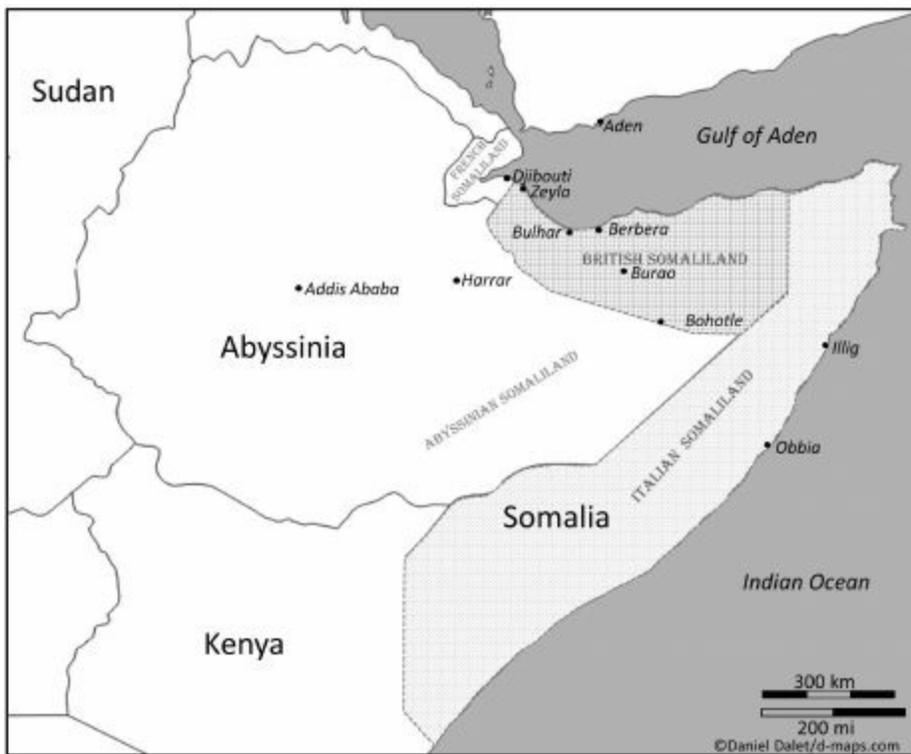
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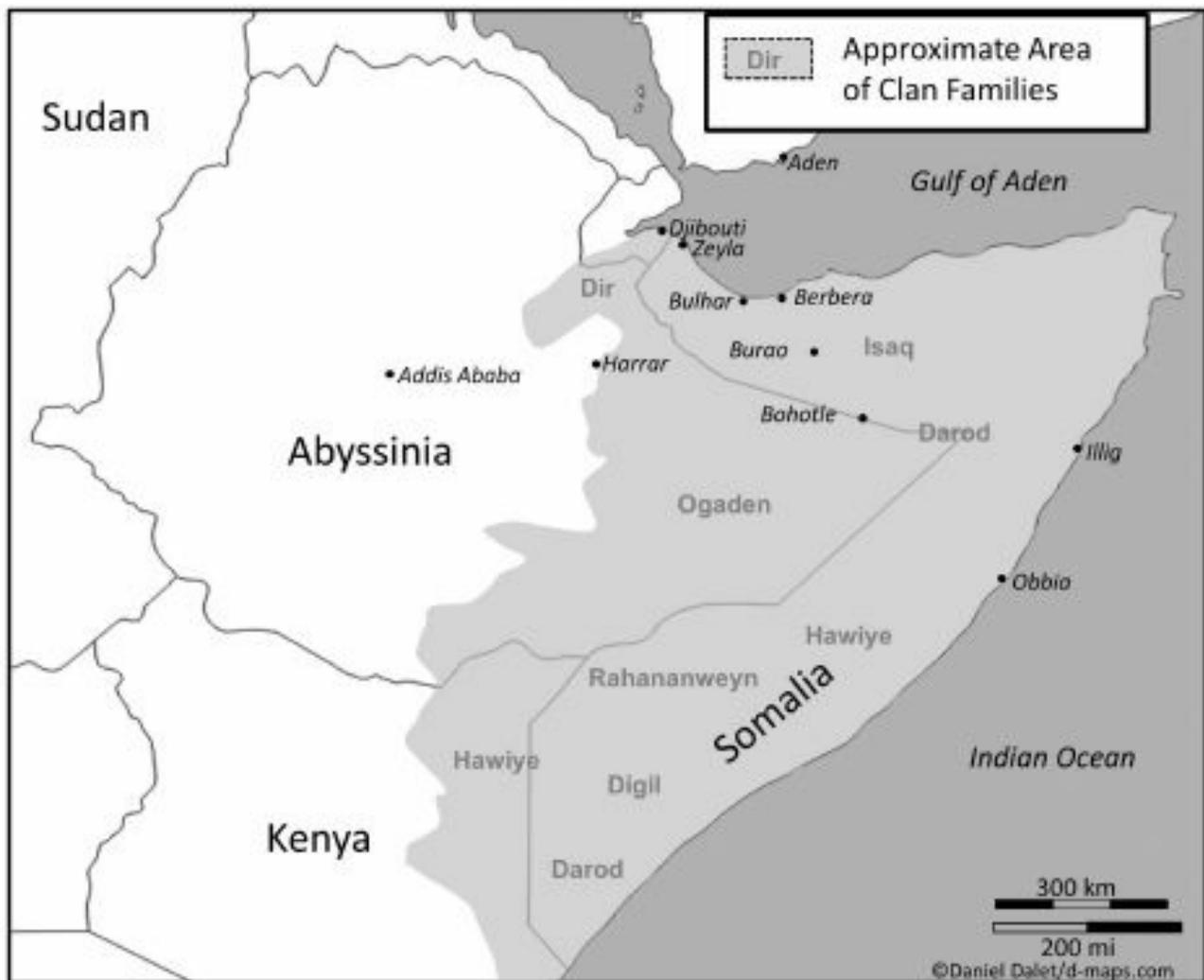
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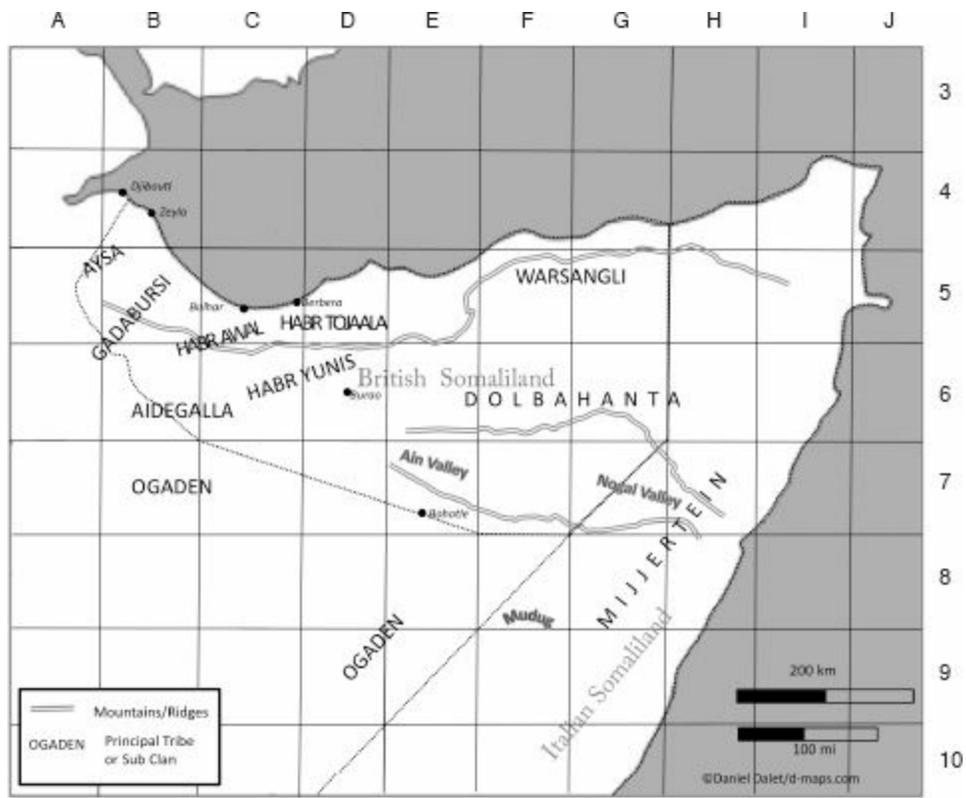
Somaliland and the Horn of Africa.

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The Somali Clans.



Somaliland - The Principal Tribes.

Foreword

I had long wondered about the campaign against the ‘Mad Mullah’ of Somaliland, a war which had eventually proved so useful to the survival of the Royal Air Force as an independent service, and resolved to buy a book on the subject. Finding a work by Douglas Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, reprinted in 1969 by The Negro Universities Press from an original publication by Herbert Jenkins Ltd of 1923, on Amazon Marketplace, my wife ordered it for me as a present – but died suddenly before the book arrived. Before it came, I therefore decided that I would write a book on the subject, and dedicate it to her. This is the result.

On reading Jardine’s great work, however, I began to feel that there was little left to say – Jardine seemed, in his oft-quoted book, to have said it all. But time reveals as well as hides; documents are available now which Jardine could not have quoted at the time; the rise of air power was contemporaneous with the campaigns, the independence of the Royal Air Force was facilitated by them; and the involvement of Sir Winston Churchill in both was confidential. Ninety years have passed since Jardine wrote, and the actors who occupied the stage in the drama, together with their inevitably fallible scriptwriters and often partisan audience, have now all fled this world, and their actions are perhaps more clearly viewed by critics with a century of hindsight. That century has not only seen the passing of the individual actors, but of their ideas, their mores, their lifestyles and their dreams. Their science and their mighty industry, and the weapons and institutions which had raised them above all preceding generations, now seem quaint and archaic. Through restricted and ancient windows we stare into their world, reading and watching as their images flicker across our screens, or are seen captured in faded and still fading photographs. The consequences of their actions now sometimes seem inevitable, and their mistakes, therefore, follies. But in passing judgement, it is wise to remember that the next hour itself is always an unknown land, and that the paths by which we commit ourselves to advance further into the future disappear in a rapidly multiplying mystery and unpredictability. Beyond a day, only the unwary, and beyond a year, only the fanatical, see with absolute certainty – yet judgements have to be made, and paths plotted. History, and most especially military history, is often a study not of the past, but of what once seemed to the actors to be the discernible shape of the future looming in the mist, sometimes in the dim and fragmentary light of evidence, sometimes in the glare of religious or doctrinal certitude. The warrior has to live or die by how he acts on what he sees; but he is heavily, and increasingly, dependent on what the warriors foresaw, or the politicians allowed, many years before. He must weigh his options in the light of possibly conflicting intelligence, doctrine, experience, instinct and instructions, and issue clear orders in the heat of battle, while appearing unhesitating and decisive to his men. The historian must convey this uncertainty, striving to avoid what in business circles is sardonically said to be the function of the auditor – to investigate the battle after the fighting is over, bayonetting the wounded.

While in the Western theatre the writers and the actors who once strode the imperial stage – together with their audience – are often denounced with shame and horror by the closed minds of a new orthodoxy, the Somali actors, on the other hand, appear to have inherited a similar script to that imposed both by nature and by nurture on their forbears. Their land is still as demanding and harsh. It is still partly under foreign rule. Their divisions are still deep, their quarrels still alive, their resentments still exquisitely expressed and their revenges still paramount. Their high natural gifts and

abilities, which ought to be a wonder to the world, seem in their own land to be mostly destructive to themselves and to their repute. Yet nothing on this earth is permanent, not even long-cherished animosities.

I am grateful to many people for their assistance with this book. My good friend Geoff Johnson, an avid and very intelligent reader of histories, looked through the manuscript from the point of view of the reader, making many helpful suggestions, asking many questions and seeking many clarifications.

I was advised by Professor Philip Sabin that good maps are an absolute essential in a work of this nature. This seemed a most daunting task – until a geologist friend, the lively and charming Louise Fletcher, volunteered her services. Louise handled all the complicated business of map making with patience and understanding, a process which was aided neither by my vagueness in requirement and ignorance of cartography, nor by my incompetence in cybernetics. It is always difficult to decide whether the reader would benefit from an extra place name; some places are essential by their importance and continual reference; but in multiplying the information, the sought for place becomes increasingly difficult to find in a maze of names. The inclusion of places was at my discretion, and although I took full advantage of John Fletcher's very useful advice, I must therefore take all the blame if the reader finds a map difficult, while the long-suffering Louise must take all the credit for its usefulness.

My thanks are due to Brian Riddle of the National Aerospace Library at Farnborough for giving me the considerable benefit of his encyclopaedic knowledge of aviation literature; Peter Elliott and the research staff at the RAF Museum for their kindness and assistance with the RAF Museum Archives and the Trenchard Papers; Kate Swann and Richard Dabb at the National Army Museum for their help with files and photographs respectively; Julie Ash and the staff of the National Archives (Public Record Office) for their usual kindness and efficiency; Katharine Thomson of the Churchill Archives Centre for her kindnesses over many days spent in that archive, and since; the staff of the Imperial War Museum picture library for their patient assistance; Robert Faber of the Oxford University Press for his kind assistance with 'Who Was Who'; and to Emerson Vandy, Papers Past Service Manager of the National Library of New Zealand, for his advice and for permission to quote from the *Nelson Colonist* and for the straightforward kindness and helpfulness which, if a stereotype may be forgiven, seems so typical of the Kiwis. I must thank Ting Baker, a copy editor whose knowledge of correct English is indubitable, for her understanding of my linguistic idiosyncracies, particularly in the choice of the words "which" and "that". I am also grateful to Laura Hirst, the Aviation Imprint Administrator at Pen and Sword Books, for all her prompt and valuable advice, for her kindness and efficiency, and for her patience. My thanks are also due to my daughter Rebecca for her many kindnesses and her very essential assistance with the computer.

My friend Brian Perryman very kindly invited me to give a talk on Sir Winston Churchill and aviation to the staff at Chartwell, and in researching this and reading Alfred Gollins' fascinating book [qv], I became more aware of the extraordinary involvement of that farsighted man in the early years of British aviation, in the projected airship raids over Somaliland and in the birth and preservation of the Royal Air Force. His gigantic figure looms large behind the scenes of both the betrayal and the redemption which form the subject of this book. Had that great man died before 1940, future generations might still have related his awesome political agility and magnetic personality, his consuming ambition, his clarity and nobility of expression, his foresight and his deep comprehension of events – had they, in that unfortunate event, been at liberty to do so.

Chapter One

The Somalis

*Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*

Thomas Gray, 'Elegy written in a country churchyard'

Of all the blessings which nature, or a beneficent God, could bestow upon a people, none could be greater than a rich soil, a plentiful supply of water in due season, and an equable and moderate climate. An autumn field bright with golden wheat, sunshine and clouds reflected from sparkling and murmuring streams rich with fish, trees laden with fruit or wood for winter fuel, fat cattle, pigs and sheep in woods or pastures washed by a regular and refreshing rainfall, are in most religions the attributes of Heaven, the land of God and of the select few. Such lands are conducive to strong and stable states, where a leisured aristocracy might maintain an ordered rule, an unchanging culture and a long peace, until they are overthrown by the envy of war-sharpened warrior invaders or by their own plebeian toilers, or reinvigorated by those whose minds are sharpened by a thriving trade or an innovative and profitable industry.

The land of the Somalis has neither regular water nor many large areas of rich soils. Sometimes great swathes of this terrible land are subjected to devastating droughts, and have no water at all. In many places, where hyaenas haunt the scrub, where leopards leap over the thornbush zariba to take sheep or children, where lions prowl in the darkness, or where the sun shines fiercely over a desert, and mirages of camel trains led by white clad figures stalk the skies, it might be described as close to a hell. At the beginning of the twentieth century the land had little surplus to enable many to develop a large capital from trade with happier lands. Sheep, oxen, goats and hides were exchanged for rice, dates, cotton, rifles and ammunition and quat, a mild intoxicant. Its greatest resource for its human inhabitants is the camel, which enables them to travel with their sheep and cattle from an arid location to another which has been temporarily blessed with a seasonal, and unreliable, rainfall, before the burning and pitiless sun sucks the life-giving water from the land.

The land occupied by the Somalis, in the 'Horn of Africa', is some 320,000 square miles in extent, and is bordered by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, the Kenyan border and Ethiopia. Of this land, the British Protectorate, comprising some 60,000 square miles, lay in the north, along the Gulf of Aden (although the strip of the Somalis' land along the Kenyan border was included by the British in their East African Protectorate, and has been inherited by Kenya). Its principal town was the port of Berbera. The Italian Protectorate ran from the Gulf of Aden down to the Kenyan border, while a vast area of western Somaliland, inhabited by the Ogaden tribes, was (and still is) occupied by the Ethiopians (Abyssinians). A smaller French enclave in the north centred around the port of Djibouti.

Somaliland is divided geographically into three broad areas. The first, the coastal plain, lies between the sea and the mountains. Its width varies from some sixty miles at the ancient city of Zeyla near the border with French Somaliland to a few hundred yards. It is arid. Sandstorms scour the few thorn bushes which form almost the only vegetation. Here 'All the world seems ablaze', wrote Douglas Jardine, 'and it is seldom that a cloud obstructs the pitiless sun'.¹ The great nineteenth century explorer Sir Richard Burton, who visited the land in 1854, described it as 'A low glaring flat of yellow sand, desert and heat – reeking'. 'The Somal themselves', wrote Burton, 'described it as the Barr el Ajam, or Barbarian land (i.e. Land not Arab).'²

The second broad area of Somaliland comprises the Maritime Mountains. The foothills of the mountains are described by Jardine as equally inhospitable, being known in Somali as the 'Guban' – the burnt. Harsh boulders strew the beds of rivers of sand, although a coarse grass grows. The mountains themselves rise to some four or six thousand feet above sea level, and in the more pleasant climate grass, gum trees, myrrh, acacias and giant euphorbia, and in places even fig trees flourish. Life-giving water lies in rocky pools.³

The third tract is a plateau, which slopes from north to south, from six thousand feet to the valley of the river Shabeelle⁴ which, eventually unequal to its long contest with the sun, expires in a saltmarsh before reaching the sea. The plateau itself is far from a continuous desert, but contains a very large variety of landscapes, from hills and mountains to open meadowland, very dense bush, and closely intersected country. The common feature is lack of water, at least in the dry season, and sometimes all year.

The culture, the 'software' of the Somali people, has been formed by this harsh and demanding environment, and by interaction with other cultures, and this has been influenced by the 'hardware' of the Somali people, their genetic makeup. This latter, of course, will always vary more than the software, which can be almost identical in many, i.e. the nomad mores and the Muslim faith. An individual may vary quite sharply from a general description of his 'race', for genetic admixture will ensure that a 'tall' people will have some short representatives, and an 'intelligent' people many stupid ones. Two people may be culturally, but never (unless identical twins) genetically identical. With these caveats in mind, it may be broadly stated that the Somali people originated from regions to the north, from Arabia, North Africa and Upper Egypt, with some further genetic input from Europe. Sometime after the birth of Islam, perhaps around the tenth century AD, the semi-legendary Arab Sheikh Isma'il Jabarti, intermarrying with the Somalis, founded the Darod clan family, and perhaps two centuries later, the Arab Sheikh Isaq similarly founded the Isaaq clans. Both slowly pushed south to their present position, displacing the Oromos.⁵ The Somalis also seem to have a small input of negro/Bantu genes, perhaps 10 per cent; although negroes (along with almost all other peoples!) seem to have been despised. The language is Cushitic, and is related (as are, of course, the Somalis themselves) to Arabic, and to that of the detested Gallas, although 'Galla', *unbeliever*, is itself a derogatory term for the Oromo and Borana of Ethiopia and Northern Kenya.⁶

The Somali language is an enormously powerful vehicle of oratory, exhortation, persuasion and poetry. Sir Richard Burton, a brilliant linguist, noted the paradoxical combination of illiteracy and what might be described as a flourishing 'oral literature'. 'It is strange', he observed, 'that a dialect which has no written character should so abound in poetry and eloquence'.

There are thousands of songs, some local, others general, upon all conceivable subjects, such as camel loading, drawing water, and elephant hunting; every man of education knows

a variety of them...The country teems with ‘poets, poetasters, poetitoes and poetaccios:’ every man has his recognised position in literature as accurately defined as though he had been reviewed in a century of magazines, – the fine ear of this people causing them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions, whereas a false quantity or a prosaic phrase excite their violent indignation... Every chief in the country must have a panegyric to be sung by his clan, and the great patronise light literature by keeping a poet. The amatory is of course the favourite theme...The subjects are frequently pastoral: the lover for instance invites his mistress to walk with him towards the well in Lahelo, the Arcadia of the land; he compares her legs to the tall straight Libi tree, and imprecates the direst curses on her head if she refuse to drink with him the milk of his favourite camel...Sometimes a black Tyrtaeus⁷ breaks into a wild lament for the loss of warriors or territory: he taunts the clan with cowardice, reminds them of their slain kindred, better men than themselves, whose spirits cannot rest unavenged in their gory graves, and urges a furious onslaught upon the exulting victor.

A little later, another intrepid geographer, Harald Swayne, wrote that the typically ‘wonderfully bright and intelligent’ Somali had:

...a great deal of romance in his composition, and in his natural nomad state, on the long, lazy days, when there is no looting to be done, while his women and children are away minding his flocks, he takes his praying – mat and water bottle, and sits a hundred yards from his *karia*⁸ under a flat, shady *guda* tree, lazily droning out melancholy-sounding chants on the themes of his dusky loves, looted or otherwise; on the often miserable screw which he calls *faras*, the horse; and on the supreme pleasure of eating stolen camels.⁹

He also noted that ‘There is no social system, but patriarchal government by tribes, clans, and families; no cohesion, and no paramount native authority; and the whole country has been from time immemorial in a chronic state of petty warfare and blood feuds’.

All the sources from the turn of the twentieth century and before agree on the high intelligence of the Somali people; yet to what purpose could such high intelligence and ability be put in the endlessly repeated nomadic journeying of the people of the plateau? Well, it seems from the above that the first call on the brains of the Somali people after the considerable requirements of exacting a living from their demanding land was language; not only the plain meaning of their communications, but innuendoes, poetic scansion, the enormously complicated alliteration, each word being weighed in a scale of reason, of form, of rhythm, of allusion. Their campfires and assemblies were the battlegrounds of a thousand Shakespeares, with well-aimed words in the place of spears, and oratorical contests in the place of an Homeric single combat. Nor were the battling heroes confined to the living; the words of long dead orators and poets would once again rise up in support or opposition to a proposal – although heavy was the social disgrace of a man who endeavoured to claim their words as his own, in a society where literary memories were long and almost incredibly accurate.¹⁰

One such oratorical contest, in more modern times, is described by Said S Samatar, a Professor of History at Rutgers University and former Somali pastoralist. He describes an incident between the Daaquato and Beerato clans in the Ogaden in 1962–3.¹¹ The Daaquato were a nomad clan, the

Beerato were agriculturalists. In an incident reminiscent of a Hollywood 'western', the Beerato had cultivated fields in the lower Shabeele (Leopard) river, which the Daaquato still considered to be grazing land. A Beerato maize field was grazed by Daaquato cattle and camels; accusations flew and two Beerato and a Daaquato were killed in the ensuing melee. For the next three months the town of Quallafo was stained with the blood of the elders and leaders of both clans, while the Ethiopians who ruled the Ogaden looked on with indifference. But the Beerato farmers made a near fatal error; not content with a desultory warfare of mutual murder and ambush, they held a war dance, and celebrated the murder of a Daaquato notable in *poetry*. This was too much for the Daaquato youth, who were narrowly prevented by their elders from a general slaughter of the Beerato, who would not have been able to contain the nomads in an all-out war. Indeed, Professor Samatar records that in a war thirty years before, the Daaquato had obliged the Beerato peace delegates to hold shoes in their mouths as a mark of submission.

The Daaquato now held a clan meeting to decide the fate of the Beerato. These assemblies were open to all, and generally took place under the shade of a tree. All could participate, although in practice these assemblies were dominated by experts in tradition, orators and poets. In this vital meeting, two orator-poets held the floor. The voice for war and revenge in the name of God was almost triumphant – the young men shouted and arose to ride off to the slaughter, and the fate of the Beerato seemed sealed – when the second voice was heard reminding the assembly that fellow Muslims could hardly be slaughtered in the name of God. Peace talks were held, and the price of the shedding of nomad blood was settled at five hundred Beerato cattle and a 'substantial quantity' of grain.

This incident, although it took place some sixty years after the events to be related, shows the democratic nature of the assemblies of the nomad tribes, the tribal feuds and hostilities and raiding that seemed to form an essential part of the nomad existence, and the two great influences on the minds of the Somali nomad – poetry and Islam.

The religion enshrined in the Koran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed alone, who, beginning with his wife Khadijah, his cousin Ali, his servant Yazid and his friend Abubekr, gradually convinced an ever-growing circle of its truth. The ruling tribe of Mecca (of whom he was one) becoming alarmed at this threat to their lucrative control of the shrine centred on the Kaaba (a black meteoritic stone that had been sacred to the surrounding Arab tribes for centuries), and fearful of disorder, sought to end the religion of Islam by the murder of its Prophet. Forewarned, Mohammed fled to the sanctuary offered by the divided city of Medina, where he had many converts (the Ansar, or helpers), who submitted to his unifying rule, and the year of his flight (the Hegira, 622 AD) began the Islamic era.¹² After a successful defence of Medina against the Meccans, and having taken a heavy toll of the caravans sent by the Meccans towards Syria and the east, the rulers of that important city, undermined by conversions to the Muslim faith and by military defeat, belatedly acknowledged the truth of the Koran and the rule of the Prophet. Before his death in 632 AD at Medina, which had become the capital city of Islam, the genius of Mohammed had united Arabia under his religion and rule. Few events in the history of man can be as remarkable or as significant.

The successors to Mohammed's temporal rule, the caliphs, began the conquest of Syria and Egypt from the Eastern Roman (Byzantine), and Iraq from the Sassanid Persian empires, enfeebled as they were from a long, bitter, destructive and costly war. After the murder of Othman, the third caliph, Ali, the cousin of the Prophet and later his son-in-law, succeeded to the caliphate (he had perhaps expected to be the first caliph) but tensions had arisen between the early Meccan believers, the Ansar of Medina and the more tardy rulers of Mecca who were late comers to the religion, but experienced

politicians; and it was claimed that the murderers of Othman were not pursued with vigour by his successor. A civil war ensued, the saintly Ali was murdered, and the successive murders of his lineal descendants, who formed the 'twelve Imams',¹³ eventually produced a bitter schism in the heart of Islam. Ali's followers were labelled the Shia, or party, of Ali, or his sectaries, by the orthodox, the Sunnis. This often embittered division of Islam still persists.

During the Hegira some of Mohammed's followers had fled to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) where they received sanctuary from its Christian rulers. This (very temporary) good feeling between the religions might have been expected by an optimist, since Mohammed had regarded Jesus as the second greatest of the Prophets. Mohammed regarded the believers of Christianity and Judaism as 'people of the book', the Old Testament being revered by Islam and Christianity alike. But to the rulers of mankind, of whatever religious or philosophic persuasion, neighbouring nations more often become sources of aggrandizement rather than alliance, and are more often rivals than friends. The Muslim conquest of the Middle and Near East isolated Abyssinia from the rest of Christendom and it became an island in an Islamic sea. That hostility, which persists to this day, lies at the very centre of the events related here.

The details of the Muslim penetration of Somalia and the events leading to the conversion of the whole country are largely unknown. However, the close trading relationship between the Somalis and Arabs, their cultural and linguistic affinities and the short sea voyage between south Arabia and the Horn of Africa must have ensured that the conversion was early, and the proud attribution of Somali tribal ancestry to the descendants of the Prophet speak of a considerable immigration of Arabs, and of their high status. Indeed, in 1974 Somalia became a member of the Arab League.¹⁴ It is maintained by some that the poetical beauty of the Arabic in which the Koran was written is proof of its divinity; this beauty would have certainly rung true in a Somalian ear.

The Somalis are divided into six broad clan families. Two, the Digil and Rahanwayn (also known as Digil Mirifle) are agricultural and dwell in the area of the great Juba and Shabeelle rivers. The other four, descended from a legendary ancestor 'Samaale', are pastoral, and consist of the Daarood, Isaaq, Dir and Hawiye. In British Somaliland the main clan families were the Isaaq – [the Habar Tol Ja'alo (Habr Toljaala), the Habar Yoonis (Habr Yunis), the Habar Awal and the 'Lidagale (Aidegalla) tribes]; the Daarood – [the Dolbahanta, Warsangli and the Ogadeen]; with the Mijjertein of Italian Somaliland, and the Hawiye – comprising the Aysa and Gadabursi (despised as inferiors by the Isaaq and Daarood).¹⁵

The lifestyle of the Somali nomads, the warrior camel herders, had endured unchanged for centuries; they might for another millennium have wandered from well to well, from pasture to pasture, raiding the livestock of other nomad tribes, boasting, dreaming, praying, reciting the timeless suras of the Koran, gathering around the campfires on chilly Somali nights, being aroused, calmed, exalted, exhorted, entertained and enlivened by each succeeding generation of poets as the sparks and their spirits rose to heaven, while in the flickering shadows outside their zaribas, their double-walled thornbush enclosures, as the poet's voice rang out, prowled the lion, the hyaena and the leopard. But in Europe a slow revolution in naval and military technology was paralleled by an industrial revolution centred in the island of Britain, which would confer such power and such arrogance upon the European nations that they would rule the destinies of every continent. The only defence would prove to be imitation. India would be the jewel of a European empire. Even great China would be shaken to its foundations, and changed forever. The old Africa – disorganized, divided, technologically and militarily primitive and with no naval power whatever, was doomed. The fate of the Somalis would soon lie in the hands of others. But, perhaps the greatest of the Somali poets, the

Sayyid, or the 'Mad Mullah', would in the name of Islam wage an unrelenting war against both the Europeans and their imitators.

The European World Supremacy and the Coming of the British Protectorate

Finally, it must be remembered that, among all changes, the nature of man remains much the same; the personal equation, though uncertain in quantity and quality in the particular instance, is sure always to be found.

Alfred Thayer Mahan

‘Almost everything that distinguishes the modern world from earlier centuries’, wrote Bertrand Russell, ‘is attributable to science, which achieved its most spectacular triumphs in the seventeenth century.’¹ The Renaissance had opened minds to an investigation of the unknown wonders of the universe, and Classical Greece was first reborn, and then surpassed, in Europe. The human body was dissected by minds freed from slavish obedience to Aristotle, and its workings increasingly understood. The last serious military threat to Europe had come from the Ottoman Turks, who in 1453 had captured Constantinople and ended the Roman Empire. Trade with the East had to go through that formidable and expanding state, which prompted the Portuguese to circumnavigate Africa, and Christopher Columbus to seek the Indies by sailing West, discovering instead an immensely rich new continent many times the size of Europe. Trade became worldwide and immensely profitable. In Great Britain a revolution in industry and agriculture and medicine and transport began, fuelling an immense rise in population and productivity. Professional armies began to be recruited, disciplined and organized on the Roman Imperial model. The art and science of war were studied exhaustively. Weapons production and technology advanced rapidly. The Royal Navy became the largest industrial enterprise in the world, ships increased in size and seaworthiness, sailing and navigation and gunnery were revolutionized. Yet the ships of 1850, wooden, powered by the wind, and firing solid shot from muzzle-loaded cannon, were entirely superseded in the 1880s by iron plated, and later, all-steel warships powered by steam and firing explosive shells from breech-loaded, turreted guns; and these themselves were made obsolete by the all big-gun *Dreadnought* battleship of 1905. Muskets, with ball and powder laboriously loaded through the barrel, and at first fired by lighted taper, were superseded by flintlocks, then by a percussion cap which when struck by a hammer detonated the powder, then by cartridges which contained percussion cap, powder and bullet in one item, loaded through the breech. A multi-barrelled machine gun, the mitrailleuse, was followed by the Maxim gun, which automatically reloaded and fired. This revolution increased in pace year by year, and is still going on. Year by year, the rest of the world slipped further behind, and into ever increasing danger.

Western schools began to educate more and more of their populations, an enterprise made necessary by the demands of industry and by the constant rivalry and warfare between the European states, as well as by the reformed and more socially conscious Churches. The arts flourished. So great was the pace of change that children nearly always knew more than their parents, and all felt a

vast and increasing gap between themselves and previous ages. The idea of a past golden age gave way to the idea of a constant progress in man's affairs and abilities.

With all this sense of superiority over their own past, it is little wonder that the Europeans felt a sense of superiority to those of other continents, who still seemed to live in that past. They were 'backward'. The difference seemed to most to be not just in education, in programming, but innate, genetic. In the sixteenth century the appropriation and abuse of the Aztecs and Incas had been excused by the fact that they were non-Christian. In the nineteenth century the Africans, Indians and even the Chinese were felt to be in varying degrees inferior to the Europeans. This attitude seemed to excuse the African slave trade, where ships would leave English ports laden with trinkets bound for West Africa, where they would be exchanged for Negro slaves captured by other more warlike tribes for the purpose of trade. The ships would then be laden with slaves bound for America to work on plantations in the West Indies or elsewhere, finally returning to England with a cargo of sugar. It is said that one-third of the slaves perished on capture, one-third of the remainder on the voyage and one-third of that residue on landing, before sale. Some on the slaveships died, it is reported, of sheer horror at their condition.

This frightening inhumanity is of some significance to the Somalis, since after the abominable trade was abolished in 1807,² the British, horrified at the exposure of what had been done in their name by some of their own citizens,³ devoted themselves to preventing the trade, and freeing slaves, wherever they found them. One sixth of the Royal Navy was engaged, during the rest of the century, in this enterprise. The Somalis both traded in, and possessed, slaves.

Of all the European nations who contended for the rich rewards of empire, the British, although late on the scene, reaped the biggest prizes in consequence of their rule of the sea. The richest prize of all was India, where the British defeated the French and conquered the huge, but divided, nation piecemeal in savage little conflicts lasting more than a century. Some Princes were left 'independent', but closely allied to, and dominated by, the British. In 1857 British rule was shaken for a time by a mutiny among some of the sepoys, mercenary soldiers employed by the British East India Company. This was suppressed after a series of truly heroic actions, and the shaken British thenceforth ruled their territories through a viceroy, who possessed immense power.

In 1877 Queen Victoria was made Empress of India by the British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, an appointment which greatly endeared 'Dizzy' to that gloriously formidable, and pitifully lonely, widow. British rule, although backed by the gun, was in general benign and well tolerated, as is evidenced by the very small British military presence which was needed to maintain it.⁴ Some of the most martial peoples on earth served loyally in the Imperial army. India was 'the jewel in the crown', and it became a cardinal tenet of British foreign policy to avert or forestall all conceivable threats to British rule, and to facilitate communications between Britain and the Jewel. With this in mind, in 1839 Britain seized the port of Aden at the mouth of the Red Sea, with its magnificent harbour. It was administered as part of India. With the advent of the steamship in the mid-nineteenth century, it became more important as a coaling station, for although they were much faster, the range and endurance of coal-fired steamships was considerably less than that of sailing vessels. In 1867 the opening of the Suez canal made the Mediterranean and Red Sea an area of very considerable strategic importance for Britain, and turned Imperial eyes towards the port of Berbera in Somaliland, from which a foreign power might interdict the now vital route to the East, and to Australia and New Zealand.

The gradual opening up of the interior of North East Africa and the Red Sea coast by Sir Richard Burton and the other great explorers had turned the Egyptians' gaze southwards and

awakened the imperial ambitions of the Egyptian Khedive Ismail I, who bought Massowa from the Ottoman Sultan and occupied Bulhar, Berbera and Zeyla (rented from the Sultan), in a plan aimed at the eventual conquest of Abyssinia. However, two attempted invasions of that land from the north, in 1875 and 1876, were routed. Britain recognized these imperial advances along the coast, but on condition that the territories occupied should never be ceded to a foreign power. Egypt at that time lay under the nominal suzerainty of the Ottoman Sultan; however, Ismail had borrowed heavily to finance projects, and by 1876 owed nearly £100 million, and he sold his shares in the Suez canal for £4 million, which was snapped up by Rothschild on behalf of Disraeli. Ismail retired to Italy, to be succeeded by his son Tewfiq. The debt-ridden Egyptians revolted against the utterly corrupt regime. Arabi Pasha seized power, was defeated by Sir Garnet Wolsey⁵ at Tel-el-Kebir, ousted, and Tewfiq restored. Britain occupied Egypt, which in 1884 withdrew from her newly acquired Red Sea empire due to the revolt of the Mahdi in the Sudan, and Berbera and the Red Sea ports were occupied by the British.

The occupation of the coast brought Britain into direct relation with the nomadic tribes of the interior.⁶ In order to prevent the establishment of any other power in the hinterland, treaties were concluded with the Habr Awal, Gadabursi, Habr Toljaala and Isa in 1884, the Habr Gerhajis in 1885 and the Warsangli in 1886.⁷ No treaty was concluded with the Dolbahanta, the largest of the clans, for the Italians regarded part of the clan as subject to the Sultan of the Mijerteen, who was himself under Italian protection. This was an important omission, but it was thought by the Government of India that 'The Dolbahanta would certainly look upon any treaty which we might conclude with them as guaranteeing to them our protection, and we should thus incur indefinite and probably inconvenient responsibilities, even if we did not find ourselves involved in difficulties with Italy.' The Government of India agreed with the Government of Bombay that the Dolbahanta should remain outside the 'protection' of both powers. But it was thought by the Foreign Office to be unwise to approach Italy on the subject, as the Italians might, if they felt that the Dolbahanta fell under their jurisdiction, demand a compensating concession elsewhere, particularly in Abyssinia.⁸ 'Protection' of the Dolbahanta would have embarrassed Britain here, for she had originally desired to quietly discuss with an Abyssinian chief the devastation of the Ogaden by the Abyssinians from Harrar, but later felt that this should more properly be prevented by using the good offices of the Italians.

The treaties themselves ran thus (the treaty with the Habr Gerhajis being in its content typical of them all⁹):

We the undersigned Elders of the Habr Gerhajis Tribe are desirous of entering into an agreement with the British Government for the maintenance of our independence, the preservation of order and other good and sufficient reasons.

Now it is hereby agreed and covenanted as follows:

I
The Habr Gerhajis tribe do hereby declare that they are pledged and bound never to cede, sell, mortgage or otherwise give for occupation save to the British Government any portion of the territory presently inhabited by them or being under their control.

II

All vessels under the British flag shall have free permission to trade at all ports and places in the territories of the Habr Gerhajis, and the tribe is bound to render assistance to any vessel whether British or belonging to any other nation that may be wrecked on the above mentioned shores and to protect the crew, the passengers and cargo of such vessel giving speedy intimation to the resident at Aden, of the circumstances, for which act of friendship and goodwill a suitable reward will be given by the British Government.

III

All British subjects residing in or visiting the territories of the Habr Gerhajis tribe shall enjoy perfect safety and protection and shall be entitled to travel all over the said limits under the safe conduct of the Elders of the tribe.

IV

The traffic in slaves throughout the territories of the Habr Gerhajis tribe shall cease for ever and the Commander of any of Her Majesty's vessels, or any other British Officer duly authorised shall have the power of requiring the surrender of any slave and of supporting the demand by force of arms by land and sea.

V

The British Government shall have the power to appoint an agent or agents to reside in the territories of the Habr Gerhajis tribe, and every such agent shall be treated with respect and consideration and be entitled to have for his protection such guard as the British Government deem sufficient.

The above written Treaty shall come into force and have effect from the date of signing this Agreement.

In token of the conclusion of this lawful and honorable Bond [there followed names of the Elders of the Habr Gerhajis tribe] and Frederick Mercer Hunter, Major, Political Resident at Aden, the former for themselves their heirs and successors, and the latter on behalf of the British Government do each and all in the presence of witnesses offer their signatures, marks and seals at Aden this thirteenth day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eighty five, corresponding with the twenty eighth Rubia al awal one thousand, three hundred and two.

It was later endorsed 'Dufferin, Viceroy and Governor General of India'. Supplementary treaties with the tribes followed, e.g. with the Habr Toljaala:

Supplementary General Treaty Habr Toljaala

The British Government and the Elders of the Habr Toljaala Tribe who have signed this Agreement being desirous of maintaining and strengthening the relations of peace and friendship existing between them:

The British Government have named and appointed Major Frederick Mercer Hunter, C.S.I., Political Agent for the Somali Coast to conclude a treaty for this purpose.

The said Major F.M. Hunter, and the said Elders of the Habr Toljaala have agreed upon and

concluded the following articles:

Article I

The British Government in compliance with the wish of the undersigned Elders of the Habr Toljaala hereby undertake to extend to them and to the territories under their authority and jurisdiction the gracious favour and protection of Her Majesty the Queen – Empress.

Article II

The said Elders of the Habr Toljaala agree and promise to refrain from entering into any correspondence, agreement or treaty with any foreign nation or power except with the knowledge and sanction of Her Majesty's Government.

Article III

This treaty shall come into operation from the First day of February one thousand eight hundred and eighty six.

It can be seen that Britain clearly undertook to protect the tribes. The main motives for this protection can be seen to be:

1. The exclusion of foreign powers from the sensitive area of the Red Sea ports and the narrow exit from the Suez canal, a national and selfish British interest, an exclusion more particularly aimed at the new and menacing German Empire, with its growing fleet and its incomparable army, and the ever acquisitive French Republic.
2. The security and good order of the hinterland of the ports, and therefore of the ports themselves, particularly Berbera, which supplied mutton and other goods to the garrison who sat amid the 'barren rocks' of the vital port of Aden; and
3. The more altruistic imposition of European mores upon the Somalis, including the protection of shipwrecked unfortunates and other travellers from savage treatment and the ending, for the first time in the long history of mankind, of that most terrible and oppressive of conditions, and vilest of trades, slavery.

Three other powers were present in the land of the Somalis. The French Republic, by agreement with the others, occupied a small area around the port of Djibouti. The Kingdom of Italy, constantly haunted by dreams of the grand vistas and military omnipotence of the past, and only fitfully awakening to the more humble and greatly reduced circumstances of the present, enjoyed a protectorate over a large area of Somaliland, over Eritrea, and, so it was thought, over the ancient and Christian empire of Abyssinia (Ethiopia).

That formidable power, which had dominated the area for centuries, was ruled by a Negus Negusti, or King of Kings, the self styled Lion of Judah, who sat in barbaric splendour in Addis Ababa, 'New Flower',¹⁰ receiving the homage of the feudal lords of the ancient mountain kingdoms of the Shoa, the Amhara and others. The Abyssinians had laid siege to Mecca itself about the time of the birth of the Prophet, and we have already noted them receiving fugitives from that city at the time

of the Hegira. The Abyssinians had been recently engaged in climactic battles. In the Sudan, utterly misruled by Egypt, a certain Mohammed Ahmed, a man of genius, had arisen, had proclaimed himself the Mahdi, had expelled the Egyptians and killed the British General Gordon, who disobeying orders to evacuate the country, fell heroically in the siege of Khartoum. On the death of the Mahdi, he was succeeded by the Khalifa (successor) Abdullah. Despite warnings from the Mahdi not to provoke the formidable Abyssinians, in 1885, after suffering a defeat in a battle with them, his general, armed with superior weapons, inflicted a shattering defeat on the highlanders in a great battle, overran the province of Amhara and occupied (and needless to say, sacked) the ancient capital of Gondar. In 1889 the Emperor John, at the head of a formidable force, engaging the dervishes in an even greater battle, was killed by a stray bullet in the moment of victory;¹¹ his death saw the disorganization and collapse of his army in an even greater slaughter. His head was sent to the delighted Khalifa at Omdurman. The heavy losses incurred in these victories were fatal to the victorious Sudanese, who had sacrificed the flower of their army for this gory trophy.¹²

In 1889 the new Negus, Menelik II, signed a treaty of protection with Italy. This, he maintained, had not compromised his country's independence, although the Italians, armed with a deliberately inaccurate and compromising Italian version of the text, claimed that it had.¹³ By 1896 the Italians had had enough of verbal argument and legal uncertainty; the descendants of Caesar and Pompey, of Marius and Sulla, sent their legions, armed with the latest weapons and supported by Eritraean auxiliaries, on the march for Addis Ababa. They were met at Adowa by the Negus' nephew, General Ras Makonnen, accompanied by the Emperor and Empress and 120,000 fierce and patriotic Abyssinian highlanders. The Italians and Eritraeans fought bravely; but 43 per cent of the Italian Army of invasion, and all of the Italian claims to Abyssinia, were left on that fatal field. The image of ancient Rome had been a vision in the mist, dispersed by the wind of the morning.¹⁴

The Abyssinian inferiority in arms, revealed by the battles with the Khalifa, had been corrected by a copious flow of modern weapons from Russia and France. This, however, had utterly upset the power balance between Abyssinia and the Somali clans, who had not been allowed to import modern weapons. The ancient Muslim city of Harrar, once forbidden to non believers, had in its glorious past invaded Abyssinia with Somali assistance, and the Christian land had only been saved by the Portuguese. This exploit was long celebrated by the Somali poets. However, that city (known to the Somalis in Sir Richard Burton's time as 'A paradise inhabited by Asses'), which had defended the passes from the Abyssinian highlands into the Ogaden, had declined, had been occupied by Muslim Egypt, and then abandoned by that power in 1884, along with Berbera and the coast. The now heavily armed Abyssinians seized the passes, and occupied not only Harrar, but Jig-Jigga, Gildessa and Biyo-Kadoba.¹⁵ The army was supplied with food by the simple logistical expedient of raiding the Somali Ogaden tribes.¹⁶ This would be of great significance in the subsequent history of both British Somaliland and the Somali Republic.

The British Government, their hands freed by the Italian defeat at Adowa and Italy's subsequent renunciation of its Protectorate, concluded a treaty with the King of Kings of Ethiopia, Menelik II, in 1897. The treaty dealt with trade, with the free movement of the subjects of either power and their protected nomad tribes over the frontiers; it allowed the supply of firearms to Ethiopia but denied them to the Mahdists of the Sudan (the decisive defeat of the Khalifa at Omdurman would take place the following year), protected caravan routes, and it delimited the frontiers in Somaliland. In an Annexe to the treaty, Mr Renell Rodd, the British Envoy, added the following note:

...I am instructed by my Government, in the event of a possible occupation by Ethiopia of territories inhabited by tribes who have formerly accepted and enjoyed British protection in the districts excluded from the limits of the British Protectorate on the Somali Coast, as recognised by your Majesty, to bring to your knowledge the desire of Her Majesty the Queen to receive from your Majesty an assurance that it will be your special care that these tribes receive equitable treatment, and are thus no losers by this transfer of suzerainty...

On the same day came the reply:

The Conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah, Menelek II, by the grace of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia, to Mr Rennell Rodd, Envoy of the Kingdom of England.

Peace be unto you.

Your letter, written in Genbot 1889, respecting the Somalis, has reached me. With regard to the question you have put to me, I give you the assurance that the Somalis who may by boundary arrangements become subjects of Ethiopia shall be well treated and have orderly government.

Written at Addis Abbaba, the 6th Genbot 1889 (14th May, 1897).

(Seal of His Majesty the Emperor Menelek II).

The Emperor, having once been bitten by the Italians, was twice shy with the British, and produced a translation of the treaty in French, '...as I have no interpreter with me who understands the English language well enough to compare the English and Amharic version...' His nephew, Ras Makunan (Makonnen), Governor of Harrar 'and its Dependencies', agreed the frontier with Rennell Rodd – again with a French translation.

These agreements were the beginning of sorrows.

Ennobled, Lord Rennell of Rodd, poet and classicist, would later comment on this split of what he termed the one 'homogenous part of Africa', forecasting that it 'will probably become a cockpit of East Africa'.¹⁷

Chapter Three

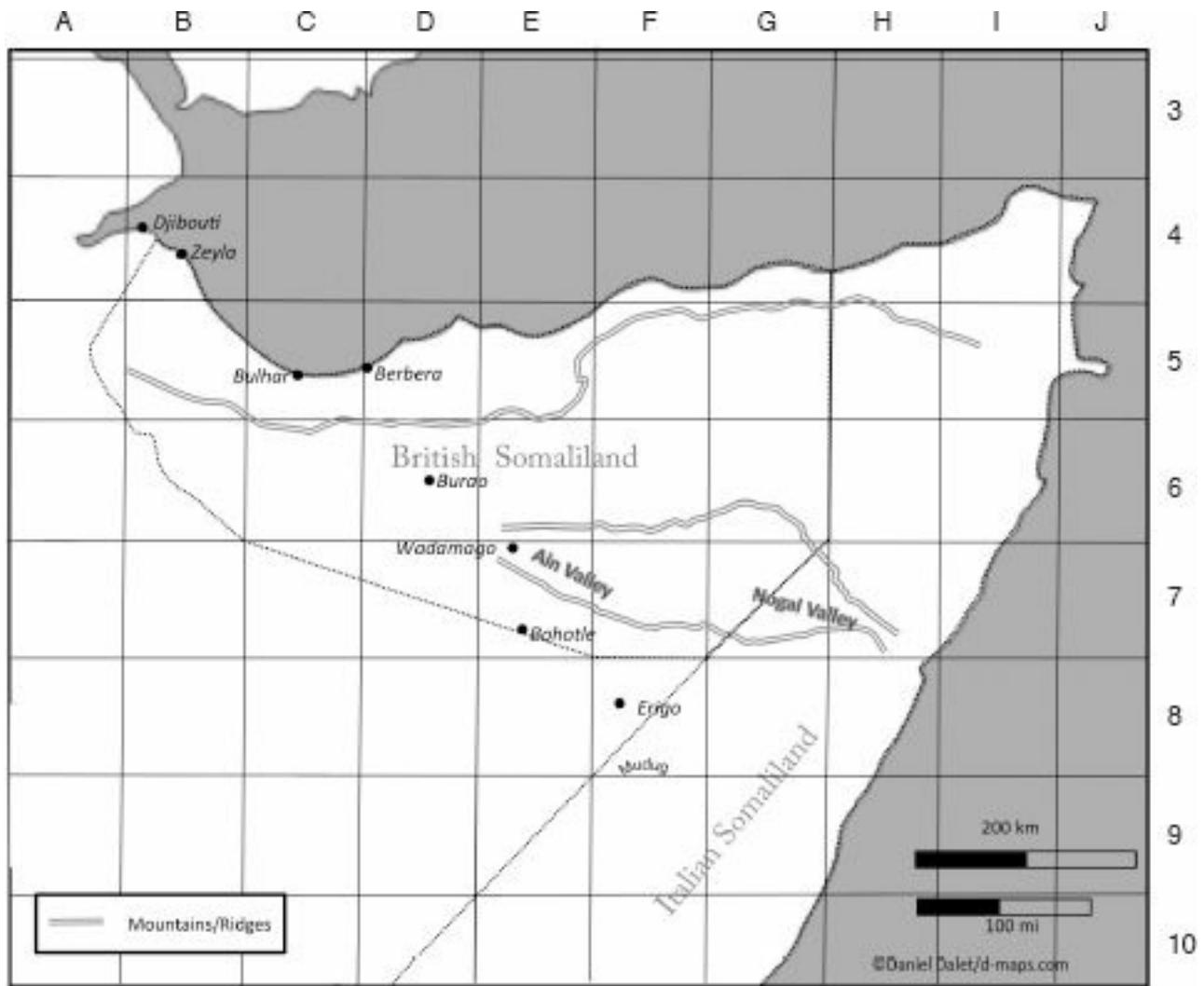
War with the Sayyid – The First Expedition

All War supposes human weakness, and against that it is directed.

War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse, with a mixture of other means.

Carl Von Clausewitz

For all the impact of the Europeans and their superior organization, discipline, technology and above all their unchallengeable naval power, which meant that they could return or retreat in whatever force and wherever on a coastline or river they chose, it was their Christian religion, although largely subordinated to their rationalism and their secular authorities, which irked the Muslim Somalis most. However, the greatest insult, the heaviest humiliation, came not from the advanced Europeans, but from the hated Christian Amhara of Abyssinia, who had occupied the ancient and sacred Harrar, and now had been confirmed by the Christian British as rulers of the grasslands of the Ogaden. They need not have worried about Britain's Christian link with Ethiopia, for she had, to the fury of some Christians,¹ long coldly supported the Ottoman Sultan, the self-appointed caliph, against the Christian Russians and the Bulgarians, despite the Turkish massacres of the latter. The British Foreign Office consulted Britain's interests, without regard to sentiment. But, nevertheless, Muslims worldwide felt under threat.



The First Expedition.

In 1856 there was born a son to the wandering Ogaden holy man, Abdille, the first child of thirty. The child was named Mohammed Abdille Hassan. The boy's mother, Timiro Seed, belonged to the Ali Gheri, a tribe of the great Dolbahanta clan. By the age of eleven the boy had learnt the Koran by heart. He studied Islam deeply. In 1894 he performed the haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. He stayed for eighteen months. In the holy city he became attached to Mohammed Salih, the founder of a new order of mystics, the Saalihiya. In meditation with Salih, deprived of books, he became as if purified in a fire, seeing visions of the Prophet and of angels. In 1895 he returned to Berbera, charged with the conversion of the Somalis to the puritan doctrines which he had so deeply imbibed.²

Harald G.C. Swayne, who visited Somaliland seventeen times between 1884 and 1893, had the following to say of Somali religious leaders:

In the interior of Northern Somaliland there are no permanent settlements except those founded and occupied by religious Mahomedans, called sheikhs, mullahs, or widads [wadaad]. These settlements occur, on an average, about seventy miles apart. The two largest which I have seen are in Seyyid Mahomed's Town in Ogaden, and Hargeisa in the Habr Awal country. There are about a dozen others of minor importance, all inhabited by mullahs, scattered over several degrees of latitude and longitude, but Hargeisa may be taken as the type of them all.

Mullahs are enabled to settle down and form permanent villages, and cultivate, on account of the respect in which they are held by all tribes. A looting party must be driven to the last extremity of hunger before it will attack them, and generally in such a case only as many animals are looted as are needed to provide food. The mullahs are drawn from various tribes, and being cosmopolitan, have very extended influence. They are a quiet, respectable class, generally on the side of order, and civil to travellers.³

But Sir Richard Burton observed that:

...Much learning seems to make them mad; like the half crazy Fakihs of the Sahara in Northern Africa, the Widad, or priest, is generally unfitted for the affairs of this world, and the Hafiz or Koran-reciter, is almost idiotic...

They were, he also observed, 'uncommonly tiresome companions' and discussed 'questions of divinity...with a violence bordering upon frenzy.'

Burton recounted later:

Till late at night we were kept awake by the crazy Widads: Ao Samattar had proposed the casuistical question, 'Is it lawful to pray upon a mountain when a plain is at hand?' Some took the *pro*, some took the *contra*, and the wordy battle raged with uncommon fury.

Major Hanbury-Tracy would write in 1901 that the 'Mullah people...devoted their time to praying and looking after their flocks and herds, never raiding other tribes and never being raided in their turn.'⁴

When the Sayyid, the 'Mad Mullah', began his mission at Berbera, he was doomed to failure. The sect which was most prominent among the Somalis was the more tolerant Quaadiriya, although an

Arab Sheikh had around 1870 established the fast growing Ahmadiya, of which the sect of the Sayyid was a more recent part. The more sophisticated merchants of Berbera and the coast were inclined to dispute an attempt to introduce a harsh Islamic discipline, especially since the Sayyid had railed against the chewing of quat, as the prophet had forbidden intoxicants. This interpretation of the drug was disputed by some, who argued that intoxicants were forbidden because they were an impediment to prayer, and quat simply promoted hilarity and good humour.⁵ However, anyone who has observed the effects of a temporary delay in quat ingestion caused by the inconvenient interval of night and slumber would be inclined to regard quat as addictive. This will scarcely have aided the Sayyid's cause. Indeed, the label 'Mad Mullah' seems to have originated among the Somalis of Berbera, who, Jardine informs us,⁶ labelled him as '*Wadad Wal*, the Mullah that is an idiot.' An Isaaq poet, Ali Jaama Habril, composed a poem 'Mohammed the Lunatic', '*Muhammad Waal*'.⁷ However, Samatar points out that *waan*, in Somali, covers many concepts, from sheer lunacy through 'lunatic' valour to an other worldly inner serenity.⁸

The sophisticates of Berbera were farther removed from the Abyssinians, the hated Amhara, whose incursions had seen the desecration of Somali shrines; and from the occupation of Somali territory by these sometimes most unchristian Christians, who felt they proclaimed the doctrine of Jesus, but sometimes used the methods of Genghis. The Amhara, it has to be observed, were far from alone in this; the crusaders had sullied their name by indiscriminate massacres, the Spanish conquest of the new world was accompanied by terrible cruelties, the internecine wars of the Christians themselves were hardly an example of chivalry, and the Muslim conquests advanced the Muslim faith by offering three choices to the conquered: become a Muslim, or pay taxes, or die. All this is not to adopt an anti-religious attitude; 'The theologian', wrote Edward Gibbon, 'may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity.'

A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings.

Yet the faithful African Muslim might well give way to despair or anger, and the seeming threat to Islam sharpened the faith, stiffened the resolve and displayed the outlines in a harsh and simplified glare. Similarly, the force of nationalism was evoked in both the religious and those of a more worldly nature by the partition of the land. The historical and often bloody antipathy of the *Orthodoxy* of the Amhara, the *Roman Catholicism* of the Italians and French, and the *Protestantism* of the British were united in the threatened mind of the Somali into a common attempt at conquest, and perhaps conversion. Even those who saw the disunity of the Christians were dismayed, and being Somalis, expressed it in poetry:⁹

And there was no greater poet among the Somalis, no greater orator, than the Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan, the 'Mad Mullah'. He was highly intelligent. He was single minded. He was deeply religious. He was vastly ambitious. He was very persuasive. He would later, on many a bloody field and rapid march, discover his latent military genius. All these qualities were in his favour. How, then, could he not conquer? But one quality which he possessed, although it inspired fear, although it created an admirable military discipline, acted as a balance and a counter to all the rest. He was abominably, mind numbingly, brutally cruel. It was fatal to his ambition and his genius alike, for to whom could those who dreaded his capricious and unpredictable savagery turn for succour? To

whom would those whose livestock (like a true Somali!) he had raided, turn for restitution? Who in the whole land could rid them of the sinister threat which hung over anyone who was not fully with him or the sect of Mohamed Salih, or who was thought too tardy in their belief in his sanctity, or who doubted that he was a new Mahdi and the saviour of Islam and the Somalis alike? Who but the infidel children of the north and their great Indian empire, with whom they already had a treaty of protection! The brilliant gifts of a persuasive and golden tongue in a society of poets and orators, and of a military genius in a land of warriors, was negated by the usual recourse of empowered simpletons – terror and the lash.

It has already been related that the Sayyid had poor success in persuading the ‘bored and unsympathetic’¹⁰ people of the coast, who were less poetic than the nomads of the interior, and swayed by more comfortable doctrines. He was reliant on alms for his sustenance – Douglas Jardine, in his book *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* reported that ‘there is an old woman in Berbera today, who up to the time of his death often wondered whether he would repay the four annas she lent him in the days of his need, should the opportunity offer’. However, alms could hardly have been very forthcoming to a preacher who denounced luxuries, the vice of those best able to afford them. He then moved to the interior, to the land of his boyhood, his mother’s tribe, the ‘Aligherry’, a part of the great Dolbahanta clan family. He lived in a village of mullahs, a day’s march from Kirritt (Kerritt), some 170 miles from Berbera.¹¹

There he seemed to the administrators of the Protectorate to be a useful influence. He settled disputes among the Dolbahanta and Habr Toljaala tribes, and even seemed to stop them from raiding each other, a very considerable achievement with the nomads.

On 12 April 1899 Lieutenant Colonel James Hayes Sadler, Consul General and therefore commander on the spot of the British Somaliland Protectorate, wrote to his superior, the Foreign Secretary, the Marquess of Salisbury, on:

...the doings of a Mullah, by name Haji Muhammad Abdullah, in the Dolbahanta country, who it was said was collecting arms and men with a view to establishing his authority over the south eastern portion of the Protectorate. It was freely rumoured that it was his ultimate object, should he find himself strong enough, to head a religious expedition against the Abyssinians.

Noting his previous good behaviour, Sadler added that:

Several communications had passed between him and the vice consul at Berbera, all written in proper terms, and three months ago he sent a prisoner into Berbera, against whom a complaint had been laid of robbery and violence in the interior.

Jardine, an administrator himself, wrote:

The Somali were not slow to realize that his rough and ready justice was preferable to the long journey to Berbera and the prospect of a government not being in a position to enforce its decision in the interior, when given.

‘The facts which brought this Mullah prominently to our notice’, reported Sadler, ‘are as follows:’

In the middle of February last, Ahmed Muhammad, who had just been made a stipendiary Akil [headman of a Tribal section]...signalled his accession to office by heading a raid by his tribe, the Habr Yunis Musa Arrah, on some camels belonging to the Mullah and his people. As soon as news of this raid reached me a party of the camel corps was sent out to intercept the raiders. This was successfully done, Ahmed Muhammad being brought into Berbera from 60 miles off with over sixty raided camels. These were returned to the Mullah, who wrote a civil letter of thanks, adding that there were more camels to be returned, and hoping they would be sent. In the meantime the Mullah collected a force from the Dolbahanta and moved against the Habr Yunis. He was written to and told that as his camels had been recovered for him there was no necessity to proceed against the Habr Yunis, and that he should return to his country. There was then no reason to suppose that he was actuated by any other desire than that of recovering his raided animals. In the Habr Yunis country, however, he was joined by Madar Hirsi, the rival of Sultan Nur for the Sultanship of the Habr Yunis, and his party...

After an explanation of the origin of this rivalry, Sadler continued:

...The matter of itself is unimportant, as neither Nur nor Madar Hirsi have any real authority over the Habr Yunis, who look to us as their Sultan; but it has a bearing on the present question, as it has afforded Haji Mumammad Abdullah an opportunity of extending his influence and of interfering with the affairs of a tribe with whom he had no previous concern.

Taking Madar Hirsi and his followers with him, the Mullah returned to Burao, still in the Habr Yunis country and close to the Habr Toljaala border, and having halted there some days, he finally left for Kob Fardod about 19 March.

It was whilst he was at Burao that the first reports of the new attitude he has assumed reached us. Information came that he had proclaimed Madar Hirsi Sultan of the Habr Yunis in place of Sultan Nur. Further accounts said that he had lately received sixty rifles from the Mijjerteins of Obbia on the east coast, and was expecting more, and that he intended to rule the interior, leaving the coast to the Europeans.

Thus it can be seen that the British Consul General thought that the Sayyid, the Mullah, was clearly arming and aiming at unifying the interior under his hegemony, if not direct rule; and if it was his intention to leave the Europeans undisturbed on the coast, against whom could his newly collected force be directed but the hated Abyssinians? – with whom Britain had a treaty. That treaty, signed only two years before, clearly stated in the first Article that: '...it is forbidden for armed bands from either side to cross the frontier of the other on any pretext whatever without previous authorization from the competent authorities.'

Britain was, therefore, in a quandary. She had no treaty with the Dolbahanta clan, and therefore no real legal standing in its affairs, unless it attacked a protected clan. She sympathized with those Somalis who were under the occupation of the Abyssinians. Indeed, the French would later congratulate the British consul at Zeyla on having no Abyssinian residents, provoking the consul to report that 'These Christian natives, addicted to strong drink, and ever ready to make use of firearms

on the slightest provocation, are an element of population that need not be encouraged to settle in our coast towns.’ If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?’ If they did these things in French ruled Djibouti, what would they *not* do in Abyssinian-ruled Ogaden?

But Imperial interests prevailed in Imperial counsels – if they were to upset the Abyssinians, that important nation would turn elsewhere. The Dolbahanta would never be permitted to deal with foreign powers – they were certainly *de facto* under the protectorate, if not strictly *de jure*.

But the Sayyid, of course, had enemies. His sect was bitterly opposed to the majority Quaadiriya. Lies and magnifications were no doubt disseminated by his enemies, and Lieutenant Colonel Sadler had spent much energy suppressing fanatical Muslims in India, and such ill reports would therefore fall on well prepared ground.¹² Yet the Anglo Ethiopian treaty was not a secret, for it was presented to both Houses of Parliament in 1898, and was on sale to the public, price 1d. It must have been known to the Mullah, who had an admirable intelligence service. Perhaps he placed too great a reliance on the *de jure* independence of the Dolbahanta.

A very small event was now used by Sadler to test the Sayyid’s intentions. His report to Lord Salisbury continued thus:

Whilst enquiries were proceeding news was received that a man in the employ of Captain Cox, who was collecting natural history specimens in the interior, had run away with a rifle supplied to him for escort purposes. There was reason to believe that the man had taken the rifle to Hajji Muhammad Abdullah, and from information since received there can be little doubt that this was so. This seemed a convenient opportunity of ascertaining the Mullah’s attitude, and, by my direction, Lieutenant Cordeaux wrote to him directing him to return the rifle to Berbera if it was with him...

Cordeaux wrote as follows:

It has been reported to us that a man, by name Duwaleh Hirsi, in the employ of Captain Cox, has run away with a rifle which he has stolen from that gentleman, and that he has taken the rifle to you.

We therefore write this letter to inform you that if the rifle is with you it must be sent into Berbera immediately.

It cannot be denied that the tone of the last sentence, if addressed to a subject, would have been acceptable; but if addressed to a leader who had hitherto been accepted as responsible and used by the British as such, to their advantage, its tone was peremptory. For a man who had a very high opinion of his dignity and his mission, the very smallness of the matter must have been insulting. And petty theft from the person was quite rare and frowned upon among those fierce rustlers! It was far more common among the English.¹³

The reply, written in Arabic on the back of Cordeaux’s letter and repeated in large white letters over a painted red background, was short and to the point.

There is no God but God, Muhammad is the prophet of God.

Oh, man! I have not stolen anything from thee nor from any one else. Seek thy object from him who has stolen of thee, and serve whom thou pleaseth.

According to Sadler, the expression ‘Oh man!’ in Arabic is one of contempt, never used between equals.

However, the matter was not as simple a one as just a message and reply! The account of the delivery of the message, and the delivery of the reply, is dubious and enigmatic. Skulduggery from another source, perhaps a religious or clan rival, may have taken a hand in this, for a second reply, unsigned and undated, to a second letter was brought by the messenger, but Sadler reported to Lord Salisbury that he had *no knowledge of another letter being sent*. The second reply, to the unacknowledged and mysterious second letter, was addressed to ‘The Officers of Government’ and ran as follows:

...First, two letters have been received from you, we have read them and understood their contents. The one [Cordeaux’s letter] brought by the Ascar [presumably Askari, native soldier, i.e. the Sowar, the private soldier of the Camel Corps who was used as the messenger, see below] was only a request for assistance. The second contained expressions which are the reverse of good. Both came from you, and we see they are signed by you.

The letter then quoted from an Arabian classic on how to behave to your neighbour. It also contained the following:

...Further, we inform you, oh, man, do not ride two horses at the same time; you are like one possessed of two feet, one of which is sound and the other has been struck by the times and halts...

This seems to refer to the very different tones of the two letters the Sayyid had received.

‘The one brought by the Ascar’ is Cordeaux’s letter taken to the Sayyid by a ‘Camel Sowar’, a messenger from the British Somaliland Camel force, who was wearing a British uniform, since he related that ‘...they called me a Kafir [an infidel], and laughed at my uniform, saying that I smelt, and asking why I wore the sirkar’s clothes...’.

The Sowar related that, on reading Cordeaux’s letter, the Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah (the Sayyid, the Mullah) had exclaimed:

‘...What is this about the rifle?’ I replied that I knew nothing about the contents of the letter. He said ‘How should I know anything about the rifle? Why has the Sirkar written to me about it? There is no mention of the man’s name or tribe in the letter, so what can I do?’

This is strange, since Cordeaux’s letter had plainly given the man’s name as ‘Dirwan Hirsi’, although not his tribe. The Sowar then claimed that he spent the next day looking after his camel. He was lodged in the same house as the Sayyid’s mother and wife.

The Sowar went on:

On the third day the Mullah sent for me. I had seen him before [presumably the Sowar meant *on that day*]; he often used to come into the house. I went to him, and he said he would give me his reply to the letter I had brought; that he had just received another letter which had been brought by a Somali. He asked me about it, but I told him I knew nothing

about it, and asked him who had brought it. He said 'A Somali'. A man named Salan had come in that day. I thought that he must have brought the letter. He then gave me a letter. It was written on the back of the letter I had brought him. I saw the Government stamp on it. He [the Sheikh, the Sayyid] said 'This is the reply to your [Cordeaux's] letter. I will give you the answer to the other letter tomorrow.' He said that the second letter contained 'bad words'. Next morning he gave me two letters, and I then went away, and got into Berbera on Saturday night...

The origin of the second letter is therefore a mystery. It certainly seems to have either inflamed or precipitated the Sayyid's antipathy to the British. But how reliable was the testimony of the Sowar? Sadler thought that the Sowar's account:

... throws some light on the doings of this Mullah and his following, and of their present attitude towards us. *I cannot help thinking, though, that this man knows more than he has said, and that he has probably been sworn and threatened not to give information – he had a scared look on him when he returned.* [italics added]

The Sowar had also related that he had asked a relative who lived in the Sayyid's camp about rifles, and had been told that they originally had six, but had received a further fifty-five. He reported that the Sayyid and his Mullahs practised with them every day. He also reported that an old man, Firim Goleh, an Akil, of the Musa Ismail Jungly, had said that he hoped, when the Sayyid was on an expedition, that God would not bring him back. The Sayyid sent for him, and he was beaten with shoes and whips until he lost consciousness. They threw water over him and left him under a tree. 'This was on the day I left', reported the Sowar, 'and he was lying under the tree when I came away.'

This seems a very dubious matter on which to weigh the questions of war and peace, since if Sadler thought that the Sowar had been 'threatened not to give information', what sort of information could that be? After all, the Sowar had already reported the import of arms and shooting practice, and the beating of an Akil, a tribal headman, all decidedly unfavourable to the Sayyid – and Cordeaux's sharp letter was based on the possession of just *one* rifle! He reported all *this* without fear! If the Sowar knew 'more than he had said', and if what he *had* said was damning, would this not at least raise the possibility that the Sowar have been lying about the bad things, and perhaps concealing something positive in the Sayyid's favour?

However, Sadler had concluded that the Mullah had frightened the ignorant into believing that he was able to hear what was said of him in Berbera, and able to render bullets harmless, a very useful recruiting tool when expecting to face Maxim guns or concentrated rifle fire, as the Khalifa's Sudanese warriors had at the battle of Omdurman in October 1898, six months before. Perhaps the news of their slaughter had not yet filtered through.

Sadler's letter to Lord Salisbury ended with a proposal to hold a 'military promenade', a reconnaissance in force, through the Habr Toljaala country which bordered the Dolbahanta, taking 100 Somali infantry, and asked for two Maxim guns from Britain and reinforcements of twenty-five sabres of the Indian troops and five sappers (Engineers) to construct the zaribas (dense thornbush entanglements, almost the equivalent of barbed wire) from the Aden garrison, to which he would add fifteen Camel Corps sowars and a few police.

All this was to ascertain the 'precise object of this movement'. 'It is a religious movement', Sadler added, 'and this is always a matter of concern in a Mahommedan country.' Later, on 31 July,

Sadler wrote that 'reports from the Dolbahanta, apparently on good authority, are to the effect that the Mullah has gone off his head'. Henceforth, in the west, he was known as 'the Mad Mullah'.

However, while Sadler was making a demonstration in the west, at Hargeisa, the Sayyid had moved into the important and strategic wells at Burao.

Sadler reported to Salisbury on 31 August 1899:

There can be no doubt that this move on Burao under the circumstances reported is an actively hostile movement, and the time has come when we must meet this movement by force. We could not afford to let this Mullah remained in openly veiled [sic] revolt for a time at Bohotele, on the confines of our Protectorate, we cannot afford to allow him to menace our coast towns and our supremacy over the Protectorate which he is now in fact doing.

On 1 September 1899¹⁴ The Sayyid sent the following note to Berbera:

From Mohammed bin Abdullah Hassan to the English

This is to inform you that you have done whatever you have desired. You have oppressed our ancient religion without cause. Further, to inform you that whatever people obey you they are liars and slanderers.

Further to inform you that Mohammed, your Akil, came to ask from us our arms; and we, therefore, send you this letter. Now choose for yourselves. If you want war, we accept it; but if you want peace, pay the fine.¹⁵

This and salaams.

'Pay the fine' appears to be a reference to the tax demanded of non-Muslims.

The defiant Sayyid, who from his base among the powerful Dolbahanta clan and with many adherents from the warlike Ogaden seemed to dominate the Habr Yunis with his determined following, now committed a grievous error. He had been faced with a crisis when the nominal Sultan of the Dolbahanta, Ali Muhammad of the Fari tribe, sought assistance against him from the powerful Sultan of the Mijjertain, Jusuf Ali, and also wrote to Berbera warning of the Sayyid's intentions. Although blessed with the remarkable gift of poetic persuasion which rings in Somalia even today, he chose a more savagely direct course; he sent assassins to murder the Sultan. The great Dolbahanta clan was outraged, and only his mother's tribe, the Ali Gheri, stayed fully loyal. He was forced to flee to the Ogaden,¹⁶ where the depredations of the Abyssinians had made patriotic opposition to them the 'last refuge of the scoundrel'. Here he seems to have secured a considerable victory.

The Abyssinians, searching for the Sayyid, had stored a large number of looted camels in a zariba at Jig-Jigga. The owners appealed to the Sayyid, and 6000 of the Sayyid's Ogaden allies stormed the enclosure, freeing the looted stock, although suffering heavy casualties. The Abyssinian commander denied this, claiming a victory; but the British Vice-Consul at Harrar reported that: 'The Abyssinians, it seems, fear the Somalis very much. I have never seen men so afraid as they are now; they have given rifles to the children to show they have troops here.'

Jardine added that 'those who recall Adowa's stricken field [the Abyssinian victory

over the Italians] will remember that the Abyssinian is no mean fighting man.’¹⁷

In July 1900 Sadler reported to Salisbury that:

The Mullah dominates the whole of the Ogaden, where he is a terror to the people of that country and the tribes on our border. He is making strenuous efforts to obtain arms and ammunition, offering as much as five camels for a cheap rifle and one camel for fifteen rounds of ammunition...there is reason to believe, too, that sufficient vigilance is not exercised at Harrar over the sale of arms...

This says much against the efficiency of the Ethiopian control of Harrar, since the arms were chiefly used against them.

But the news from Somaliland was perhaps drowned by the events in South Africa, where in 1899 the great Boer War had broken out, with its early humiliations to British arms raising public interest to fever pitch. Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking were on everyone’s lips. The pitiful physical condition of those who came forward to fight raised concerns among the elite, and revealed to all the terrible conditions under which the poor laboured. The war’s unpopularity internationally revealed that the policy of ‘Splendid Isolation’ had become more perilous than splendid, and might endanger national security. Britain, apart from her faithful dominions, was alone.

The Foreign Office, which controlled the Protectorate, had many more pressing concerns than a fractious Mullah in the Horn of Africa. The rapidly growing power of the United States, where Britain had been popularly considered as the enemy,¹⁸ and where the balance of power on the vast Canadian frontier along the 48th Parallel was increasingly against the Empire, was desperately appeased from Panama to Alaska. The United States was supported in the Spanish American war of 1898, and a very serious mistake of the British Ambassador in suggesting a joint European diplomatic intervention in that war was covered up by blaming the Germans. But Britain’s terrible oppressions in Ireland, the worst ruled of all her subject lands, saw a vast emigration from that unhappy land to America, and the embittered Irish citizens of the New World looked to secure justice in the Old. With the alienation of the growing power of the German Empire another, and larger (if less vociferous) section of the United States was alienated. The new German Empire, much nearer home, with a large and highly efficient army and a menacingly growing battlefleet, was a serious worry. The traditional enemy, France, had been confronted at Fashoda in South Sudan in 1898, after the victory at Omdurman, and it was the French interest in Ethiopia which induced Britain to maintain her close friendship with, and support of, that country. Russia was considered a menace to Constantinople [Istanbul] and the Straits, to India and to British interests in China. The Netherlands, although no longer in the big power league, were strong in support of their Boer children. Suppose, in the international bitterness engendered by the Boer war, they all combined? How many troops and ships should the British send to the poor Protectorate of Somaliland in these circumstances?

Even had there seemed to be an option in 1900 and 1901 to send a large army to Somaliland, how could it be supplied? There were no real roads. The terrain was sometimes mountainous, sometimes scrub and thornbush, sometimes desert, sometimes verdant, and sometimes unexplored and unknown. Very often large areas were utterly waterless. The camel was king. There were transport camels, riding camels and eating camels. On an advance, you had to carry your water with you between wells and pools, often over large distances. If you stayed for a time at a place, you had to build up a supply of food and ammunition. You might have sheep for food, but these needed water. This was taken by camels. But the Somalis had raised camel and livestock raiding to an art form.

Plainly, the construction of roads and military railways on the Sudanese scale was needed. But the treasury wanted the war to be self supporting as far as possible, and Somaliland had no real taxes save port dues. There was no real wealth save livestock. This stringency, although precluding a thorough and massive Roman style war, was also a strength. The British yoke was easy and their burden light – in many cases unseen. Three schools were maintained, where elementary reading and writing in Arabic (there was no Somali script) and simple arithmetic were taught, although this could be obtained at local mosques. A Roman Catholic English school at Berbera was more popular, much to the annoyance of the Mullah. Three hospitals, at Zeyla, Bulhar and Berbera, were maintained by the British administration, with all medicines and surgical instruments, treating 13,440 cases in 1901/2; food was partly aided by charity, but from 1902 the feeding of paupers was met from Protectorate funds. Some thirty ‘cripples and incurables’ were maintained by the poor house in Berbera. Vaccinations against smallpox were free. In 1901/2, 200 visual impairments from cataracts were cured.¹⁹ When the blind could see, it was difficult for the Sayyid to point to oppression and to raise a cry for liberty. There was no colonization. The hunger for land of white settlers, which raised so much bitterness in Kenya and in Southern Africa, which ruined the native Americans and the Australian Aborigines, and exterminated the poor Tasmanians, was absent. Divided, mutually hostile, acquisitive, competitive, warlike, the habitual rustlers of the interior of Somaliland had always been their own worst enemies.

The Sayyid, to repeat, therefore, had two cards to play. The first was religion. The British were, after all, Christian. The Abyssinians, the Amhara, were Christian. This advantage was reduced by the division of the Somalis into sects, of which the Mullah’s Saalihiya was one, and the smallest. The second was the Abyssinian occupation of the Ogaden. Here, the limits on Britain’s effort necessitated encouraging a greater effort from Ethiopia.

Harald Swayne recounts the following incident:²⁰

At Gagab, on 25th July 1892, a mullah calling himself Sheikh Sufi, who was not necessarily a very important man, appeared from Eastern Ogaden, from the direction of Mudug, and held a meeting of the tribesmen, at which he preached a Jihad, or holy war against Abyssinia. On this day, which was also the date of the arrival of my survey at this place, a great equestrian display was given by horsemen of the Rer Ali tribe to Sheikh Sufi; and he preached for hours to the crowd squatting in the sandy river bed. With my brother I stood at the Sheikh’s side for a time. He was polite to us, and asked us to listen to his words, as they were on important matters. Our interpreter helped us to get their drift.

Next day, after this mullah had gone, the same horsemen gave a display to ourselves, the mounted minstrels uttering the *Mot, io mot* (Hail, and again hail!) or royal salute accorded only to the British.

As the survey party (which consisted merely of my brother and myself, and an armed escort of camel-men whom we had drilled) left Milmil, the crowds of men, women and children followed us, clutching hold of our camel bridles and calling out,

‘The English are good; lead us against the Abyssinians.’ ...The mullahs were the traveller’s best friends; we gave them Korans and Mahomedan bead rosaries, and they blessed our expeditions.

Captain E.J.E. Swayne, of the Indian Staff Corps, younger brother of Major Harald Swayne and a man

of great local experience, was given the local rank of Lieutenant Colonel and placed in charge of the first expedition, which consisted of a native levy of Somalis, 1500 strong and comprising 1000 infantry, 100 camelry and 400 mounted infantry. Seventeen British officers were appointed to this force, and the Indian Government were requested to supply 50 Punjabi sepoy (all Muslims) to drill the force. These arrived too late, and the task was undertaken by the police, but the sepoy later rendered good service. Jardine²¹ reports that 1200 volunteers came forward on the first day 'despite the unusually low rate of pay that was offered', and the full levy was soon raised, which he attributed to the 'exasperation engendered in the mind of the average Somali on account of the Mullah's atrocities'. In July 1900 the Sayyid had raided the Habr Gerhajis, stealing much livestock and causing consternation; in September 1900 another raid, this time on the Habr Awal near the Abyssinian border, saw the sack of 50 villages and the indiscriminate slaughter of 100 people, including women and children. Lieutenant Colonel Swayne arrived in Somaliland in November 1900.

In June 1900 the Ethiopian Emperor suggested joint action against the Mullah, but this was 'not deemed expedient' [Sadler], probably because of the situation in South Africa, but two companies of the Central African Regiment, equipped with a Maxim gun, were sent to Hargeisa. In November 1900 Menelik again suggested cooperation, and this time his offer was accepted. In January 1901 a force of some 10,000 Abyssinians marched south from Harrar. A shortage of water caused numbers of them to return to Harrar. However, the remainder drove the Mullah back onto the Dolbahanta.

With armies of this size involved in the conflict – 8–10,000 Abyssinians, 1500–2000 Somalis and Indians – it is well to realize the actual numbers of fighting men of the tribes these forces moved among, in order to appreciate the essential element of Somali goodwill, or of neutrality.

The Ogaden tribes were estimated to contain, in all, 40,000 spearmen; the tribes of the Protectorate numbered over 90,000 spearmen, split roughly as follows:

- The Dolbahanta 26,000; the Habr Toljaala 7000; the Habr Gerhajis 10,000; the Habr Awal 20,000; the Warsangli 6000; the Isa 10,000 and the Gadabursi 12,000.

Thus the opposing forces were swimming in a sea of some 130,000 spearmen. Under normal circumstances they were, of course, mutually hostile anyway, even within the same clan family. But what if some folly, some religious slight or even a rumour of one were to bring them together?

In March 1901 a British officer, Brevet Major the Honorable A.H.C. Hanbury-Tracy, Royal Horse Guards, who had been attached for liaison to the Abyssinian forces operating in the Ogaden (the British forces likewise had an Ethiopian liaison officer with them), received the following instruction from Colonel Swayne, which he noted in his diary:

...To keep me posted up in all movements and intentions of the Abyssinian force. To report more especially upon (a) their behaviour in action, (b) the reliability of the men, (c) what resistance is met with from the tribes, the Abyssinian system of transport and commissariat, and to what extent it hampers or facilitates their movements, and to what degree the tribes are affected by it. Work up general intelligence, the value of which in many cases depends on its being early. I will keep you informed of our movements so as to enable you to allay any anxiety the Abyssinians (always a suspicious people) may have as to our *bona fides*. [Sadler, in his political instructions, had already warned of the importance of giving the Abyssinians information as to British movements, and the reason for them].

As regards Co-operation. – As the Abyssinian force started in January and has been long out of touch with us, co-operation can only take place on very general lines. Any close

co-operation within a limited theatre with the Abyssinians does not commend itself to me. Our force is a Mahommedan one, the Abyssinian a Christian one, and therefore 'Kafir'. Hitherto the Mullah's attempts at raising the tribes in a general religious war against us has failed, because his tribes know that ours are their co-religionists. Should we co-operate closely with the Abyssinians, however, matters would be entirely changed and our force would be reckoned to be a Kafir force. A general rising would then be possible against us and several of our own Mahommedan soldiers would be very severely tried. Tribes which I am confident now only need a little pressure to throw up the mullah and make a settlement with us would then refrain from doing so, and would, on the other hand, be compelled to join in the general fanatical movement. I do not want to stir up fanaticism, always an awkward factor, and as far as I can see there is no reason why any fanatical movement, *provided we keep clear of the Abyssinians*, [italics added] should be started against us, for the tribes have no cause of hostility to us...

Swayne also asked Hanbury-Tracy to send 'early reports' of 'any indications on the part of the Abyssinians to show a want of precaution in providing for their own safety', since if they were heavily defeated 'their 10,000 rifles and stores of ammunition' would be 'added to the resources the Mullah already has, [which] with the prestige his force would gain, *would absolutely alter the relative strength of his and our forces.*' [italics added] According to Swayne, 'in fact the Abyssinian part of the programme is generally to block the western part of the country and detach the tribes in that part from him, and drive the Mullah eastward, where it is our business to deal with him'. He added the following approbation – 'So far they have done well.' The Ethiopian alliance was fraught with danger.

Swayne now dealt with the Sayyid. Success would be to kill or capture that wily commander. Anything less was failure, for the Sayyid, if left alone, but free and alive, could use his golden words, his charisma, his dark threats and religious fever to inspire and control other minds.

The war which Colonel Swayne and the Mullah now waged was not one of positions, in the European style, or even in the style of the Omdurman campaign. The populations of the few and isolated 'towns' were seasonal. The villages, the 'kharias', were made of mobile, nomadic homes. It was a highly mobile war. It was almost comparable to a naval war, in which the wells and water holes and rain pools were island ports, and the opposing armies and their camels and livestock were the naval and merchant vessels, tied together for mutual support. The terrain between these havens was like a vast and varied sea of mountain and scrub, desert, dry riverbed and grassy plain in which forces might, and did, stumble upon each other in the often dense thornbush in encounter battles. But even the 'island' havens changed from month to month; pools would dry up, or appear unexpectedly, for rain might be heavy or light, early or late, or indeed, absent altogether. When an army moved between 'islands', it took its supplies with it: supplies of food, ammunition and above all, water. All were carried by the camel. These were always vulnerable, for as has been noted, the Somalis had elevated 'rustling' to an art form – or at least, the recounting of successes in their rich poetry was! And like the ancient Romans, any army in Somaliland had to make or occupy a fortified camp each night, a thorn fence zariba, for the camels and livestock had to be protected both from the fierce carnivores that prowled in the flickering shadows of the night – lion, leopard, hyaena – and man. Soldier and camel were of equal importance. Not enough men, and the army was overwhelmed. Not enough camels, or too many men; and it starved, or fled.

In this military equation four factors stood out as the most essential. Intelligence, to know where

the enemy were and in what force and with what intention; speed, to seize the enemy's livestock, to enable the army to seek, decline or accept combat, and to arrive at wells before the enemy; a constant political awareness that defeat or religious insult might multiply the opposing forces many times, while dividing your own; and however vile or brackish or fouled or discoloured, as it often was – *water, and where it could be found.*

Colonel Swayne trained his levies at Adadleh. There he formed two infantry corps of 500 men each, under Captain McNeill and Captain Phillips. The mounted troops were commanded by Major Beynon, and consisted of infantry mounted on ponies, commanded by Captain Merewether, and the Camel Corps under Captain Bruce. There was no artillery.

On hearing in March 1901 that the Abyssinians had driven the Sayyid from the Ogaden, and that the western Ogaden had attacked him, forcing him to retreat on Bohotle on the Abyssinian border, Sadler directed Colonel Swayne to move on the wells at Burao in early April, and to move down the Ain valley on the Mullah, before he could re-establish himself among his own Dolbahanta clan. The more cautious Foreign Office, however, urged Sadler to avoid operations in the Haud desert.

Sadler duly occupied Burao, and by 20 April had established a strongly fortified forward base at the wells, concentrating 800 transport camels there – of which 200 were for water alone. Intelligence reports placed the Sayyid's camp one day's march east of Lasader. The rains, however, did not come until May. On the 21st, the British striking force advanced by night marches to Ber, halted there for three days, and by 28 May had moved on to Eyl [Eil] Dab, burning a settlement of mullahs, which was the Sayyid's birthplace, Kob Fardod, on the way. The marches were conducted in a loose square formation, preceded by the mounted troops, and with the precious transport camels in the centre. Mounted scouts moved in front and to either side. At Eil Dab the scouts had the good fortune to seize a caravan of the Sayyid. They also gained intelligence on the locations of the various Dolbahanta tribes. On reaching Somala on 30 May, Major Beynon captured 50 horses and 3500 camels belonging to the Mahmud Gerad tribe, and 20,000 men of the tribe now pledged their support. A good supply of water being found at Somala, it was strongly fortified with a zariba (which included barbed wire) and Captain McNeil was placed in charge of the base there with 500 men, of whom 370 were armed with rifles. Lieutenant Colonel Swayne now marched out of the base to the south east, scouts in front and to the sides, to seek out and defeat the Sayyid's army, which it was reported consisted of 1200 horsemen and 6000 infantry.

Swayne did not know where the Sayyid was; but his departure from Somala was closely observed by the Sayyid's scouts. The Sayyid now had the chance of attacking either McNeil or Swayne, but chose the former. He hit McNeil's 500 men with three furious assaults in two days by ten times as many horse and foot, but not before McNeil was able to get the grazing camels back into zariba. These assaults were pressed home with great determination – but failed to penetrate the defences, although in places there was desperate hand to hand combat. The dervishes suffered 600 casualties in front of the wire and thornbush, where they had been mown down in First World War style by the fire of a .45 calibre Maxim gun as well as concentrated rifle fire. The Sayyid now retreated. McNeil's force had lost ten dead, with eight wounded. But the Sayyid soon realized that the captured livestock which he had sought to recapture in Swayne's absence had been a baited trap, for Swayne's force now blocked his retreat, and he was forced to divide his army to slip through the surrounding hills. Swayne now got in among these, and the Sayyid's forces headed in full flight into the Haud, while the Sayyid sought refuge with Sultan Othman Mahmud at the wells at Mudug, just in Italian Somaliland.

Swayne requested permission from Sadler to cross the border to attack, but the Foreign Office

declined Sadler's request. Britain was too isolated, too committed in her internationally unpopular war in South Africa to risk his force. Sadler despatched a messenger to Swayne with the information that the Foreign Office considered that he should retire to Burao; the whole Protectorate coming under the aegis of the Foreign Office, this was an instruction to be obeyed. Meanwhile, returning to Somala, Swayne punished the members of the Dolbahanta who had joined the Sayyid, capturing 30,000 sheep, 14,000 camels and 1000 cattle.

But the Sultan of Obbia in Italian Somaliland now took a hand, driving the Sayyid back to British Somaliland, 50 miles north west of Illig. Here Swayne, who was at Bohotle, moved to attack him. But having got in touch with the Sayyid's forces at last, the instructions from the Foreign Office via Sadler reached him. Yet he could not now retreat. He was 340 miles from the coast. Sensing defeat, the recently coerced jackals of the Dolbahanta would descend on him and his camels on the long march back.

Swayne probed forward; finding that the Sayyid was at Ferdiddin, he embarked on a moonless night with a mere 600 men, heading for the enemy. The next day, 17 July 1901, an advance guard led by Captain D.A. Friederichs ran into an ambush in dense thornbush, and Friederichs was killed trying to save a Somali NCO. Benyon lost nearly half his camels and horses, and 350 Dolbahanta fled the action, but when Swayne sent his reserves into the enemy's flank a dervish retreat ended up in a rout. The Sayyid now began a desperate retreat to the wells at Mudug in Italian Somaliland, pursued closely by Somali scouts, 'who emptied their bandoliers, quite unaware of the value of the man that jogged along on a weary pony in front of them, disdaining to take any notice of the bullets that whistled about his head.'²²

He and his entourage were reduced to drinking the water from the stomachs of the many dead camels which littered his line of retreat. Swayne's casualties amounted to 22 killed and 24 wounded; the Sayyid lost 1200 killed and wounded, and 800 taken prisoner. But the land of the Somalis was harsh to vanquished and victor alike; Swayne had to call off the pursuit for want of water and for the sake of the wounded. His march back to Burao was one of considerable suffering and thirst. Thus ended the first expedition.

Chapter Four

With the Abyssinians

Victory is the beautiful bright-coloured flower: transport is the stem without which it would never have blossomed.

Winston Spencer Churchill

What, meanwhile, had become of the Abyssinian blocking force in the Ogaden? The Abyssinian armies in the Ogaden had not had a happy time up to then, for in 1896, the year of the great Abyssinian victory at Adowa over the Italians, an army of 7000 men under Fittaurari¹ Waldo Manul had marched from Harrar to the Shabeele River; eleven men returned to Harrar. The year before, the army had lost 3000 men through desertions because of hunger, the rest saving their lives only by eating their transport animals.

Major Hanbury-Tracy had joined the Abyssinian army as a liaison officer in April 1901. On 25 May Abanabio, the Kynazmatch,² the Abyssinian Commander appointed by Ras Makonnen, arrived to take charge. During the march, Hanbury-Tracy appeared to while away time hunting; he reported the following in his diary entry for 27 May 1901:³

...[After reporting lying in wait for lions the previous evening and that morning...] On our arrival here [Garabat, on the Tug Faran] we immediately went after a rhinoceros which some Ogaden had seen on a hill behind the camp. He had, however, made off on the approach of the Abyssinians, and although we followed him for a long way we could not get near him.

Heat today intense. We were too tired today to visit the Kynasmach, *who we heard was anxious to see us.* [my italics]

Hunting seemed to come first! However, Major Hanbury-Tracy would soon find more urgent things to do among the Abyssinians, protecting his own Somalis.

The Abyssinian army on the march in the Ogaden was led by some 200 to 300 Somali spearmen, followed by the bulk of the infantry, with the Commander, the Kynazmatch, in the centre with retainers and cavalry. After the Kynazmatch came other chiefs with their retainers, followed by the baggage and then the rearguard.

‘The Abyssinians soldiers have no breakfast before starting,’ reported Hanbury-Tracy.

Some of them take a little parched corn in a corner of their clothes, otherwise nothing. They can go for two days without food, but, unlike the Somalis, require plenty of water. Each soldier carries 100 rounds on his person, and the only transport taken by Government, so

far as can be ascertained at present, is reserve ammunition.

The rear of the army was 'a curious sight', he wrote, 'some men riding ponies or mules, some leading them or marching alone, whilst others were driving donkeys lightly laden and carrying the grain rations supplied them by the Government.'

All were clothed alike in a long linen coat and short trousers fitting tight below the knees, with a broad leather belt containing their cartridges. Some had a sword strapped round the body and worn on the right side, others carried spears, whilst all were armed with rifles, making it impossible to distinguish the soldiers from the retainers.

The head-dresses were mostly varied, black or grey felt wideawakes, straw hats of odd shapes and fits, some with a puggri wrapped round the head.

Nothing is worn on the feet.

Some carry a shamma thrown round the shoulders, some a leopard or sheep skin, or more rarely a lion skin.

Each man carries a water bottle made of a gourd.

Apparently, the Abyssinians when campaigning in the Ogaden do not bring their women, as very few were visible.

The rearguard must have covered some 3½ miles, as there were thousands of donkeys, each man having a beast to carry his rations and possessions.

Yet in spite of this enormous horde [some 12,000 men], they get over the ground very quickly. The donkeys, being lightly laden, march with great rapidity.

As the army marches along the soldiers scour the country on both sides in search of game, or in the hopes of coming on some village which they can loot...

Whilst waiting the arrival of the camels many Abyssinian soldiers were seen going by carrying on their heads loads done up in bundles, and on inquiring I found that they had been looting a village from which they had taken everything, camels, sheep &c.

Our Somalis were furious at this. It seems a shame the way the Abyssinians loot the villages lying within 20 miles from the road. It does not seem to matter whether they are friendly and have paid the tribute due to the King. The army has to feed on the country, whether friendly or hostile.

In the same entry, Hanbury-Tracy records that two Somalis who objected to having their things looted had been shot. 'Apparently', he commented, 'The Abyssinian soldiers look upon this as a big looting expedition. Many of them, on their arrival the first day, came and asked the headman where and when they were going to commence looting.'

The Abyssinian commander, the Kynazmatch, did at least seem to try to mitigate this as far as he was able, for Hanbury-Tracy recorded that he had stated that he made a long march in order to be as far as possible from any village. On 29 May he reported that the Kynazmatch was very busy:

...We found that he was dispensing justice to the Somalis, notably Sheikh Ash who had been looted by the troops passing. He expressed great indignation at the behaviour of his troops yesterday, and again stated that it was for that reason he had made a long march, wishing to get his troops away from the villages. He informed us that he intended doing his best to put a stop to the looting in future, and was making each soldier take his oath to a

priest that he would not loot again during this expedition. Taking this oath had apparently a great hold on them, as, if they are found to have broken it, they are excommunicated by the church, which is considered a very severe punishment.

The Kynazmatch then entertained Hanbury-Tracy to tea, and:

After this repast the Kynasmach [Kynazmatch] went out, and, surrounded by his officers, witnessed the stolen property being restored to the Somalis, giving chits on the Government for the sheep stolen. The looted property consisted of ‘Americani’, [cloth goods] iron implements, axe-heads, gimlets, all kinds of Somali utensils.

All round these goods were seated on one side Somali women and on the other Somali men, whilst in rear stood stood the Abyssinians who had looted the goods, looking on in disgust at their return. In the centre a tall Somali held up the various things which were promptly claimed.

The mobilization of an Abyssinian feudal array such as the army in the Ogaden began with the Negus Negusti sending out his requirements to a selected provincial governor (Ras), who then tells his chiefs how many men they are to supply, and giving a time and place for a rendezvous. If the Negus does not require him to lead in person, the Ras nominated a chief to do so. The chiefs did the same with their sub-chiefs, who supplied the men with 300 rounds of ammunition, 200 of which were carried on the man’s donkey, also supplied by the sub-chief (ammunition unaccounted for at the close of a campaign was charged to the man at a dollar per thirteen rounds). The sub chief also supplied each man and his wife (who usually accompanied him) with a month’s supply of unground grain. He got no more, which meant living off the country. The ordinary soldier, besides his food and a donkey, received two suits of ‘Americani’ clothes per annum, two Shammas from the same material, a tent, and pay. This last commenced at 3 dollars per annum, rising to 30 or 40 with experience. Some of the troops were so far experienced as to have fought against the British expedition to Ethiopia more than thirty years before!⁴ The Kynazmatch regularly consulted these veterans.

As well as unaccounted ammunition, the donkey and the tent had also to be paid for if lost by neglect. A month on the march, and an Abyssinian army had to live off the land, had to seize livestock and food, although game was sometimes killed – on one occasion an oryx was pursued, killed and in five minutes was eaten raw. The progression from food to goods must have been all too easy. Discipline was attempted by temporarily taking away a man’s mount, or by flogging. However, Hanbury-Tracy reported that, in the Ogaden at least, ‘the soldiers do very much as they please’. Some soldiers having robbed Hanbury-Tracy’s Somalis of a sheep, Hanbury-Tracy wanted them flogged as an example, but the Kynazmatch preferred a fine – and eventually, at the suggestion of the Europeans, who did not wish to upset the rank and file by *publicly* demanding their punishment, pardoned the men, fearing that they might ‘desert in a body!’

The Ogaden tribes in the path of the Abyssinians deserted their villages and fled to the British Protectorate, but on hearing that two British officers were with the army they returned. However, it being a month since the army had marched, and some of the men not having eaten for two days, and some actually begging Hanbury-Tracy for food, looting recommenced. A village was reached, and found to be deserted (and therefore sheepless); when 500 sheep were eventually found they were grabbed and carried off by starving soldiers. A fight began, and the live sheep were torn limb from limb ‘before being properly killed’. ‘It was a horrible sight’, Hanbury-Tracy confided to his diary,

'but one felt greatly relieved that most of the men would satisfy their hunger *for the time being*' [my italics]. Sir Geoffrey Archer, who we shall encounter many times as Governor of British Somaliland, recorded in his memoirs that, attending a ceremonial function in Addis Ababa, a bullock's carcass was carried round to the diners, from which they carved their own meat. He observed, however, that killing the bullock before carving had been a comparatively recent innovation.⁵

The Abyssinians were so badly and inefficiently supplied that they felt almost obliged to follow the short sighted policy of looting friendly Somali tribes who had actually paid their dues; Hanbury-Tracy made the following entries in his diary:

6th July...the Kanyazmatch [Kynazmatch] is sending out a party tomorrow to loot the Rer Augass Elmi, a friendly tribe, who have regularly paid their tribute to the Ras. His excuse is that on the outward journey of the Abyssinian Army they had killed and wounded some of the Somalis with the expedition; no doubt they had good reason to do so, and were only protecting their own belongings. For this one would hardly have thought it necessary to take such strong measures...

7th July. Warrantab. Halt...

...What a relief it will be when we bid a last farewell to this mob, and have a few days peace before returning to Harrar.

Some poor Somali women of the Rer Augass Elmi tribe, whose village unfortunately happened to be on the line of the Abyssinians march, have had all their worldly possessions looted, and have now come to our camp asking for food. It does seem a cruel shame that these poor people should be thus treated. We can only give them a little milk, &c, as long as we remain here, and when we leave they must either starve or find another village. Many of them were carrying children on their backs. We tried to get them some food, &c, from the Kanyazmatch, but he sent them away.

...10th July...There seems to be a great number of the Abyssinians sick, and one sees many of them being carried on the backs of camels.

Several parties of Abyssinians passed our camp soon after we got in, driving large herds of camels, apparently part of the looting expedition returning from the raid on the Rer Augass Elmi.

It is reported that the Abyssinians have looted 20 villages belonging to the Rer Augass Elmi, who, as I have already said, are a friendly tribe, having paid tribute for some time back to the Ras. On my return to Harrar I shall make a point of telling the Ras of the treatment these tribes are receiving from his soldiers and the harm it is doing...'

...11th July. Ain. 18 miles. Water holes.

The march today was one of the worst we have had, the Hagga wind blowing with great force, very hot and dusty.

In spite of all the looting that has been going on there are many men who, owing to their mules having died, are unable to go out themselves, and are, therefore, reduced to eating camels, which they say makes them very sick. The soldiers seem to be most selfish, as many of them have plenty of sheep.

Today we passed about 100 sheep that had apparently had their throats cut and then been left to rot. This is a very dog in the manger thing to do, and apparently the soldiers when looting a village take what they want and then cut the throats of the beasts they leave behind. On the march we passed Sayid Mahomed, a large village, with extensive jowari

cultivation around it. This, in spite of the superstition in connexion with it, and in spite of the soldiers who were sent to guard it, had been looted by the Abyssinians, who had gone on ahead. They were apparently satisfied with taking most of the sheep they found there.

We found the men that had come along with the Kanyazmatch hard at work cutting off the jowari heads and loading as many of these as possible on their mules, which had been allowed to graze and trample down the jowari. I should think that at least half the crop was ruined.

Some of the soldiers had gone so far as to strip the poor Somalis of their loin cloths, and we met them returning to their villages very ashamed. What brutes these men are, surely there must be a horrible retribution in store for them!...

Soon after our arrival the party who had been sent to loot the Rer Augass Elmi, began to return, driving before them the flocks and herds belonging to these poor people. They took about three hours to pass our camp, and I think they must have captured some 2,000 camels and many thousands of sheep...

After recounting the murder of a British subject and the robbery of his brother who were trading with the unfortunate tribe, and the cold-blooded killing of two Somalis whom three Abyssinian soldiers had beckoned towards them, Hanbury-Tracy went on to say that:

I think it will greatly surprise the Ras when he hears of all these atrocities that are being perpetrated, but I fully intend to tell him everything, and hope that he will be able to prevent these happening again.

On 5 August Hanbury-Tracy received a letter from Ras Makonnen, apologizing for the behaviour of his troops, promising to punish the murderers, and threatening to also punish the Kynazmatch Abanabro. This last upset him, as his punishment was to be for a lack of courtesy towards the British party, and not for 'his absolute incompetency'. He replied:

...Your soldiers were very hungry, and this, no doubt, was the cause of their looting your friendly tribes.

When I see your Excellency I shall be pleased to explain to you how your expeditions to the Ogaden might be carried out more successfully and satisfactorily...

But some of the Abyssinian depredations were made by 'discontented' Abyssinian soldiers, who between Hermok and Fegambrio 'infested' the country, murdering solitary Somalis, and retiring into the bush before groups.

When Hanbury-Tracy saw Ras Makonnen on 2 September, the Ras attributed the lack of supplies for the Abyssinian army to the Kynazmatch Anabrio, adding that he had wanted to lead the army himself, but the Negus Negusti, the King of Kings, Menelik II, had refused. However, Professor Samatar reported that the Ethiopian Army in the Ogaden some sixty years later still maintained little contact with the Somalis, save to exact tribute and to replenish their own supplies by seizing livestock.⁶

The situation of the Abyssinians and Somalis in the Ogaden seemed to be one of mutual

suspicion and fear. Hanbury-Tracy reported that the Somalis were terrified of the Abyssinian firearms – weapons which they did not possess. One Somali chieftain was maintained in power by the Abyssinians with a mere 150 Somali riflemen. This fear worked against the Sayyid, for the last thing that the Ogaden tribes wanted was to trigger the presence of an Abyssinian army. On the other hand, if the Mullah could provide them with arms, they might flock to his standard.

So the 40,000 brave spearmen of the Ogaden, whose valour was dreaded by their enemies, and who might have proved a formidable weight in the balance of power in early twentieth century Somaliland, were neutralized by the fear of the Abyssinian depredations, and above all, by their own tribal divisions. The magical poetry of the Sayyid merely added to their divisions, since it was balanced and offset by his harsh and unrelenting cruelty. It seems probable from Hanbury-Tracy's and the Swayne brothers' reports that the Ogaden tribes would have preferred the protection of Great Britain.

War with the Sayyid – The Second Expedition

War is the province of chance. In no sphere of human activity is such a margin to be left for this intruder, because none is so much in constant contact with him on all sides. He increases the uncertainty of every circumstance, and deranges the course of events.

Carl von Clausewitz

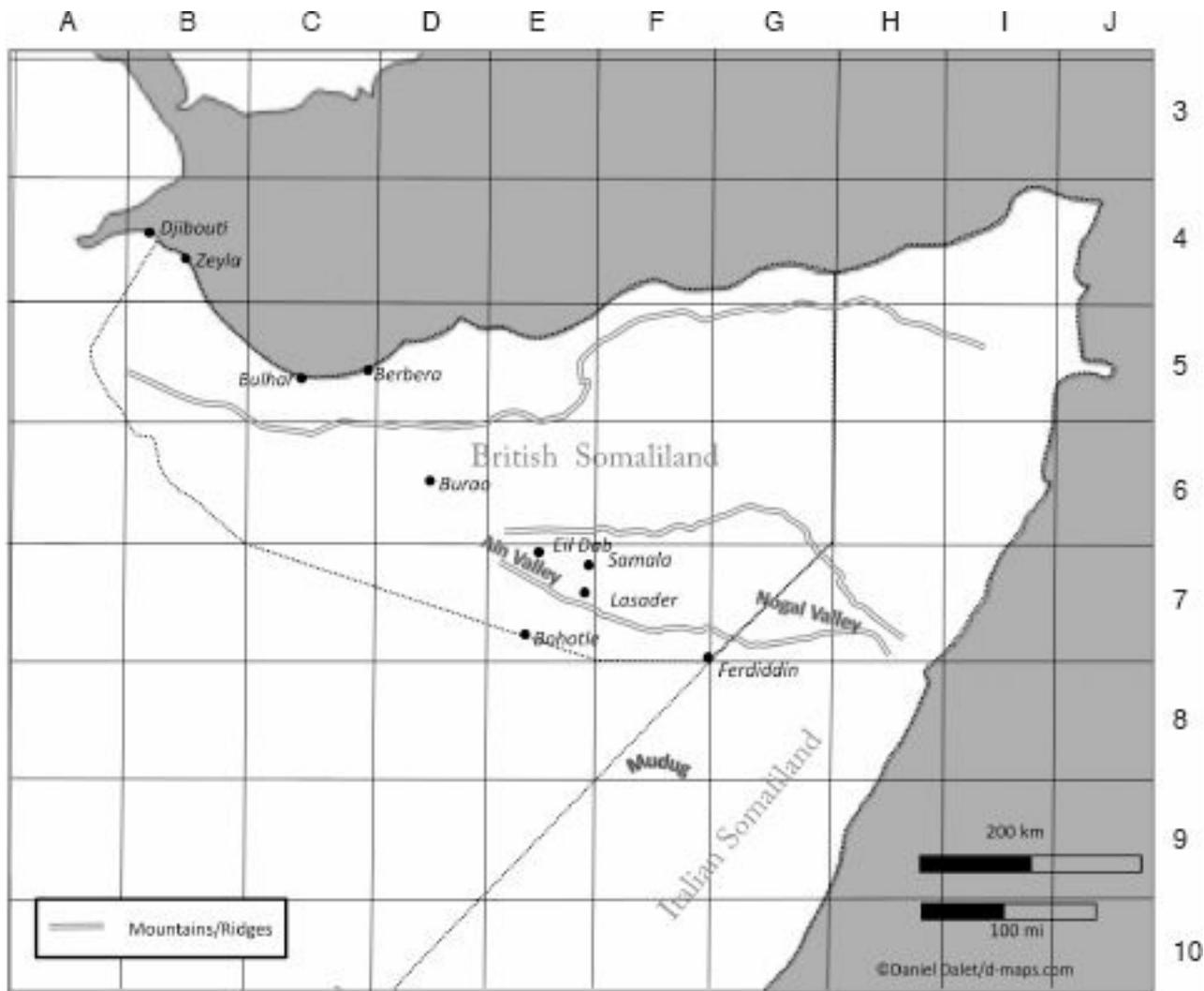
I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.

Ecclesiastes, 9:11

When the Somali levy returned to Burao in August 1901, only four companies of infantry and 100 Camel Corps were retained, the rest being disbanded. Three companies of infantry remained to garrison Burao under Captain M. McNeil. They had also to guard the camels which had been captured during the expedition and which were grazed at the wells – no small task in Somaliland! – and which were retained for transport purposes. The fourth company returned to Berbera, together with the 100 Camel Corps, who were placed under Ressaldar [in the Indian Army, a native commander of a troop] Musa Farah.¹

On 11 September 1901 the Consul-General, Lieutenant Colonel J. Hayes Sadler, went to England on six months' leave. In his place Lieutenant H.E.S. Cordeaux was made Acting Consul-General until 1 March 1902. Lieutenant Colonel E.J.E. Swayne went on leave on 11 September, returning on 18 January 1902 to take command of the military forces again. On 1 March he was appointed Commissioner of the Protectorate.

But in December 1901 the Sayyid returned to his raids on the friendly tribes, which the garrison at Burao was far too small to deal with. The Somali levy was now restored to full strength, the discharged soldiers willingly re-enlisting. When Lieutenant Colonel Swayne returned from leave, the force numbered 1500 men with 12 British officers. It was further increased by an additional 500 infantry, and 100 infantry were converted to become camelry. Further British officers were drafted in, and by 31 March the infantry numbered 2000, the Camel Corps 200 and there were 23 British officers.



The Second Expedition

In addition to this came a Somaliland battalion (the 6th) of the newly formed King's African Rifles (KAR), 375 infantry and 100 camel troops being placed under British officers, with a reserve militia of the same numbers.

But by December 1901 the Sayyid had regained nearly the whole of the great, and unprotected, clan of the Dolbahanta.²Jardine³wrote very bitterly of the refusal of the Foreign Secretary, the Marquess of Lansdowne, to place permanent garrisons among the Dolbahanta. Lansdowne considered that the Dobahanta had 'forfeited their claim on us by transferring their allegiance to the Mullah'.⁴Yet the Sayyid's men were armed with rifles; how in these circumstances, deprived of the opportunity of getting modern rifles by the very people who blamed them for defection to the Sayyid, could the Dolbahanta avoid reconquest, with its concomitant punishment by the Sayyid of those *kafirs* who had supported the British? Like the Ogaden, with both the Abyssinians and the Sayyid armed with rifles, the Dolbahanta were virtually forced to obey whoever of the two was there. "What use are spears to us?" they asked.⁵Yet allowing the Sayyid this large, ungarrisoned recruiting ground, his mother's clan, with the knowledge that he previously recruited heavily there, whether by compulsion or fear, made little military sense. This was the folly of war on a shoestring.

By December 1901, as we have seen, the Sayyid was back in the Protectorate, initially with a force of 500 riflemen and 900 horse, at Lassader, with outposts at Bohotle, Kirrit and Gosaweina. He moved forward to Oodaweina later. His force now contained 1000 riflemen, 1000 spearmen and 10,000 horse.

In February Swayne marched to Burao, hearing on the march of a destructive raid by the Sayyid on a Dolbahanta tribe, the dervish army having marched 70 miles on the day of the attack. On reaching Burao, he then headed for Bale-Shale-Shale, 30 miles to the south of the wells, where the threatened friendly tribes had been concentrated. Before he left, wounded men reported that a dervish army 4000 to 5000 strong had raided livestock at Amudli, killing many people in the process. However, a flying column under Captain Sharp was sent in pursuit, and some ten to fifteen thousand sheep recovered, although the raiders got away.

With increased prestige from these raids, the Sayyid now sent his agents among the tribes nearer Berbera itself, and Swayne immediately detached 750 men and two Maxim gun sections under Major Phillips towards Burdah, killing several disaffected chiefs.

Swayne now marched his forces south east to Wadamago, arriving on 28 May, and waited there while Resselard Major Musa Farah moved against the Sayyid's outposts at Bohotle, on the Ogaden border, where he drove them off the Bohotle-Hawiya road, and moved north to rejoin Swayne at Wadamago. By 1 June 1902 Swayne's forces at Wadamago consisted of 1200 infantry with 3 Maxim guns, 50 mounted infantry, 20 Camel Corps and two 7-pounder guns, supported by 1000 burden and eating camels. Four hundred mounted infantry and Camel Corps, with 50 infantry were on the march to Wadamago from Burao under Captain Osborne. Musa Farah's detached force was moving to Bohotle from Darror. A further 150 infantry with a 7-pounder gun garrisoned Burao, under Major Sharp, and 100 infantry with a Maxim gun were planted in the blockhouse at Las Dureh.

Swayne then pushed on south to Bohotle, which he reached on 4 June, building a strong fort there to protect the stores. He intended to attack the Sayyid where his livestock lay amid some rainpools at Damot on the Ogaden border, or Baran where his main force lay. However, he heard from prisoners that the Sayyid had evacuated Baran and moved south into Italian Somaliland, to Erigo, which place lay just one day's journey to the north of the wells at Mudug. When Swayne arrived at Damot he found the rainpools nearly exhausted, and was obliged to move north to Las Anod, in the Nogal valley. Here he received reports that the Sayyid's forces, themselves short of water, were moving into the Nogal

valley, and that the Sayyid himself was following them. Swayne moved on Beretabli (Beretable) in the Nogal, hoping to get between the Sayyid and his forces, and to drive his detached forces north. On arrival at Beretabli Swayne detached Lieutenant Colonel Cobbe with the mounted infantry and Camel Corps. Losing 7 killed and 1 wounded, Cobbe killed 150 of the enemy, taking 4000 camels and several thousand sheep.⁶

On 4 July Swayne heard that the Sayyid had been rejoined at Mudug by most of his forces from the Nogal, with the exception of some tribesmen north and east of Gerrowei. The Ishak (Isaaq) Somali levies being afraid for their families if this force were left in the Nogal behind them, Swayne marched against them first, also strengthening his blocking forces at Bohotle and Wadamago. It was not until 7 September that these operations were completed. Collecting his forces, Swayne advanced to Baran, from where, on 2 October 1902, he reported to Berbera that the Sayyid had attacked the Hawiya tribes to the south of Mudug, getting 'considerably the best of it'. His envoys were in the Ogaden. He had lost a considerable amount of livestock in the drought, and Swayne thought that he had 'too few camels fit for work to move his encampments away from Mudug'. He reported that he had been at Baran twenty-three days, waiting for regular soldiers. But the Sayyid had to be hit before the November rains would allow him mobility again.⁷ On 3 October Swayne began his march towards the Sayyid. Prisoners captured on the 5th reported that the thornbush became thinner and the country more open in front of the column, and that the Sayyid was two days away. But on the next day, 6 October 1902, Swayne and the Sayyid encountered each other in dense thornbush at Erigo. The marches, counter marches, raids, fortifications, intelligence, all the manoeuvres and evolutions had been to this one end – battle. Swayne had commented after the first campaign that:

...Until I actually saw the Mullah's men fighting, I had no idea that a Somali could be so influenced by fanaticism.

I am speaking of the Dervishes, the men who...have thrown over father and mother and their own tribe to follow the Mullah. They have passwords, wear a white turban and a special breviary, and have sworn to throw up all worldly advantages....At Ferdiddin and at McNeil's zariba these were the men who led, and who were shot down. After Ferdiddin, after the others had fled, a number of these men remained behind to fight to the end, and were shot down as we advanced...

Now, in the words of the great military theoretician Clausewitz, the cheques were cashed, and Swayne was once again to find that the dervishes⁸ – implacable, inexorable and courageous – made a very formidable foe.

The forces faced each other in the dense bush for a time. Swayne wrote that:⁹

...our formation was three sides of a square round the transport, with three companies closing up the rear. Our people in trees could see the enemy's scouts perched in trees about 400 yards off.

3. After waiting for some time, and it being evident that the enemy intended to wait till we moved, we again advanced very slowly. Immediately our outlooks [sic] reported the enemy to be advancing *from all sides* [my italics] and in two or three minutes the firing began – the enemy running in and out amongst the bushes, firing as they came¹⁰ and immediately men and camels began to fall. The rear companies stood firm, as did also the companies of the 6th King's African Rifles (Somalis), on the left of the 2nd King's African

Rifles [Yaos, a Malawian tribe]. The companies on the left, however, fell back on the centre in sudden panic, and were followed by one and a half companies of the front face; but one half company, whilst the retirement was going on, charged to its front and drove the enemy off. After this another company of the front face advanced, and the companies on the left also returned and advanced beyond the position. I then proceeded with two companies of the 2nd King's African Rifles and two companies of Somalis and cleared the ground beyond the left rear of our formation.

4. The transport camels [4000 animals] had all stampeded in this direction owing to the noise caused by the firing in such dense bush, and some thousand camels with water tins and ammunition boxes jammed against each other, rushed away into the jungle, scattering their loads everywhere. We drove the enemy away from the loads and recovered them all with a cost of only two casualties. In the evening I proceeded with one company of the 2nd King's African Rifles and two of Somalis to the front, driving the enemy before us for two miles, and returning with some 1,800 of our camels. The Somalis as well as the Yaos behaved very steadily....

...On the evening of the 6th we buried the dead in the presence of the officers and made a zariba...

On the British side, two officers and ninety-nine men were dead, with two officers and eighty-four men wounded. Swayne reported that he had counted sixty-two enemy dead in front of the front face of the square alone, and learned from prisoners that 135 dervish riflemen had died in addition to a 'very much larger number of spearmen' and that many were reported wounded. This, then, had surely been a great victory, with Swayne in possession of the battlefield, and the enemy in retreat. A general in Classical Greece would have erected a trophy on the site of the slaughter, and the enemy would have craved a truce to bury their dead.¹¹

But Swayne's mind was assailed by doubts about renewing the advance. Prisoners had stated that the Sayyid, the Mullah, had gone back to hurry reinforcements forward. He did not know the country before him, and what little information he had indicated that the dense thornbush continued for a further 30 of the 40 miles which lay between his army and the wells at Mudug, the only place where he knew he could get water. His transport was disorganized, and he had lost many precious camels. To take all that he had through the dense bush again was to invite another stampede, and another slaughter of the vital creatures. But if he left some behind in the zariba at Erigo, and just took a more manageable transport column, the force he left behind would soon itself need water, and so would have to leave the zariba to seek it, and the Mullah's forces would surely watch it, and ambush it on the march.

All this seemed to Swayne to dictate that he should retire about 6 miles to Eil Garaf, where in a glade lay a pool of rain water. He marched there on the 7th, and made a strong zariba around the pool and the transport camels, and prepared to march forward against the enemy with three companies of the 2nd King's African Rifles and five companies of Somali levies, all lightly equipped and battle ready, to hit the enemy where he was reported to encamped about 10 miles distant.

On the morning of 8 October 1902 Swayne marched out of the zariba to achieve a decisive victory with the troops who had performed so well on the 6th, despite the early panic. But his senior officers reported to him 'that they could not rely on the men'. He would still have had to take 400 transport camels into the dense thornbush. It was unexplored. He did not know the Mullah's strength. All this he knew – but to do it with unreliable troops! This might be fatal. He felt that he would be

unable to save his force, including the wounded, and that the transport would then also become engulfed by the victorious dervish onslaught. Swayne returned to the camp, where the open ground made him feel sure that he could withstand anything that the Sayyid might throw at him.

He decided, however, to wait awhile at Eil Garaf until his scouts brought him more information about the dervish force, and 'to diminish the effect of the retirement.' On hearing firing in the night, Swayne left the zariba with three companies of *Somalis*, a strange choice if he felt that they were unreliable. Then the scouts reported that the Mullah had received more rifles, and that 'men were coming up on all sides'. The army retired to Bohotle. The Sayyid, far from advancing, retired just as quickly to the safety of Galadi in Italian Somaliland, nursing his wounds. Neither side realized how hard the other had been hit.¹² The Sayyid, however, was in possession of a Maxim machine gun captured at Erigo during the panic.

The second campaign was over. What could the British do, with the Somali levies believed to be unreliable? If the levies, under the eye of the commander and armed with rifles, were unreliable, what could be said of the spear-armed nomadic tribesmen? What if the Dolbahanta rose in revolt?

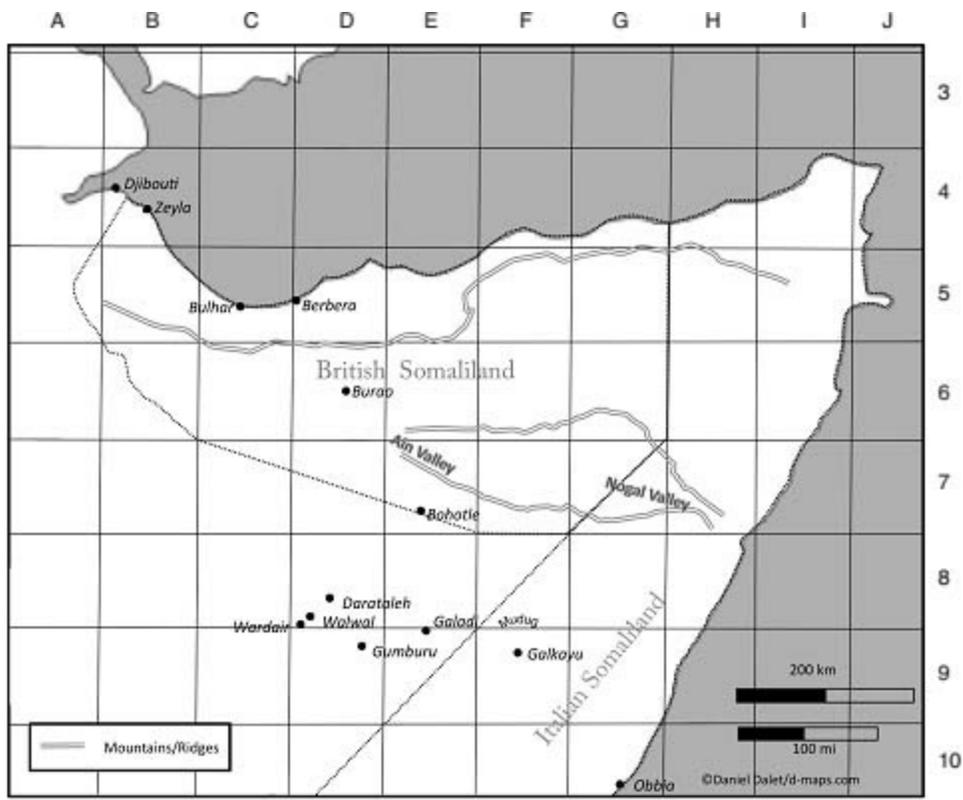
The answer seemed to be a third expedition – this time with regular soldiers.

Chapter Six

War with the Sayyid – The Third Expedition

*...For we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of Fate,
Which hangs uncertain to which side to fall.
And whether it will heave us up to land,
Or whether it will roll us out to sea,
Back out to sea, to the deep waves of death,
We know not, and no search will make us know...*

Matthew Arnold, 'Sohrab and Rostum'



The Third Expedition.

The third expedition against the Sayyid was placed under the command of Brigadier General William (Henry) Manning, who had already on 4 October, two days before the action at Erigo, been sent to Berbera to secure the lines of communication from Berbera to Bohotle. Born in 1863, Manning had seen service in the 2nd Burmese War, on the North West Frontier of India, Central Africa and Rhodesia. In Central Africa he had been Commissioner and Consul-General, and had both raised and commanded the Central Africa Regiment. He was appointed the Inspector-General of the King's African Rifles, a post he retained until 1907. Manning assumed command on 30 October 1902, Swayne having been recalled to London for consultations.

In order to deny the wells at Mudug to the Sayyid, and also to support Sultan Yusuf Ali, the British had in August 1902 approached the Italians with a view to that nation permitting a British landing on the east coast in the Italian Protectorate, in order to seize the Mudug wells, while the Abyssinians were approached to provide a blocking force of 5000 men, to prevent the Mullah's retreat to the Ogaden.

The Italian Protectorate was a rather loose affair, managed mainly by subsidies to compliant sultans. In December 1902 a British Officer, Brevet Lieutenant Colonel C. Hope Willis, reported on the east coast to the Foreign office via HMS *Highflyer*, which had conveyed him to the region.¹ The main ports of Eastern Somaliland, he wrote, were nominally owned by the Sultan of Zanzibar, an annual sum being paid to him by an Italian company, the Benadir. The Italian governor, who was resident at Mogadishu, was paid by the company. The Italian administration, such as it was, was mainly confined to the coastal areas. They had no knowledge of the interior.

The report went on:

...Moreover, the populous district of the Uebi Seebeli [River Shabeeli] valley is slave-ridden, a further reason for abstention by Italian Officials until prepared to face the whole situation...

The chief government posts in Italian Somaliland are along the valley of the Juba River, in communication with Brava on the coast; a garrison with two military officers being stationed at Bardera, and another under an officer of the Italian Navy at Lugh.

...The language generally spoken is Somali, difficult to learn. Swaheii [Swaheli] is almost universally understood, particularly at the coast towns where there are numbers of Swaheii slaves. There are about seven white persons in Mogadiscio [Mogadishu, the capital], all Italians, one speaking English.

The port of Obbia found the most favour, since the Sultan had offered to assist a British force with 600 transport camels.² Pending further discussions between the two powers, with Italian permission, a British gunboat proceeded to Obbia to reconnoitre the port, assisted by two Italian vessels. A conference held at Rome agreed to the use of Obbia, and on 16 December 1902 a cabinet meeting approved the plan of operations, which was to seize Obbia and from there to advance to the wells at Mudug, from whence a flying column would be formed with troops from both Mudug and from Bohotle. An Abyssinian force of 5000 men would be in place to block the Sayyid's retreat westward to the Ogaden. However, security was not too well maintained. A *Daily Telegraph* reporter, Bennet Burleigh, obtained a memorandum from Brigadier General Manning on the distribution of troops in Somaliland which he had sent to General Maitland, in command at Aden, for the information of Lord Kitchener. For clarity, Maitland had had it printed. It was published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 12 December – the whole affair has a very modern ring to it! Whether the Sayyid benefitted from this is

unknown, but there were many Somalis in Aden, indeed many all over the Empire, and his intelligence service was known to be quite good.

Also on 12 December the Viceroy of India telegraphed the following to the Secretary of State for India:

General Officer Commanding, Aden, has requisitioned 100 boxes, Indian Pattern, expanding ammunition for Somaliland. This is prohibited pattern, and, as I do not know authority for demand, please ascertain wishes of War Office.

The expanding bullet, also known as the Dum-Dum round, had been adopted after experience in Chitral, in 1895, had shown that the ordinary .303 round would not stop a rush of fanatical tribesmen. The Mark IV, and later the Mark V Dum-Dum round, was adopted both for home and colonial use. However, the Hague convention of 1899 adopted a declaration which required nations to:

...abstain from the use of bullets which expand, or flatten, easily in the human body, such as bullets with a hard envelope which does not entirely cover the core, or is pierced with incisions.

Both the British and United States delegates voted against this resolution, and were not signatories to it. The Mark V round, which contravened the ruling, was therefore approved by the Foreign Office; however, it was prohibited for use in South Africa, and withdrawn. The Defence Committee decided to maintain stocks for use against 'savages', or in retaliation for their use against the British. Thus they were not used in China against the Boxers. As inadvertent use might be made of this round when both stocks of ordinary (Mark II) and Dum-Dum (Mark V) were held; it was then decided to cease manufacture of the Mark V, using up stocks as required.

The Government endorsed the Viceroy's refusal to issue the expanding ammunition. The Dum-Dum round, either manufactured soft nosed, or with the nose cut deliberately, was well known for its stopping power at close quarters, for the round expanded greatly on impact, leaving a terrible trail of injury through the body and a vastly greater exit wound. There the matter rested for a time; but it would soon arise again, with greater force, when the regulars experienced the reckless courage of the dervish army. It had been noted that, in the action at Erigo, the Sayyid's devoted followers had charged the guns so bravely that their clothes had been singed by the flames from the barrels of the guns. In a few months an action would take place where they were not stopped at all, and in desperation, Dum-Dum rounds would again be requested.

On 6 December 1902 the Foreign Office handed over control of military and financial affairs in Somaliland to the War Office, although in company with the India Office they retained a presence in a War Office Committee.

On 22 December the transport *Haidari* sailed from Berbera carrying 700 troops from the Punjab and the 1st, 3rd and 5th Battalions King's African Rifles, with nineteen British Officers. They carried two nine-pounder guns and five Maxims. The commander of this expedition was Major P.A. Kenna, VC, DSO. His instructions were to protect Yusuf Ali, the Sultan of Obbia, and his people, to arrange for the promised supply of transport animals and the supplies necessary for the expedition inland, and to make Obbia a secure base for the receipt of a larger force from India. He had also the vital task of intelligence gathering for the march into the unknown interior.

But Yusuf Ali was a little less than honest, and was soon suspected of being a little less than an

ally. The tribes would not sell their camels via Yusuf, who had withheld their money, saying that the British had not paid him. After long delays and fruitless negotiations Yusuf Ali and his son were removed to Aden, and then to Erythrea [Eritrea]. The tribes then sold camels freely, and these were also supplemented by ship-borne supplies from Berbera.

Intelligence reports placed the Sayyid at Galadi. Arrangements were made to march in that direction – but how was the march to be made? Should a line of wells be secured in advance of the main force? To do this would be to lose any element of surprise – indeed, it would absolutely advertise the line of advance. It would also expose the separate detachments to attack by superior and concentrated forces. On the other hand, securing a line of wells prevented the Sayyid from using that route, unless he were to attack one of the fortified wells. The alternative was to equip a force with very large numbers of camels carrying tins of water, which would give the force greater range and a wider selection of routes. But Manning simply did not have the resources for this. Railways and roads could, of course, be constructed, as in the Sudan campaign against the Khalifa; indeed, work was started immediately on a road from Berbera to Bohotle; but in the ‘River War’, there was only *one* possible line of advance – down the great River Nile to Omdurman. More to the point, perhaps, Egypt paid for that war and that reconquest. British Somaliland was poor and on a low budget; as stated before, low taxation was a boon to the people, but such easy-going economies would not support a war. It had to be paid for from the British Treasury, or from War Office funds.

So Manning had to proceed as best he could, taking as much water as he was able, defending (and often deepening) the wells and splitting his force to probe for the enemy, giving instructions that when he was found by a probing force, he should not be engaged in battle – the detachment should disengage and retreat upon the main force, who, informed of his location, would then advance to crush him.

However, to the ambitious British officer, active service in a war gave an opportunity for distinction, and a well conducted retreat in the face of the enemy, although the most difficult military task to accomplish, earned little glory. A reputation as a ‘safe pair of hands’ and as a competent officer would be a valuable asset for promotion; but to dully follow orders when he had sensed a possible victory would surely haunt the ambitious and perhaps romantic young officer. What would a Caesar or a Napoleon or an Alexander have done? It was reported that Parmenio, Alexander’s general, had advised the King on receiving Darius’ offer to share Asia – ‘If I were Alexander, I would accept’ – to which Alexander had replied ‘If I were Parmenio, so would I’. These were the sort of words that lived in young minds. How do you really *know* the size of the force in front of you, in the heat of a sudden action? Suppose you had retreated in the face of an inferior enemy, or one that you might have vanquished? Suppose that you spurned the once in a lifetime chance of glory for security and safety; would it *always* be seen that way? Might voices in later years hint at over caution, or even impugn your courage, and might not one of them be your own?

Lieutenant Colonel Arthur William Valentine Plunkett, a major in the Manchester Regiment (and a local Lieutenant Colonel) and seconded to command the 2nd Battalion of the King’s African Rifles, was not the last British officer to be faced with this dilemma. He was born on 4 May 1868, and entered his regiment as a second lieutenant on 14 March 1888, being promoted to lieutenant in November 1899. He had seen action in several campaigns on the Indian frontier, including the expedition of the Malakand Field Force amid the fierce Pathan tribesmen of the Afghan frontier, made famous by the account given of that expedition by another young second lieutenant, Winston Spencer Churchill.³ He also took part in the Tirah expedition. He was promoted to the rank of major in June 1901, and was mentioned in despatches in the Gambia expedition of that year.⁴ In this, the third

Somaliland expedition, he had already achieved several successes, having raided the Sayyid's livestock on 6 and 7 April in concert with a force led by Lieutenant Colonel Cobbe, VC, 1630 camels having been captured. A few days later he had killed some thirty-six of the enemy in another raid. Lieutenant Colonel Cobbe, his fellow officer, was an example of a man who had seized the opportunity of glory with both hands, for he had been awarded the Victoria Cross for 'working a Maxim and assisting a wounded soldier under hot fire...' at the savage battle of Erigo in the previous campaign. Now both men were part of General Manning's probe to the North to locate the Sayyid. However, both men's low views of the Somali levies were noted by a fellow officer as being 'too bigoted and unreasonable for anything'.⁵ It might result in a very dangerous illusion if these views of the Somali levies were also applied to the Somali dervishes!

Manning had received information that the enemy were at a point north of the villages of Wardair and Walwal, and that there was a supply of water at Wardair, and he therefore sent Cobbe on a reconnaissance to the west, to find and hold the town, although *not* to attack the main enemy force, if it was encountered. On 10 April Cobbe set off with a force of 415 men of the 1st, 2nd and 6th King's African Rifles, with two seven-pounder guns and four Maxims in tow. He sent mounted infantry on ahead, but these lost their way in the dense bush, which was some twenty feet high. Cobbe, after a slow advance, decided on the 14th to retreat onto his water supplies, but was attacked in the thick bush, and although some of his transport camels stampeded he managed to beat off his attackers with the seven-pounders and the mounted infantry. Reaching Gumburu Hill, he intended to establish a water post and then retreat to Galadi. However, it rained heavily. Cobbe now replenished his water supply and on the 16th sent scouts on ahead to search for further pools; these scouts were attacked by the enemy, and forced to return. On the 17th Cobbe sent out two scouting parties. Captain H.E. Olivey, in command of a company of the 2nd Battalion scouting to the west, reported at 7.45 am that he had found the tracks of one foot soldier 3 or 4 miles from camp, but had seen no enemy. However, at 8.05 am Olivey reported that both horse and foot of the enemy were advancing, and that, quite correctly, he was retiring slowly. He requested reinforcements. Cobbe sent Plunkett to bring Olivey safely in. Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett delayed his departure slightly in order to issue an extra fifty rounds to each man. He then led out a company of the 2nd Battalion and fifty men of the 2nd Sikhs. They had two Maxims.

Cobbe now sent a horseman to call in his other patrol, under Captain Walker, who was quite close, and Walker duly came in. Cobbe subsequently reported to Lieutenant Colonel G. Forrestier-Walker, Chief Staff Officer of the Somaliland Field Force, that:

As Colonel Plunkett started another report from Captain Olivey arrived saying he was within 1½ miles of the zariba and was not in action.

He added: 'This was shown to Colonel Plunkett, to whom I had given orders that he was only to bring Captain Olivey back.'

Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett duly met Captain Olivey. He gave orders to move towards the enemy, and away from the nearby zariba to which he had strict orders to return. Orders were given to form a square, with the Sikhs in the front. They marched in this formation for some 6 miles away from the zariba, where they occupied a clearing surrounded by bush at a distance of between 300 to 600 yards. Horsemen, riflemen and spearmen of the enemy were collected in that bush, and in that order they fiercely attacked the square on all sides. The dervish dead began to pile up in front of the Maxim guns, which were placed at the corners of the square. Plunkett was inflicting a bloody defeat upon the

enemy, whom he must soon have expected to retire, or simply run out of men. His wisdom in waiting to provide his force with an extra 50 rounds to the 100 they and Olivey's men carried was surely justified in that savage fight. Victory, fame, promotion, honour, the plaudits of press and public, all awaited that ambitious and brave officer, who in true Nelsonian manner had sought out the enemy despite the explicit orders of his more cautious commanders. The cavalry and infantry of the enemy were being thrown back time after time. Their dead continued to mount. Despite their losses, the Sikhs, the Yaos and the Somalis and their British officers stood firm.

But the 'Mad Mullah', the Sayyid himself, was there to inspire his forces. The dervishes did not stop attacking, despite their very heavy losses. They absorbed every round that the square possessed, and still came on. The ammunition was now exhausted! The spearmen broke in. Wounded, with his dreams of glory surely being replaced by the horrible truth, that his disobedience might have cost the lives of his and Olivey's men alike, and probably ruined the third expedition, Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett, amid the carnage of his faithful army, gave the order to break the square and to charge back the 7 miles to the zariba with the bayonet. Captain J. Johnston-Stewart, of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, broke up the Maxims and rendered them unusable. Then Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett, who made truly heroic efforts to redeem the situation, his body bearing both bullet and spear wounds from the thick of the fight, fell with a bullet in the brain. All nine officers died. The fifty Sikhs, like Spartans, died to a man. Altogether, 196 men died and 29 were wounded. Just 6 escaped wounds.

So Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett had disobeyed orders. Lieutenant Colonel Cobbe seems to have plainly asked him to 'bring Olivey in' – no more. Yet two facts seem to muddy this apparently clear tale.

Firstly, Cobbe stated that the report that Olivey was only a 1½ miles away '...was shown to Colonel Plunkett, to whom I had given orders that he was only to bring Captain Olivey back'. But surely the last thing that Plunkett did before leaving the zariba was to issue the extra fifty rounds each to his men. He would not have waited after that. Jardine wrote that the report came 'Just as he was starting.'⁶ But if Olivey was just 1½ miles away, and not in action, why should Plunkett have gone out at all? Olivey was 3–4 miles out at 8.05 am. At 9.15 am he was 'within' 1½ miles of the camp. He was therefore making approximately 1¾ mph, and so less than an hour away, and not in touch with the enemy. Plunkett would have met him some ¾ mile from the zariba.

The second fact is even more curious. On 21 April 1903 Captain Bridges, who commanded the two seven-pounder guns on camels with Cobbe's force, wrote to Winston Spencer Churchill, the livewire young Unionist Member of Parliament for Oldham, of whom Somaliland was to hear very much more, stating that both Cobb and Plunkett had come to a decision to fight on the 17th, but that Cobbe had changed his mind.⁷

Bridges seemed to imply that both the decision *and* the attack were on the 17th, writing that 'On the 17th it had been decided to make a big reconnaissance and try to bring off a fight, but Cobbe changed his mind about this and sent out two companies of Yaos to reconnoitre in the morning for a mile or two.' If the decision was on 17 April, the change of mind was left rather late, for Olivey went out at 0445 hours! In any case, Plunkett's decision to advance, or his willingness to be drawn on, were not exactly the out of the blue incomprehensible disobedience that was implied by Cobbe.

It does not seem that Cobbe's instructions to Olivey and Plunkett were in writing.

On 20 August 1903 Major-General Egerton, replying to a suggestion from the Commander-in-Chief that Lieutenant Colonel Cobbe be given command of a Somali mounted force, reported that '... Cobbe, although not invalided, is considered by the medical authorities to be not equal to any severe mental strain, or to the acceptance... of any grave responsibility...'⁸ Cobbe appears to have been

blamed for not going to Plunkett's assistance on hearing the sounds of gunfire, and it was reported that his fellow officers would not speak to him.⁹ However, he had only 250 men left, and he could hardly have left the camp, and his transport, water tanks and supplies undefended, and could not have spared sufficient men to influence the result without jeopardizing them.¹⁰

The numbers lost by the enemy at Gumburu could hardly be estimated with any accuracy, thought Forrestier-Walker, the Chief Staff Officer. The dervishes, in possession of the battlefield, had removed their dead, and he considered the Somalis to be unreliable in estimating numbers, and reported that the Yaos could not count beyond ten.¹¹ However, it was obvious that the dervishes had lost very heavily; the Sayyid did not attack Cobbe's force in the zariba, although he posted men to watch it, neither did he molest the 100 men who joined him there, nor Cobbe's retreat to Galadi.

The Sayyid's losses also aided the survival of the flying column which Manning had ordered to reconnoitre from Bohotle. Major John Gough, of the Rifle Brigade, who had been Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett's Staff Officer at the end of March, was selected to command, and on 11 April arrived at Bohotle. His task was to move:

...to the west and south-west with the double object of collecting information and stock, and interposing, if necessary, between the Mullah and the district to the north and north-east of Hodayuwein...and to endeavour, as far as possible, to keep up communication with the advanced force operating from Galadi.¹²

In command at Bohotle was Lieutenant Colonel Swann; in consultation with Manning, it was decided to send Gough to Danot, 75 miles to the south west, where there was reported to be a large pool of rainwater, and co-operate with Cobbe's force. Gough left Bohotle on 13 April with 400 men and three Maxims. Of his force, half were mounted, and these left a little later, on 14 April, to save water.

On hearing a report at Danot that a force of dervishes was at Daratoleh, some 25 miles to the south south west, Gough set off on 22 April to attack them. He had the mounted force with him, consisting of forty-five men of the Bikanir Camel Corps (an Indian Army unit), fifty-four Somali mounted infantry, fifty Somali Camel Corps, thirty men of the 2nd Battalion, King's African Rifles mounted on Bikanir camels, twelve Sikhs and one Maxim gun. There were ten British officers. The ammunition carried was 250 rounds per man, 100 more than Plunkett's force, and 150 more than Olivey's, although they were unaware of Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett's fate. They advanced, as had Plunkett, in a square. Ahead the bush lay in clumps, some 12 feet in height and 80 to 100 feet in thickness. A Reuter's correspondent, Angus Hamilton, who was with the force, reported as follows:

The tracks, mere lines of footprints, bordering the different bunches of bush, swept and swerved between them, making any regular line of front impossible, any pattern of the parade-ground kind of square impracticable. The utmost that could be done towards maintaining close order where it was necessary was accomplished. In the waste places of the earth, where the unexpected happens, and men fight for their lives in the slides of their rifles, notions that are comfortably orthodox drop away, and men, falling foul of the precedents of Aldershot, hang together with an instinctive common sense.

Making detour after detour round the bushes the force wriggled forward, extending into open order where the bush permitted. Patrols searched the front and covered the flanks of the column, every wide clearance into the bush being seized upon to bring together in closer order any too widely separated details, as well as to make a thorough overhauling of

the adjacent country. The density of the bush was greatest within a 2-mile radius of Danot; beyond that point a zone of more sparsely covered country relieved the column of much of its anxiety. This open area extends some 18 miles, losing itself in the heavy undergrowth of scrub and bush which describes Daratoleh. Threading a track through the denser bush, no order but single file is possible; flankers are impossible, the path being barely two feet in width, and confined to a single trail. However, pushing along an even pace of four to five miles an hour was secured in the more open country. For the first three hours nothing occurred, and only fleeting glimpses of spies and scouts were caught by our flanking patrols. The country was now less adapted to any surprise attack than had been the case earlier in the march; the bush was much lower and less dense; open reaches were more frequent. Opposition to the column at this point would have resulted more disastrously to the enemy, since it presented few inherent obstacles to the work of mounted infantry, and any surprise was impossible. Unhappily the enemy had disappeared, waiting an opportunity until the bush would give their attack the crowning advantage of an ambush.¹³

Hamilton went on:

...The din of battle is always terrible. White men shout in the stress of their emotions; natives chant war songs. But the end is the same. The clamour of human voices in the tumult of actual strife is encouraging. It is the long hours of cold suspense which try the nerves – nothing else...¹⁴

The men had indulged in a little boiled rice, the officers in cocoa and biscuits, before setting off. It would be 27 hours and 50 miles later that they would eat again. Seven of those hours would be filled with 'the din of battle', the remainder with suspense. The force left Danot at 4.30 am. It was fired on by enemy scouts, and at 10.20 am a large force of the enemy were reported to be advancing on them. Gough dismounted the men, placing the animals in the centre of the square. The enemy attacked in front, and soon spread the attack to both flanks and the rear.

Gough wrote:

Owing to thick bush and long grass the firing was at very close range, from 20 to 50 yards being the average range. This heavy attack continued till 2 pm, our men being most steady and firing well. The Maxim under Sergeant Gibb was moved from place to place as occasion arose, and the enemy always giving way when it opened fire. The enemy attacked in a most determined way, exposing themselves freely. At 2 pm, our ammunition beginning to run short, and one of the enemy who was captured by the Somali Camel Corps reporting that the Mullah himself was at Daratoleh, and it therefore being highly improbable that the Obbia force were at Wardair or even threatening the place, I had to decide whether to advance further or return to camp. Principally owing to lack of ammunition for further big fight, I decided to return to Danot.

At 3 pm Gough sent to the base at Danot for ammunition and reinforcements. He formed a square and retired towards Danot, with the wounded on camels in the centre. His rearguard and both flanks were in action all the time until 5.30 pm, when the Somali mounted infantry cleared them out. Reinforcements and extra ammunition met them on their retreat, and they arrived at Danot at 1.15 am on 23 April.¹⁵, ¹⁶

On that day, the Secretary of State for War sent a telegram to Manning, sympathizing with the losses at Gumburu and ‘fully’ recognizing ‘the gallant behaviour of Colonel Plunkett and his force’, suggesting that the victory had given the Mullah confidence and ‘in all probability adding to his numbers’ and asking whether he needed supplies or reinforcements. In a polite criticism, Manning had also been told in that telegram that ‘...you will no doubt consider how far you can concentrate your forces, so as to avoid the Mullah being able to deal separately with small detachments...’

On 27 April Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, sent a telegraph to Brigadier-General Manning, saying that:

Telegraphic report of Gough’s engagement near Danot is satisfactory in so far Gough’s action and management of troops is concerned, and I would ask you to congratulate him and all concerned from me, but it only serves to strengthen opinion expressed in Secretary of State’s telegram to you of 23rd instant that your flying columns are dangerously weak and too much scattered. The enemy is evidently more powerful than you anticipated.

On 18 May, Roberts continued:

In continuation...your recent reports indicate the risk of employing small and isolated detachments in a difficult and unknown country and against a numerous and fanatical enemy. In view of water difficulties I recognise that some dispersion of your force for reconnaissance purposes is unavoidable, but I desire to impress upon you the necessity for caution in this respect and for remembering the *weaker the detachment the larger should be the rounds of ammunition per man supplied to it.*’ [italics added]¹⁷

In a letter of 26 April to his Quartermaster, Manning had said:

I am very sorry for poor Plunkett, and it is hard to blame a dead man, and one who did his best to retrieve his mistake. But as so often has occurred before, disobedience to orders has cost him his life and the lives of 200 men, and had he done what he had been ordered to do, we should have been able on the 19th of the month to meet the force of the Mullah with 1,000 men, and I feel no doubt that we should have defeated him and finished the campaign. The Mullah’s army was there and he himself was present, the whole thing was so near success that I feel extremely exasperated at the loss of such a chance.

After all our hard work and preparation, it does seem hard to have the fruits of it all thrown away by the disobedience of one officer...

So who was to blame? Was it really fair to blame Plunkett? After all, the real difference between Gough and Plunkett was not obedience and disobedience, not sensible initiative and wild rashness, but ammunition. They had both miscalculated, but Plunkett, through lack of time, perhaps, had erred more. The difference between victory and defeat lay in, perhaps, another 200 rounds per man – and possibly, as will be seen later, the *type* of ammunition. It had been thought that some 2000 dervishes fell bravely at Gumburu. General Lord Ismay, of whom we shall hear much more later, when campaigning in Somaliland (as a Major) thought that:

...It was not realised at the time how dearly the enemy had paid for his victory [at

Gumburu], but I have the evidence of many Dervishes who fought against us that day that their losses were tremendous...¹⁸

And Jardine would write that far from gaining in prestige and reputation from Gumburu, the dervishes were soon depressed when they reflected that such a small force of the enemy had caused them more casualties in its defeat than any victory or previous defeat. ‘Another such victory and I shall be ruined’, King Pyrrhus of Epirus was reported to have said after the heavy losses which he incurred in defeating the Romans at Asculum – and the term ‘Pyrrhic victory’ must surely be applied with justice to Gumburu – and indeed to Daratoleh, where the enemy again possessed the battlefield. The aim in the war was not to secure geographical locations for themselves, but to defeat the enemy army and capture or kill the Sayyid himself. To defeat it you had to engage it, and this was the difficult part – this was where the Sayyid excelled, like all great leaders – in choosing when and where to fight. Could the Sayyid have foreseen his losses at Gumburu, he would surely have fought a different fight. Large columns might now seem safer to the British, but because of that they would simply be avoided, and they would march around the country spending even more money for no result. And large columns constantly needed large supplies. At both Gumburu and Daratoleh the British forces – Indians, Yaos, Somalis and British Officers alike – proved that they could beat off any attack, *provided they carried enough ammunition*.

Manning, however, drew a different conclusion, although his solution involved ammunition. He seemed to accept the first part of Lord Roberts’ criticism, that he had sent out insufficiently strong patrols, although Colonel Plunkett had been expressly told to limit his action to ‘bringing Capt Olivey in’. He possibly felt the second part of Lord Roberts’ criticism more deeply – that this was because he had underestimated the enemy. He wrote that:

...I am compelled by the fact that the Mullah must have gained prestige by Gumburu, [as the Secretary of State had pointed out] and fact that the fighting value of his army must now be estimated far higher than formerly, seriously to modify views as to this point which I have hitherto expressed. I do not think that a less garrison than 400 [at Mudug] would be safe even in a strongly entrenched position.

This seemed to accept Roberts criticism of small forces, but shift the blame for it onto the brave, but dead, shoulders of Lieutenant Colonel Plunkett. Small forces were acceptable before; now, because of Plunkett’s defeat, the Mullah was far stronger, and things were changed!

Manning’s second observation was to reiterate that the standard service bullet did not have enough stopping power. On 23 April¹⁹ he telegraphed that the Sikhs and King’s African Rifles:

...appear to have fought with splendid gallantry, but were overpowered by numbers, and at a disadvantage owing to stopping power of service bullet. The dervishes on this occasion fought with a fanatical bravery far greater than they have ever shown before...

Asked if he thought Dum-Dum rounds should be provided, and if others concurred, he replied on 19 May 1903:

I have just obtained opinion of Gough, which is that, from acquired experience of his fight

on 22nd April [Daratoleh], [the] Service bullet has not enough stopping power for use in fanatical rushes, and that use of expanding bullets is advisable. This is the only engagement besides that of Gumburu from which deductions can be drawn. I am of opinion that for warfare in this country the use of expanding bullets is necessary, but I doubt whether in the present conditions of transport it would be possible to push forward any quantity from Berbera to Bohotle.

Gough had more than usually good information on this, since he had actually used Dum-Dum at Daratoleh!²⁰ However, he could not, of course, advertise the fact.

On 3 June the Secretary of State for War, William Brodrick, sent the following telegram to Brigadier-General Manning:

Your telegram No. 133. [19 May above] You should take steps to file or otherwise treat the Service ammunition so as to give it sufficient expansion to stop fanatical rushes.

On 13 June, Brodrick wrote to the India Office that any further ammunition sent to Somaliland should be soft-nosed, and on 27 June informed Manning that half a million soft-nosed Mark V rounds would be sent to him from Egypt. But on 29 June in an instruction to Egypt, this quantity was tripled.

The actions at Gumburu and Daratoleh 'showed that the Mullah had reached the limit of his strategic retirement and was compelled to stand and fight in the neighbourhood of Wardair', wrote Ismay.²¹ But Manning reported that:

After the withdrawal to Galadi, a further advance on Wardair or Walwal was now impracticable. The delay caused by events at Gumburu had in any case too far reduced my available rations and transport, while the knowledge gained of the country to be traversed, and of the military spirit of the enemy, would have necessitated a larger force than I had available at Galadi.

I therefore decided to drop back the bulk of my force to Galkayu and Bera, and to employ every available camel on the rolling up of the Obbia base.

In order that this movement should be completed without hostile interference, and for the following reasons, I decided to hold Galadi and Dudub with sufficiently strong garrisons.

By doing so I could cover the rolling up of the base, and the Bohotle-Galkayu route, and, in addition, should the Abyssinians come up with and inflict a defeat on the Mullah, I should be able to prevent the latter from falling back on Galadi.²²

Had Manning been shaken by Gumburu and Daratoleh, as Swayne had been shaken by Erigo? The fight at Erigo had surely revealed 'the military spirit of the enemy' well before Manning's advance! Perhaps he had been unnerved; but the decision to retire was a sound one for reasons of transport. Due to sickness, and the wear and tear of heavy marching, he simply did not possess a sufficient number of fit camels.

But the Abyssinians had done rather well. On 4 April they had beaten off a dervish attack at Burhilli, inflicting heavy losses in the hand-to-hand fighting at which they excelled. On 31 May, after a forced march with a flying column, they came up with the dervishes again on at Jeyd and handed them another severe defeat, before retiring for lack of water.

The Sayyid, however, trapped between the Abyssinians and British, now showed his genius for war with a daring move. Following a heavy rainfall, when pools of water aided movement, he moved towards the Nogal valley. This movement took him, his camels and his flocks and herds past the British garrison of Bohotle, where lay Lieutenant Colonel Swann and over a thousand men, with over a thousand transport animals, and with eight Maxim guns. It was a desperate move, and a great gamble, for having suffered severely against two British forces of some 200 men each at Gumburu and Daratoleh, suppose five or six hundred came at him and his vulnerable flocks and herds, well supplied with ammunition, with four or five of the terrible Maxim guns, out of Bohotle?

Lieutenant Colonel John Christopher Swann, Commandant of the 1st Bombay Grenadiers, was 47 years old, and had served in Afghanistan, Sudan, Burma and China. He had been three times mentioned in despatches. What he might have done had Plunkett simply obeyed orders, we shall never know. Had he ever, in his youth, been tempted into rashness by the ghosts of Alexander or Caesar or Napoleon and survived to become more cautious, and perhaps, wiser? Had the news of the savage actions at Gumburu and at Daratoleh unnerved him, or had they simply reinforced caution in a cautious man? We shall never know. But Swann, described by a fellow officer, Lieutenant J.W.C. Kirk, as ‘a dear old man but rather hidebound like all these Indian [i.e. British Indian Army] officers, full of the forms and returns and official work’²³ stayed put in Bohotle, and the Sayyid survived to fight another day; in fact, he survived to fight some further 7500 days, all of them as a thorn in the side of the Empire. He had gauged his opponent well.²⁴ Ismay would say, in his lecture, of Swann’s inactivity that ‘Inasmuch as he had 1100 men and 8 Maxims it is hard to understand, as it is to excuse, his inertia’. Manning, on the contrary, while acknowledging the chance of a complete victory, agreed with Swann’s inactivity:

...had the Bohotle Flying Column been sufficiently strong to move out to meet the whole force of the Mullah, and defeat it, a complete rout of the Mullah’s followers would have resulted. However no column of less than 1000 men would have been sufficient since the dervishes were in full strength, and defending the passage of their live-stock across our lines of communication...

Thus Manning thought that a military predicament such as being forced into a movement which exposed the enemy’s life blood – his camels and sheep, without which he could not survive – to capture, was a military strength to the *Mullah*, rather than to Swann, because it forced him to fight for life, like a cornered rat! But there were insufficient camels to supply a larger force, due mainly to disease and overwork. This surely revealed that the Sayyid had defeated the British where it really mattered – in the *minds* of commanders who dreaded to force him to extremities, as both Plunkett and Gough had done. But commanders could be replaced.

Thus ended the third expedition.



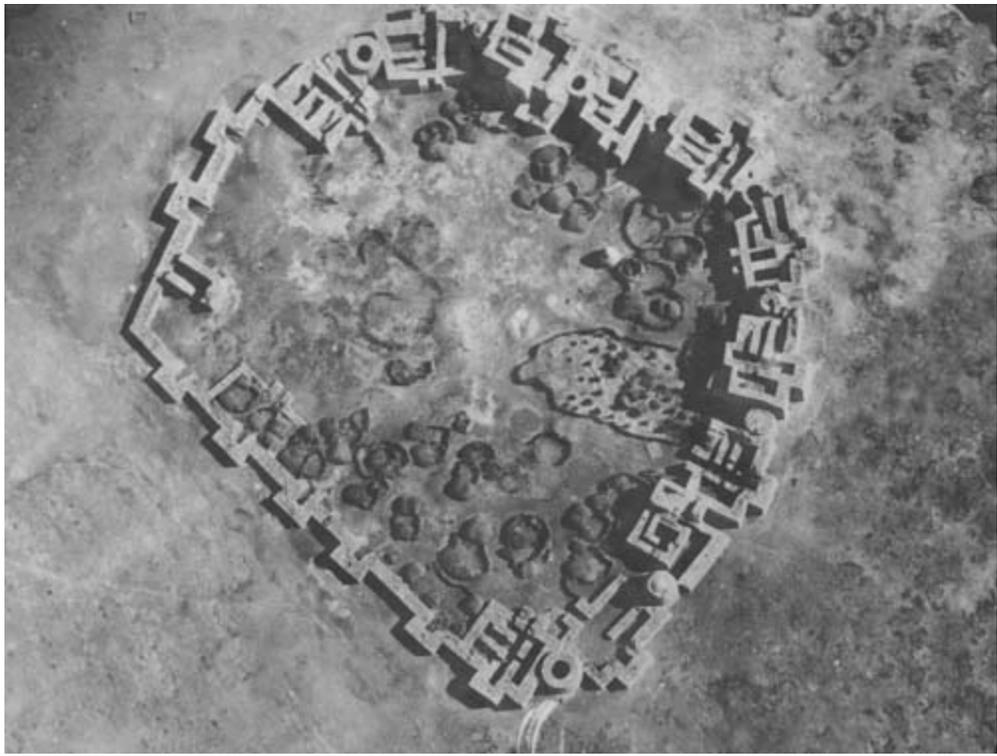
A relaxed Winston Churchill on visit to the Rhine with Army Council 1919. © IWM (Q34723)



Winston Churchill with Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson on visit to the Rhine, 1919. © *IWM* (Q34712)



Captain Adrian Carton de Wiart. © *IWM* (Q68300)



Tale Fort from the air. © IWM (HU70765)



Bombs bursting on Tale. © *IWM* (HU70766)



Bombs bursting on Tale. © *IWM* (HU70767)



Bombs bursting on Jid Ali. © IWM (HU70768)



Officers of 'Z' Force, RAF. © IWM (HU70764)



Captain (later Air Vice Marshal) Tyrell, principal medical officer, 'Z' force, RAF, at his HQ., Somaliland. © *IWM* (HU70763)



HMS Espiegle in Mesopotamia, 1914. © IWM (Q60250)



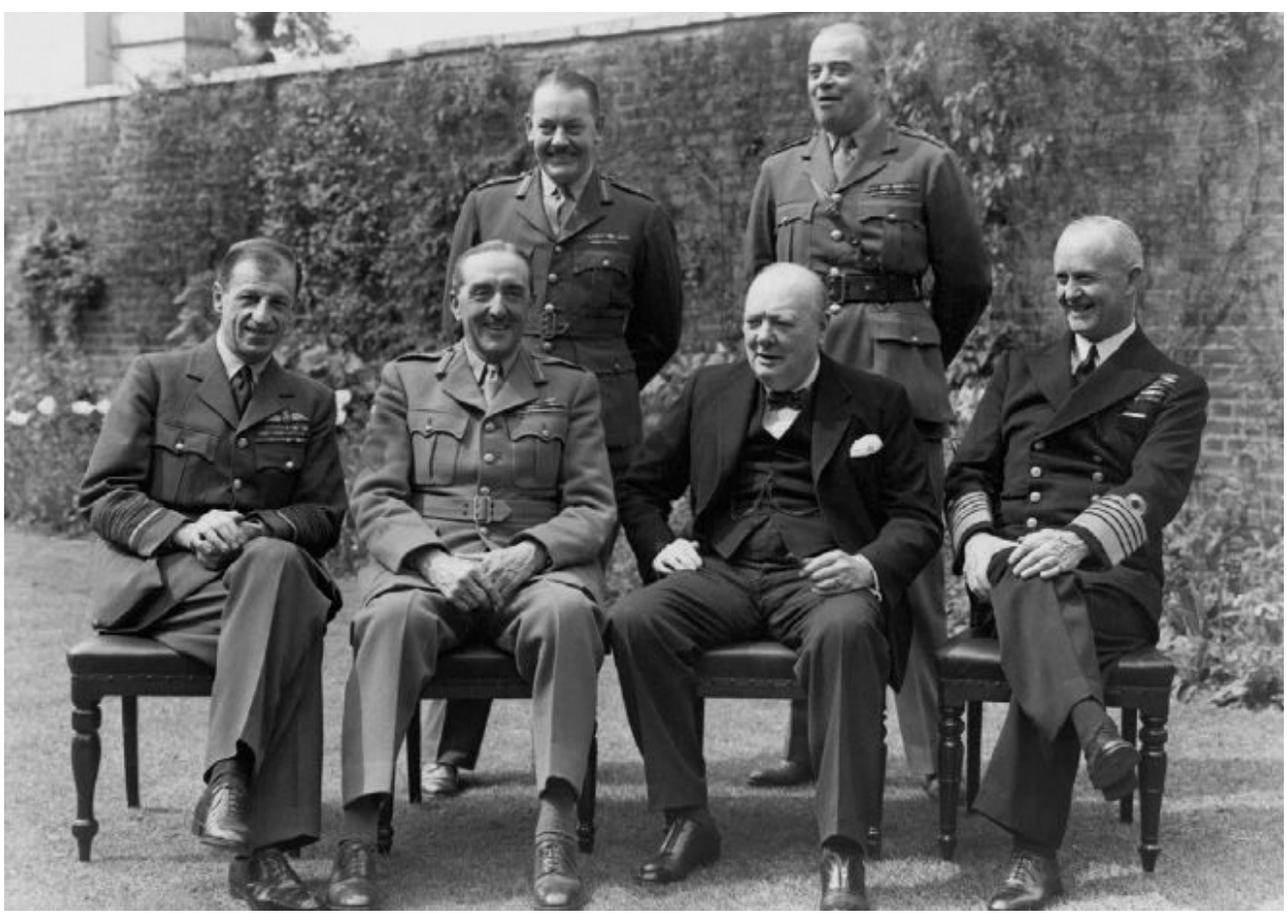
Grave of Lt. Bowden – Smith, killed at Jidbali. (*National Army Museum 1984-07-25-12*)



Camp at Badwein. (*National Army Museum 1985-07-25-13*)



Lt. Gen. Egerton Commander of the Fourth Expedition and the Victor of Jidbali. (*National Army Museum 1985-07-25-15*)



Major General Hastings Ismay “standing, on right of photo” with Chiefs of Staff and Winston Churchill during the Second World War.
(*National Army Museum 8510-134-73*)



Jidbali. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-8*)



El Afweina. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-12*)



Lower Sheikh. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-28*)



Upper Sheikh. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-29*)



Burao. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-41*)



Fasken's 2nd Brigade near Jid Ali. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-65*)



The beach at Obbia, 1903. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-55*)



The landing at Obbia, December 1902. (*National Army Museum 6309-85-8*)



Lieut. Colonel A.W.V. Plunkett who died fighting at Gumburu in April 1903. (*National Army Museum 2009-11-6*)



DH9 Aeroplane. The pilot's Vickers machine gun was located in a recess to port. The large object clearly visible on the engine is the exhaust manifold. (*Royal Aeronautical Society*)



Winston Churchill as Home Secretary at the Hendon Air Display on 12th May 1911. Over 200 MPs attended (see Gollin, 171-2). (*Royal Aeronautical Society*)

War with the Sayyid – The Fourth Expedition

Only he is lost, who gives himself up for lost.

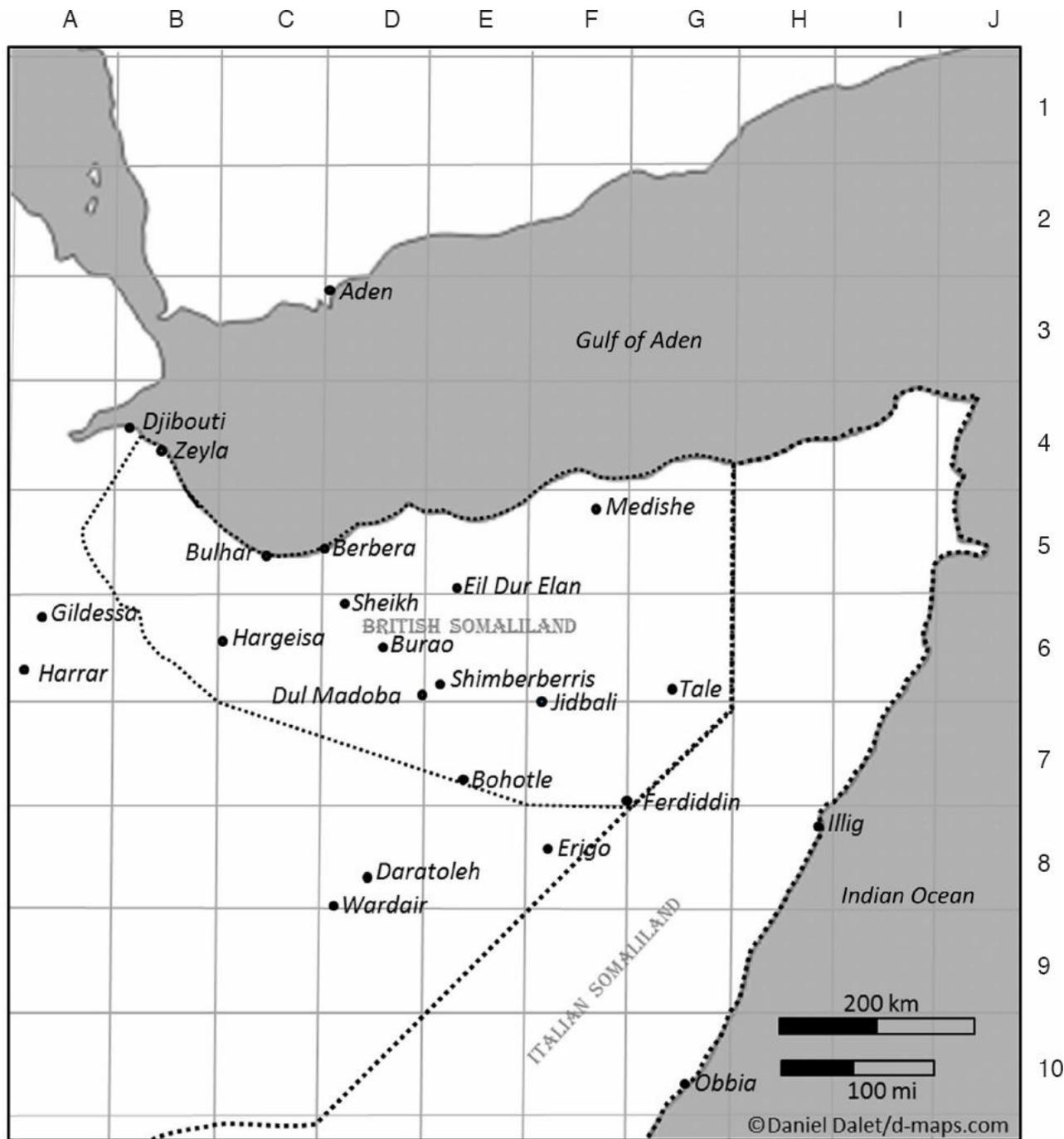
Hans Ulrich Rudel

The fourth expedition was placed under the command of Major-General Sir Charles Comyn Egerton. Born in 1848, Egerton had served in the Afghan war of 1879–1880, and had taken part in the famous march of the current Commander in Chief, Lord Roberts, from Kabul to Kandahar. He reached Berbera from Bombay on 3 July 1903, and landed on the 4th. He had already given his sanction to Manning's suggestion of an advance into the Nogal valley after the Mullah, for which purpose troops were to be concentrated at Burao. While on his way to his command, a peace deal was suggested.

Sir Francis Reginald Wingate (1861–1953) was the Director of Military Intelligence during Kitchener's Sudan campaign, and later succeeded him in command of the Egyptian Army, and as Governor-General of the Sudan, which posts he held from 1899 to 1917. He now proposed sending Sudanese representatives to the Sayyid, to express their distress that he should be fighting against the British, and 'council [sic] him to accept the mediation of the Sudan Government with the British Government in order that further bloodshed might be avoided and that the Mullah's pretensions might receive fair and just consideration.'

The question was laid before the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, who, the Director of Military Intelligence reported, had observed that:

...the Mullah is believed to be at present in occupation of a portion of the Nogal Valley lying within the British Protectorate, and, although the latest intelligence indicates that his following is somewhat disorganised, it would appear probable that his prestige would be revived and his pretensions enhanced if overtures were made by His Majesty's Government while in his present position...it would appear unwise to incur the risk of an offer to negotiate being interpreted as a sign of weakness...¹



The Fourth Expedition.

The Sayyid would have to be defeated first.

Major-General Egerton's instructions from Lord Roberts were detailed and demanding, and were sent before his arrival at Berbera. He was required to confer with Manning, and after personal enquiries and inspection, to report to the Secretary of State for War on what posts should be held, what force was needed to hold them, what mobile force was needed, his requirements in transport and supplies, and the date when the Berbera to Bohotle road would be completed for wheeled transport. He had further to report on the feasibility, cost and relative advantages of three proposed railways; on the intelligence service as to whether it was organized 'on a proper footing' and whether proper provision of scouts, guides and interpreters had been made (surely showing a heavy distrust of Manning's grip on the campaign); what steps he would take to improve the water supply along the lines of communication; and how the Emperor of Abyssinia's forces could assist (Roberts added that the Ethiopians' supply arrangements, which involved living off the country, should preclude an invitation to enter the Protectorate). He was also required to send a weekly report on the distribution of forces, on intelligence reports and staff diaries, and to report on the progress of the campaign 'from time to time'.

He was informed that Mr Cordeaux, the acting Consul-General at Berbera, was in administrative and political charge of the Protectorate, but that all local troops would be under his (Egerton's) command. Captain Harry Edward Spiller Cordeaux was 32 years old, Cambridge educated, and had joined the Indian army in 1895. He would become Commissioner himself in 1906.

After having duly consulted Manning, Cordeaux and others, Egerton reported on 14 July that, if the United Kingdom were to continue to hold Somaliland, it would be necessary either to kill or capture the Mullah, or finally to expel him from British territory. The first course would require the co-operation of an Abyssinian force moving east from Galadi, the second would involve the maintenance of a chain of posts from Hargeisa to the Nogal valley, and the addition of the Dolbahanta into the Protectorate, including occupying and administering their land.

The necessary measures to enable these projects to be carried out were, thought Egerton, the completion of the work on the road from Berbera to Bohotle, making it fit for wheeled transport, improvements to the water supply, and an early resumption of military action. Major-General Egerton also asked for reinforcements; he wanted a company of sappers and miners, a Pioneer Regiment, and a battalion of infantry from India. He also required 8000 camels (2000 from India for the lines of communication, as the Indian camel carried twice the load of the Somali and would work continuously, and 6000 from Somaliland or Egypt for the mobile troops, as the Somalian camel could go for longer without water), a coolie corps, a tramway, a steam launch and two lighters.²

On 31 July, the Secretary of State for War, William Brodrick, having already suggested an advance into the Nogal with a small column while the Mullah appeared to be disorganized, made the following additional points to Egerton:

The position of the Government is as follows:

We have no intention of abandoning Somaliland, but we have no desire to increase our territory or to take any steps beyond those necessary to secure order in our Protectorate. The Dolbahanta you hope to detach from the Mullah, are not among the tribes with whom we have treaties, and the assurances which you propose to them would, we presume, be in the nature of Protection, which would extend our liability in the direction which has already cost us so much.

The original expedition against the Mullah was sanctioned in pursuance of our treaty obligations

to protect certain tribes, on the belief of the local authorities that a severe blow might be struck at his prestige and influence. The *defeat* [my italics] at Erigo worsened our position, and two courses were thus open –

First, to defend our Protectorate by a line of posts.

Second, to strike at the Mullah from Obbia and drive him from Mudug to a position where the Abyssinians could co-operate with us.

The latter was adopted on the grounds of the expense of keeping a line of posts equipped for a long period against possible raids by the Mullah.

The result has been that after an expedition of 6 months duration, and an expenditure of 500,000*l.* [£], the Mullah has moved to the Nogal with some loss, and a fresh expedition is suggested.

I would point out to you that your proposals involve a very heavy cost. The reinforcements of about 2,000 men and 3,500 camels already sent to you have caused an initial expenditure in India of 515,000*l.*, and the upkeep of the whole force is calculated at 75,000*l.* per month, which for the 6 months to December, for which you expect the campaign to last, will reach 450,000*l.* more.

Beyond this, you require an extra Indian battalion, 3,500 camels and attendants from India, mules from South Africa, and a variety of other smaller units and supplies. Some 60,000*l.* is also asked for Abyssinia, as well as transport animals and supplies. It thus appears that the campaign, as you propose to conduct it, will cost for the second 6 months of the year not less than 1,500,000*l.*, or, allowing for some of the Indian expenditure being less recent, something like three times the cost of General Manning's operations, and you appear to think that after this a considerable force must be maintained in the country. The Government have no desire that you should undertake any operations which you consider dangerous, but your telegrams make it clear that although hopeful of success, you do not consider that even with the larger operations proposed there is anything more than a fair chance of permanently crippling the Mullah.

This being so, they would be reluctant to incur the very large cost of an expedition from which nothing of value would be gained, unless the Mullah were reduced to impotence...

After a brief holding telegram, Egerton replied on 7 August, reviewing the situation as follows:

...2. On my arrival in this country I found that the effect of General Manning's operations had been the withdrawal of the Mullah into the British Protectorate, and General Manning's own retirement on to Burao and Bohotle, which, owing to the exhaustion of his transport, he was barely able to effect.

3. In your No. 322, dated 14th July, 1903, you suggest that I should attack the Mullah with a small column before he can reorganize. That is to say, that I was to launch a small column, practically unsupported (for troops without transport cannot be considered a support) towards Halin, 250 miles from the nearest point on the Berbera-Bohotle line by the route the column would have to march; against an enemy, who, no matter what his state of exhaustion may have been, could still muster a large number of rifles and a still larger number of spearmen, and who could choose his own time and ground for fighting; or if he did not choose to fight, could escape into neutral territory close at hand, whither our troops would have been unable to follow him. This course did not commend itself to me, as it

appeared a mere repetition of the same error that has led to all our former reverses, viz., striving to obtain decisive results with inadequate means. The opportunity to strike a decisive blow at the Mullah was lost when he crossed between General Manning's column and Bohotle, when, had there been (as there should have been) a fairly strong and properly equipped column at Bohotle, the Mullah might have been so severely handled – hemmed in as he would have been, between General Manning, the Abyssinians, and the Bohotle column – that he must have surrendered, or been killed...

After criticizing the transport situation and the organization and staff defects that he found on his arrival in Somaliland, he went on in an oblique way to criticize Government policy:

5. Being unaware of the ultimate policy of Government in the Protectorate, but seeing that a main road from Berbera to Bohotle was under consideration; that a survey for a railway was in progress and that it was already in contemplation to send out plant for its construction, I naturally concluded that it was the intention of Government to extend its influence and administration in the interior of the country. To effect this, and to restore order, the first essential is the final expulsion of the Mullah and the destruction of his influence within the Protectorate, and to this end I have framed my plan of operations.

6. The plan of operations is briefly to attack the Mullah with two columns, to crush those tribes of the Dolbahanta, who have willingly and persistently assisted him, and to detach those who would otherwise be coerced into joining him; which latter object can only be effected by assurances of future protection. The outward and visible sign of this would be the establishment of posts in their midst...

General Egerton stressed the 'threatening' geographical position occupied by the Dolbahanta, and added that:

...The actual death or capture of the Mullah is so very problematical, that it can hardly be taken into consideration; but to drive him out of the Protectorate is comparatively easy, as it would be to keep him out permanently with the co-operation of the Dolbahanta.

8. It must not be supposed that in advocating the establishment of posts, I in any way contemplate a prolonged military occupation. On the contrary, I consider it affords the best means of avoiding it. It is not intended that these posts should be largely garrisoned with a view to offensive, or even defensive, operations. They would rather be the emblems of our supremacy, and form rallying places for the tribesmen, in what would then be the very remote possibility of the Mullah again attempting to enter the Protectorate. The important points to hold are Gerowai [Gerrowei], Las Anod and Badwein...these being the water centres in a tract of country known as Nogal, which forms the principal summer grazing ground of the Dolbahanta, and the Mullah's base of operations against the Western and North-Eastern tribes of the Protectorate. It is well known that the Dolbahanta tribe are adherents of the Mullah, more through fear of him than any attachment to his person, or fanatical religious spirit. They are tired of his cruelties and exactions, and in the belief of those who best know the country, would speedily transfer their allegiance to us. Should they do so, we shall have obtained the best possible guarantee for the future peace of the Protectorate. An essential preliminary, however, to all negotiations with the tribesmen,

must be the tactical defeat of the Mullah and dispersal of his following, or should he refuse to fight, his expulsion from the Protectorate. In these operations the Dolbahanta will be the chief sufferers in life and property, which will give them, it is hoped, a more wholesome respect for our power.

Egerton stated that he proposed to form two columns, based on Olasan, about halfway between Burao and Bohotle, and to march them both to Dariali near Las Anod, where they would form a strong intermediate post of 400 rifles, and then march respectively east upon Gerrowei (just over the border with Italian Somaliland) and east north-east to Halin. The strength of these columns was to be 1500 each, composed of 500 cavalry and 1000 infantry.

The General then pointed out that his full strength, British, Indian and Somali, was 6000 men.³ Of these, 725 were pioneers and 300 sappers, and with men on special duties etc. a total of 1200 men must be deducted from that 6000, leaving 4800. The columns, wrote Egerton, took 3500 more (he had only mentioned 3400 above) which left only 1300 for garrisons and convoys. Berbera, Garrero, Burao and Bohotle took 800; Hargeisa and Las Dureh 100; and Upper Sheikh 150, which left just 250 for other posts. Egerton therefore asked for another battalion, citing the agreement of Manning and others with this necessity.

General Egerton then turned to the expensive matter of the camels which had caused Brodrick and the cabinet such concern.

...11. I now come to the most important question that confronts me, viz., that of Supplies and Transport, and in order to make my requirements understood, I will briefly recapitulate what the Supply and Transport has to undertake. It has to provide for the daily requirements of all the troops distributed over a line of 201 miles in length, and to maintain 1 month's reserve for the garrisons at each of the posts. It has also to provide carriage for the moveable column at present covering the line of communications, and over and above all this, to place in readiness 2 months' supplies at an advanced base, which is situated 135 miles from Berbera, for the 3,500 men and a large number of followers, who will accompany the columns, and to convey all military stores and equipment to any required point. It will then have to provide carriage for the baggage, ammunition and a month's supplies with 3 days' water for men and 2 for animals for that force, and to keep a month's reserves for the whole force including the columns. To fulfil all these objects, I have at present 2,880 Indian camels, and 3,538 Somali camels, of which latter half are sick, and are not likely to be available for the next 3 months. So short of carriage am I, that the mere maintenance of the small moveable column of 500 men most seriously hampers and delays the work of pushing up supplies. I may mention that while the Indian camels carry full loads of 400 lbs each, the Somali camels at present carry only 160 lbs.⁴ In addition I have the two Army Service Corps companies which are not yet disembarked, and whose practical utility until the road is completed is more than doubtful. In your telegram you imply that these were sent at my request, but this I entirely deny. They are only the equivalent in carrying power of a very weak Indian camel corps, though far more costly, and are not, at any rate until the road is open, adapted for the country. It has also been proposed to send me traction engines, for what purpose I cannot conceive. What I require, and most urgently require, are more camels. Local purchases are proceeding but slowly, and the prompt addition of four more organised and equipped camel corps, viz., 2,800 camels (not 3,500

as you state) from India would be of infinite value to me, and by hastening my advance and consequent conclusion of operations would be an indirect saving to Government.

Egerton denied responsibility for the suggestion of a subsidy of £60,000 to the Abyssinians, although he had mentioned the necessity of some subsidy and a supply of water tins. Any suggestion that they be supplied by Britain with 2600 camels could not, wrote Egerton, have emanated from him. He thought that their cooperation was scarcely worth the delay in getting them into position.

Egerton went on:

I much regret to observe in your telegram an implication that I am endeavouring to commit Government to a costly expedition of indefinite duration, to an increase of territory, and to a large demand for reinforcements....

The operations, Egerton went on:

...would have no permanent effect unless Government elect to pursue a particular line of policy, and in this I am supported by the opinions of the civil and political officials of the Protectorate. This line of policy involves no extension of territory, but only the assertion of our own authority within the limits of our Protectorate...

...It is for the Government to decide whether it is prepared to adopt it. So far as I am able to judge, *the only alternative is to evacuate the country altogether.* [italics added]

...It must not be forgotten that the country produces nothing but camel grazing and some sheep and goats, which help out the meat supply, and local labour is unknown, even water for the troops has to be carried for them, often for several days at a time, and that military operations in a country of this nature must necessarily be costly.

16. My only object is to carry through the operations as quickly, cheaply, and as thoroughly as possible, and I trust I may be acquitted of any desire to incur reckless expenditure or to make extravagant demands...⁵

When Egerton's reply reached the Secretary of State at the War Office, it caused no little stir. It was decided by Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister, not to send it to Cabinet or King until a reply had been drafted, because:

the unfortunate tone in which it is worded makes it necessary that the intentions of the Government as to policy and the opinion of the C in C as to the military proposals should be made clear to General Egerton...

The reply to Egerton on behalf of Brodrick was drafted by the great public servant Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson, who in the next year would become Director-General of Army Finance. Referring to Egerton's dispatch, it suggested that:

...the intentions of His Majesty's Government regarding their policy in Somaliland, and the nature of the operations which are considered necessary to carry it into effect, are imperfectly understood...[Egerton's demands] appeared to His Majesty's Government to

indicate that you proposed to carry your campaign beyond the limits they desired to observe, and that this supposition is well founded is made clear by your despatch under reply, in which you state that you concluded from the measures taken to improve communications in the British sphere, 'it was the intention of Government to extend its influence and administration to the interior of the country.'

The Government's policy was reiterated to Egerton:

(a) To secure order and consolidate our position within the Protectorate, extending protection to those tribes with whom we have treaties.

Thereby plainly *excluding* the Dolbahanta!

(b) To avoid any extension of our *influence into* the interior of the country [amended by the Arthur Balfour, the Prime Minister into *obligations in*] which might lead to extensive military operations, and throw a heavy burden upon the Imperial Exchequer.

4. While conceding that your proposal to detach from the Mullah his following among the Dolbahanta tribes who live within the actual borders of British Somaliland does not involve an extension of territory, His Majesty's Government would impress upon you the necessity of avoiding any engagements which, by bringing fresh tribes within the Protectorate, would increase our liabilities in the direction which has already cost so much...

It was pointed out to Egerton that although his plan of operations 'was considered by the Commander-in-Chief to be well conceived' it simply required too many troops for the camels available within a reasonable time. Roberts had suggested raising Somali levies, 'capable of moving more speedily and with less impedimenta than a regular Indian battalion...'

'I desire to add in conclusion', wrote Wilson, 'that Mr Brodrick ...entirely acquits you of any desire to "incur reckless expenditure or to make extravagant demands".'

The position of the Government concerning the Dolbahanta was tortuous in the extreme. They were covered by no treaty because, it will be remembered, an earlier Government had wished to avoid diplomatic complications with Italy over relations with Abyssinia, when that country was still an Italian Protectorate. They were not, therefore, within the British Somaliland Protectorate as far as British obligations were concerned; yet they lived 'within the actual borders of British Somaliland'. The Dolbahanta seemed to live in a vacuum, where the Empire had 'influence' without 'obligation' within its own territory.

Egerton now set about organizing the offensive within the limits prescribed. He established a forward base at Kirrit, 150 miles from Berbera, although due to supply difficulties this was not accomplished sufficiently to enable an advance to be made until the end of October 1903. The General divided his field force into two brigades, the First Brigade, led by Brigadier-General Manning, which was concentrated at Bohotle, and the Second Brigade, led by Brigadier-General Fasken,⁶ which lay at Eil Dab and nearby Wadamago, in the Ain Valley. Manning was ordered to march across the Haud and establish a strong post at Galadi, and to return quickly to Bohotle.

The British Government did not look kindly on plans to reoccupy the Mudug wells in Italian Somaliland, but a very successful Anglo-Italian naval demonstration was made at Obbia to convince

the Sayyid that a force would reoccupy them, blocking his retreat in that direction. At the same time the Sultan of Obbia, Ali Yusuf, who had been installed in the place of his less reliable father, and who was thought to be no friend of the Sayyid, was persuaded by a gift of 250 rifles and a monthly allowance of rice and dates to occupy the wells at Galkayu to block an escape by that route.

To block the south west, the Imperial Government allocated £15,000 to the Abyssinians, together with 1000 water tanks, 5000 water bottles, pumps and other equipment to assist these mountain men in their passage of waterless areas. However, some difficulty was experienced in getting the Abyssinians to move, due mainly to jealousy and rivalry between the Emperor Menelik and Ras Makonnen, the Governor of Harrar. On 29 November Egerton telegraphed the Secretary of State for War, noting the 'serious hitch in the Abyssinian preparations for advancement', and adding:

...It is questionable therefore whether I should any further wait their problematical and certainly tardy co-operation...Should the Mullah decline to fight and retire south I am powerless to stop him without Abyssinian co-operation. Except for such punishment as we can inflict by rounding up the Dulbahante karias, the campaign must be abortive.

In an inspired move, the British representative was allocated another £7500 on 1 December, to use on a 'payment by results' basis.⁷ 'In Abyssinia money talks', wrote Jardine,⁸ and in two days a formidable mounted force of 5000 Abyssinians, including elements of the Lion of Judah's personal guard, were on the march to Walwal and the Shebeele river. But the new Secretary of State for War, Hugh Oakley Arnold-Foster, could not but remind Egerton that:

...His Majesty's Government did not, however, realize from your previous reports that Abyssinian co-operation would be so essential to your plan of action, that without it the campaign must be abortive. In paragraph 12 of your despatch of 7th August you doubted whether this co-operation could be organized in time, and whether, if secured, it would be worth the delay necessary to get the Abyssinians into position.

Your telegram No. 462 of 21st August appeared to express a similar doubt, and your telegram No. 729 of 23rd September intimated your intention to advance without waiting for the Abyssinians. You were therefore given full discretion as to the date of your advance by my telegram No. 563 of 3rd October.

Egerton replied that:

The latitude given me in your telegram No. 563 of 3rd October, and effect subsequent to the drought in Haud on Mullah's probable movements, have enabled me to considerably modify my plans. I now hope to take full advantage of the Abyssinians.

This appears to be at odds with Jardine's statement that the Sayyid had, because 'the season had been an exceptionally dry one, even for Somaliland', only one line of retreat, which was north east across the Sorl to Jidali,⁹ away from the Abyssinians, because the drought had made a move to the south difficult – Egerton himself acknowledged that the Mullah's southward passage of the Haud desert towards the Shebeele or Mudug might be made 'if the rains gave him a favourable opportunity'.

In mid December 1903 came reports that a dervish encampment at Jidbali was being reinforced, and Fasken was instructed to reconnoitre. He duly despatched the redoubtable Lieutenant Colonel P.

A. Kenna,¹⁰ VC, DSO, the Commander of the mounted troops, from Badwein with a force of nearly 200 British and Indian Mounted Infantry, 50 men of the Indian Bikanir Camel Corps and 200 Somali Tribal Horse, with 150 riflemen of the 27th Punjabis, and 100 of the Hampshire Regiment marching in support some way behind, on whom he could fall back if confronted by a large force. Estimating their numbers at about 2000, Kenna attacked them, and a three-hour fight ensued before Kenna wisely retired upon his infantry upon the dervishes being reinforced. The infantry had marched 66 miles in 44 hours, and were only 9 miles behind. Kenna estimated the dervish strength 'at 1500 footmen and 200 horsemen, the majority being armed with rifles'.¹¹

Now Egerton decided to attack the enemy where they lay at Jidbali, and evacuating Galadi (where supplies were running short) he moved the garrison via Bohotle to Eil Dab, where he now concentrated Fasken's Brigade and Kenna's mounted troops. However, finding that intelligence reports indicated that the dervish strength at Jidbali was daily increasing, he diverted Manning's force to meet him with Fasken on 9 January at a point 20 miles east of Badwein. Manning had 550 men of the King's African Rifles, 6 Maxim guns, 125 Somali mounted infantry and 500 horsemen from the Gadabursi tribe.

On 10 January, 1904, when the combined force moved against the dervish position at Jidbali, it contained over 2400 men, ten times the force at Gumburu or Daratoleh, with two guns and *seven* Maxims, each capable of firing some 600 rounds per minute. The result was never in doubt. The guns opened up on the enemy zariba, and also, like giant shotguns, fired case shot into the bushes on Egerton's left. Dervish attacks on the infantry square were beaten off in a withering fire, none getting within 400 yards. Two more attacks were pressed with determination, but were scythed down by Maxim and rifle fire, and at 10 am the dervishes broke and fled. A count two days after revealed 668 bodies on the field, with many more estimated to have been killed in the pursuit by the mounted infantry. The Imperial forces lost twenty-seven killed and thirty-seven wounded, these low figures being mainly due to the poor aiming of the dervish riflemen. The more effective spearmen had not got close. Congratulatory telegrams were received from the King, from Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief, and from Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, the Commander-in-Chief India.

The victory was not followed up for a few days, for as always in Somaliland, lack of water hindered both victor and defeated. Not only was there a drought, but the wells at Jidbali were 'choked with rubbish and with dead Dervishes'. By midnight on the 11th five wells were cleared enough to give the horses and ponies a small drink. On the 12th and 13th Manning marched to Damotleh, where a good supply of water was found, and reconnoitred Hudin. The Sayyid was reported at Halin, east of Jidbali, whence he might retreat either north, or east to east to Kallis, or Illig on the coast of Italian Somaliland. Ascertaining that he was at Jidali, to the north, Egerton concentrated the First Brigade at Halin and the second at Sheikh, with a mobile column at Eil Dab. General Egerton established his HQ at Berbera on 18 February 1904. This, he reported, 'terminated the first phase of active operations'.

The General estimated that:

the results have been, tactically, the defeat and rout of the enemy at JIDBALI and his losses in men and rifles, materially, the losses that he and his people have suffered in live stock, and morally, the loss of prestige of the MULLAH himself and the demoralisation of his fighting Dervishes, while strategically, he has been hemmed in between our column and MIJERTAINS who are professedly hostile to him and his cause...I cannot too highly commend the conduct, keenness and endurance of the troops, the marching powers

displayed by them in a barren and inhospitable country, and the admirable service of all the Departments...

But the Sayyid was alive. He was free.¹² His remarkable oratorical and poetic powers, wonderful recruiting agents, were still intact. The tribes were still desperately frightened by him.

All this was not the fault of the troops. They had, indeed, performed well. They had endured a harsh climate, and made physically demanding marches on a poor diet. A medical report accompanied General Egerton's despatch.

Colonel John Francis Williamson CB, CMG, of the Army Medical Service was 53 at the time he wrote the report, and a very distinguished veteran of many wars – the same Afghan War in which General Egerton saw service under Lord Roberts, Egypt, Burma, the North West Frontier of India and the Great Boer War of 1899 to 1902. Colonel Williamson listed scurvy as causing the most admissions to field hospitals, due to the poor diet and lack of fresh vegetables.¹³ A bi-weekly rum ration was among what must have been the more popular prophylactics which he suggested. Water quality was not good – in the Nogal valley, 'excessive purgation with severe colic' was experienced, and elsewhere on the plateau he noted that 'it is as a rule decidedly unpleasant to the taste and its effect on one's interior economy, to say the least, inconvenient.'

The daily diet varied between the various Imperial races. Indian soldiers got 1½ pounds of atta or rice, 4oz dal (pulse), 2oz ghee, ½ oz salt, 1 oz gur, 28oz of meat per week (vegetarians were issued with 4½oz gur instead), 2oz potatoes, 4oz onions, 2oz dried fruit, ⅓oz tea, ⅙oz chillies, ⅙oz turmeric, 1/6oz garlic and ⅓oz ginger.

British troops were issued with 1lb flour, bread or biscuits; 1lb meat, 4oz potatoes, 4oz onions, 4oz jam, 1½oz tea, coffee or chocolate, 2½oz sugar, 4½oz rice, ⅔oz salt, ⅓oz pepper, 4½oz dal, 1 candle [officers only], 2½oz dried fruit and 1 bottle of Worcester sauce every 10 days. Officers received 10lb firewood. Other ranks received 4lb. (It is presumed, although not stated, that *all* troops received firewood!)

African and Somali troops and followers received 1lb rice, 8oz dates, 4oz onions, 1lb meat three times per week in lieu of 1lb rice, 2oz ghee, ⅓oz salt, and 2oz potatoes, the latter only at the coast.

South African natives were issued with 1lb biscuit or flour, 1lb meat, ⅓coffee, 2oz sugar, ½oz salt, ⅓oz pepper and 4oz onions (if available).

The meat issued was sheep for the British, goats for the Indians, sheep and goats for Africans and, almost needless to say, camels for the Somalis. Bread was issued by field bakeries as far as the advanced base at Eil Dab; on operations beyond, biscuit and flour were issued. It was noted that when sheep or cattle were driven with the army they lost condition, and there was little fat, sometimes none at all, on the carcass. Such meat could only be baked or grilled over a fire – when cooked it was 'unpalatable, hard, and of little nutrient value'. The soldiers could also buy tinned fruit, vegetables, pickled onions, cheese, biscuits and 'other small luxuries' in Field Canteens at Sheikh, Burao, Kerrit and Eil Dab. A bi-weekly issue of rum was made 'as thought advisable', although malt liquor was issued at the base only, due to (unspecified) transport difficulties. Tinned milk was issued to the sick, the 'Ideal' brand being thought the best by the Medical Department.

The clothing issued to the troops varied widely, due to the very wide variation of the climate from place to place and season to season. On the maritime plain it was shirt sleeve order at all seasons. From Sheikh to Burao, 'jerseys, woollen drawers, extra blankets and warm coats were very

necessary'. The troops and followers engaged in transport had to carry warm clothing to adjust quickly to the change in climate and temperature. As protection against the power of the equatorial sun, the 'Cawnpore Pith Hat' was found to be essential. Heavy serge greatcoats, although found suitable for Sheikh, Burao, Shimber Berris and other high places in the winter, were found to be too heavy and hot for marching.

For battlefield casualties, the injured were firstly, of course, removed by the assistance of other soldiers, and many were the very heroic exploits, and many were the medals awarded for valour in saving the wounded from capture and a long drawn out death at the hands of the dervishes, or for carrying them to medical help. The seriously wounded were conveyed to the Base Camp by Dandies (light wagons), light double Kajawahs (panniers carried each side of a camel, of which a special light type weighing 37lb made in Aden was useful in field operations), camel carts, bullock carts, mules, and both riding and burden camels. Kahars, Indian porters (who carried a Dandy in a similar way to a sedan chair) were the best means of conveying seriously ill soldiers, both Imperial and enemy. The number of Kahars per Dandy laid down in the regulations was six, but Colonel Williamson noted that as the marches averaged 20 miles per day over difficult terrain, with steep slopes and carrying an injured soldier who might weigh as much as 16 or 17 stone, the number should be 10, with an absolute minimum of 8.

The Surwans, or camel drivers hired from India, were engaged by the Army on the 'silladar' system, which meant that they hired themselves out, rather than being employed directly. This system enabled men to work into old age. These men suffered severely from scurvy, but Colonel Williamson noted that:

...when the enormous distances covered by these men, their unceasing work, their scanty time for sleeping and eating are considered, the only wonder is that they worked so well and so long – the majority of the Surwans were fine upcountry natives but in many instances they were far too old for active service.

Also noted as suffering from scurvy were grasscuts, ekka drivers (the ekka was a two-wheeled Indian cart) and syces (Indian animal grooms). These were somewhat unkindly referred to as:

...of a very inferior type, mentally and physically. Many of them were old and worn out, and others suffered from chronic diseases of every description. Either their medical examination was of the most perfunctory description, or impersonation took place on a very large scale between the place of enlistment and the port of embarkation...¹⁴

A second medical examination at the port of embarkation was suggested by Colonel Williamson as a solution to a dishonest impersonation which, in modern Britain, is increasingly tackled by the use of photographs and more 'high-tech' devices, as they become available.

Of the Somali tribal horse, Major J.G. Beresford reported that the Dolbahanta, the Habr Yunis and the Ba Idris were the best. The Midgans he also felt to be useful; these hunters, trackers and workers in leather, whose origins were unknown, were outcasts, almost serfs, and spoke a language quite different to Somali. Their use of poisoned arrows made them feared, however, by the Somalis – and the Sayyid himself had a Midgan bodyguard.

Beresford wrote:

I have come to the conclusion, after my experience that the Somali is a difficult man to get on with. He is quick and has plenty of intelligence, but will not serve every one...To lead them properly in the field, I should say one officer to every fifty men would be required. The actual presence of the officer in the field is what is necessary, and not any attempt on his part to teach them what to do, or how to fight, as they will go on their own methods...

The only reason for which the better class of Somali will join these irregular corps is for loot; their one idea is camels. Pay is a secondary consideration...

As regards the fighting power of the Somalis, I think they have plenty of pluck, but when used in large numbers they get so frightfully excited that they hardly know what they are doing...

Beresford concluded:

I would as soon go about this country with 100 good Somalis as any soldiers. Their knowledge of the country and ways of the enemy's fighting is a very strong point; they have wonderful sight, and at night, if they want, are very alert, and if they know their officers, will take very good care of them, and I don't think they would leave the latter in case of danger.

Egerton agreed with Beresford's report on the tribal horse, but added:

He is no good in actual battle fighting, and should be kept in the background while it is going on.

What with his high pay, his constant expectations of reward and thirst for division of the spoils, he is an expensive luxury to keep, and his rapaciousness does not even cease with his death, if killed in action, as a large sum has then to be paid to his family as blood money.[!]

All these criticisms of 'The Somali' as a soldier, from Erigo to Jidbali, seem to miss an important point – the best troops in the Empire had been engaged for four years in trying to defeat a less well armed army of *Somali* dervishes under a charismatic *Somali* leader! It was obvious from this that it was wrong to criticize the Somali 'race' as soldiers, for the criticism should have been of the way in which they were organized and led – the courage of the Sayyid's men would continue to arouse the admiration of the British officers who opposed them in battle – as would the bravery, efficiency and utility of the Somali soldiers when properly led.

The soldiers in Egerton's Army were not always imbued with a strong sense of togetherness, as the following report reveals:

It is doubtful whether a more varied collection of races has ever been in a campaign before.

At the base there were always to be found representatives drawn from nearly every part of India, besides Kaffirs, Zulus, Arabs, Abyssinians, Yaos, Soudanese, Swahilis and Somalis.¹⁵

With such an admixture of races, all speaking different languages and representing so

many different types of humanity, differing widely in customs, religion, and interests, it was not to be expected that a certain amount of friction would not be engendered.

The Somalis were the more troublesome to manage than any other race, owing no doubt to their utter ignorance of discipline and to their ingrained independence.

Quarrels occurred at intervals between Somalis and Arabs, Somalis and Abyssinians, and Somalis and Kaffirs.

These fracas usually commenced between individuals on some trivial matter, but on certain occasions the disturbance assumed considerable importance if the disputants were not separated before they were joined by all their confederates within reach. Feeling ran high between the personnel of two of the camel corps, one of which was composed entirely of Arab drivers' attendants and the other of Somalis. On one occasion these two corps were encamped at no great distance apart, and the Somalis, armed with spears, made an unprovoked attack on the Arabs who were unarmed. The combatants were forcibly separated, but not before several of the Arabs had been stabbed with spears. Fortunately no loss of life was incurred on this occasion...

The feeling between the native of India and the Somali is also rather bitter. It is a rather curious fact that the Hindu appears to get on better with the Somali than the Mahommedan of India. This may be accounted for in a great measure for the following reason:

The Mahommedan of India, I think, looks on the Somali as a very low bred Mussulman, and the latter of course resents this, and forms a similar opinion of the Indian Mahommedan.

The Hindu, on the other hand, knowing that the Somali has a different religion, regards him as a different being altogether.

In any place such as the base camp, where large numbers of Somalis, Arabs, Indians, and Abyssinians are necessarily collected within a limited area, it is advisable to keep the Somalis as much as possible together and at any rate to separate them from Arabs and Abyssinians.

It was not to be expected, of course, that the Somalis would 'get on' with any other people; after all, their problems at the time arose because they could not get on with each other. Their fault was that their 'ingrained independence' as individuals, and their tribalism, had lost them their independence as a people, when the Europeans and the better armed Abyssinians had arrived. However, the nature of the country, as with the Ancient Greeks, also bred independence and tribal disunity. Their tragedy is, perhaps, that they were not all conquered by the same power.

It remains to account for the last moves of the Fourth Expedition to conquer or capture the Sayyid. The 'first phase' ended, it will be remembered, with the Mullah, in General Egerton's words, 'strategically ... hemmed in between our column and MIJJERTAINS who are *professedly* [italics added] hostile to him and his cause'. Egerton, intending to drive the Sayyid towards Mahmud, sent Fasken east of Jidali and thence through the Warsangli land while Brook moved from Eil Dab. They were successful, the Sayyid was driven into headlong retreat, shedding followers all the way, but a delay in obtaining Italian permission for a pursuit into their country proved fatal to Egerton's plans. Further, the qualification 'professedly' in Egerton's expectation of the Sultan's hostility to the Sayyid had been well chosen, for Sultan Osman Mahmud of the Northern Mijjertein made no move at all, but seems to have come to some understanding with the dervishes,¹⁶ who had already established themselves at the port of Illig. An unauthorized bombardment of the Sultan's house at Ras Hafun by an

Italian warship at the end of January 1904 might have been a little less than helpful in this respect.¹⁷

Illig, with the agreement and assistance of the Italian Government, was now captured in a well co-ordinated combined assault by Hampshires, Marines and sailors, and the village was burnt and the dervishes driven out. It was not occupied permanently, and the dervishes, and the elusive Sayyid, soon returned.

Brigadier-General Egerton had now completed his operations; the Mullah had been driven out of British Somaliland, as he had promised. He had not promised the Mullah's capture. '...The actual death or capture of the Mullah is so very problematical', he had written, 'that it can hardly be taken into consideration; but to drive him out of the Protectorate is comparatively easy, *as it would be to keep him out permanently with the co-operation of the Dolbahanta.*' [my italics]

The Sayyid, of course, had other plans, and he never once lost sight of them. But for the moment, he was in a difficult position. Morale was low, for the heavy losses in his victories at Gumburu and Daratoleh had been followed by even heavier losses, and loss of prestige, at Jidbali, and on his helter skelter flight from that fatal field. He accordingly despatched an envoy to Aden, Abdalla Shihiri,¹⁸ an intimate friend and acolyte from the Sayyid's youth who met an Italian diplomat, Signor Pestalozza. Invited to Illig, Pestalozza negotiated a treaty of protection by the Italians, and peace with the Empires of Britain and Ethiopia, and the Sultans of Obbia and the Mijjertein. The Sayyid was not allowed to import arms or slaves; the former he never stopped, the latter he had never begun.¹⁹ He was, however, allowed into British Somaliland, to the wells in the Nugal 'of Halin, and from these to those of Hudin, and from Hudin to Tifafleh, and from Tifafleh to Danot'.²⁰

He now composed more of his matchless oral verses, and sent them out on their journey by every campfire, every nomadic gathering, viral fragments of a mental program which could so grow in the mind of a Somali that it subordinated his own moral judgement to that of the Sayyid, and rendered him insensible of the voice of pity, or of the pain of battle wounds, or of the fear of death.

Chapter Eight

Enter the Giant

*...Tell them that brave it most,
They beg for more by spending,
Who in their greatest cost
Seek nothing but commending...*

Sir Walter Raleigh, 'The Lie'

On the night of 20 October 1907 HMS *Venus*, having coaled at Aden, slipped anchor and headed for Berbera. Two cabins, one a large room 'with a delightful balcony at the end overlooking the waves', were occupied by a Giant, whose comfort the Captain was 'unceasing in his efforts to promote.'¹ The Giant was neither physically imposing, nor did he occupy very high office, being Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies; but he was, perhaps, the most ambitious young aristocrat since Julius Caesar; like Caesar he was a restless genius, and he would eventually be as famous a figure in Western history – more gifted than Caesar politically, 'guiltless of his country's blood', although less gifted in the understanding of war. His name was Winston Spencer Churchill. One of the architects of the modern world, and in 1940 the saviour of his country, Winston Churchill was knighted after the war, although a peerage would have been his for the choosing.

Churchill had already, at the age of 33, gained a very considerable reputation. As a cavalry officer he had charged at the battle of Omdurman, and later, had written *The River War*, a wonderful history of that campaign. Like the Sayyid, his command of his native tongue was absolute, and his oratory vivid, moving and persuasive. He had been both a war correspondent and a cavalry officer in the Boer War, achieving public acclaim by a much publicized escape from Boer captivity. Lionized on his return, he was elected as Unionist MP for Oldham. His grandfather was the seventh Duke of Marlborough. He was the son of Lord Randolph Churchill, and very conscious of treading in his revered father's political footsteps. He crossed the floor of the House in a dispute over free trade in 1904, and became a member of the great Liberal Party, with its watchwords of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform. He clashed with Brodrick over army expenditure in the House of Commons, a question upon which his father had resigned as Chancellor of the Exchequer from Lord Salisbury's Government in 1886, never regaining office. During the debate, Churchill thanked the House for allowing him '...after 15 years, to lift again the tattered flag I found lying on a stricken field'. Brodrick accused him of 'a hereditary desire to run imperialism on the cheap'.² Now, as Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, he was on an unofficial, sporting tour of the colonies, which became a lordly progress of inspection and rectification, and the Colonial Secretary, Lord Elgin, was the largely unwilling and sceptical recipient of a hail of suggestions. Churchill's position, however, was quite strong, since he was the spokesman for the colonies in the House of Commons.

Winston Churchill spent two days at Berbera, and then dictated 'A Minute on the Somaliland

Protectorate' to his secretary, Edward Marsh. It was addressed to Sir Francis Hopwood, the Permanent Under Secretary at the Colonial Office, and to Lord Elgin, the Colonial Secretary. Its logic was persuasive, its style Napoleonic and its effect disastrous.

It was marked 'confidential'. It ran thus:

1. The general position in Somaliland is not satisfactory either from a financial or a military point of view. The revenues of the country, which are raised entirely upon the coast, might be sufficient to maintain a moderate civil and military establishment for the purpose of holding the seaports and patrolling the coast line. They are far from sufficient to support the forces necessary to rule the interior, and there is no likelihood of their becoming so. A permanent grant-in-aid of not less than £60,000 a year is indispensable to the present policy, and to the armed strength involved; yet this expenditure and these forces do not in themselves afford any real security to the tribes within our demarcated border, and a large expeditionary force must be sent with that object if at any time the Mullah advances in earnest.
2. The following are the figures of revenue and expenditure in the last four years:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Revenue £</i>	<i>Expenditure £</i>
1904–5	35,200	73,600
1905–6	39,400	127,500
1906–7	42,000	107,100
1907–8 (estimated)	35,400	113,500

The resulting deficits have been made good by the British Treasury in two ways, first by grants-in-aid, as follows:

1904–5	£78,600
1905–6	£76,000
1906–7	£42,000
1907–8	£37,000

and, secondly, by a vicious system of allowing unexpended balances (principally arising from special war expenditure) to accumulate unsundered and to form a surplus fund which amounted on –

1st April 1904 to £52,100
 1st April 1905 to £92,300
 1st April 1906 to £80,200
 1st April 1907 to £53,400

and from which sums of money were drawn in each year to balance, conjoined with the grant-in-aid, the natural deficit upon revenues. From this second source a sum of £42,800³ will be required in the present year, 1907–8, leaving only £12,300 of this fund available

for the future. With these facts in view it is easy to see how illusory are the apparent reductions in the grants-in-aid; and now that the accumulated balances are practically exhausted, they must, upon the present basis of expenditure, rise at once in 1908–9 to about £60,000, and to about £70,000 in 1909–10 and succeeding years.

3. The financial aspect is not completely revealed without the addition of the special war expenditure involved by the expeditions of 1903 and 1904, which amounted to about £2,300,000, or a permanent charge on the British taxpayer of not less than £70,000 in respect of a country quite unremunerative except in its coastal strip, and only capable of yielding, at any rate for many years, a revenue of between £35,000 and £40,000 from that.
4. But the military situation is still more unsatisfactory. The regular forces at present available in the Protectorate consist of 400 Indian soldiers constituting nominally the 6th Battalion of the King's African Rifles, and 350 mounted and 100 unmounted Somalis, called the Somali Standing Militia. Both these bodies are well officered by British Officers belonging to the King's African Rifles, and their quality is good.

There are beside 180 armed police, borne on the Civil Establishment, and 100 regular camel-mounted Somalis attached as escorts to the political officers, and borne on the 'Political Administration' vote.

The regular forces are distributed as follows: First the political officers with their escorts of 25–30 men apiece are spread along the line Hargeisha [sic] – Ber – Las Dureh. This may be called the line of observation and intelligence. Supporting its centre are at Ber 200 mounted, behind these at Burao 200 mounted and 100 unmounted, at Sheikh 250 unmounted, and at Suksodeh 100 mounted men. The friendly tribes have in addition been given a certain number of rifles and some ammunition, and have been encouraged to form themselves into a kind of highly irregular militia, which at the present time is causing a good deal of anxiety by its impartial depredations upon neighbours not similarly armed, and upon refugees from the Mullah's territory.

5. The regular forces, although well adapted to checking these mere raiding parties, are obviously and admittedly quite unequal to resisting any determined advance by the Mullah. By the defence scheme at present in existence, any such movement is to be met as follows: First, all the mounted troops are to be collected at Ber to resist the Mullah as long as possible pending the arrival of large reinforcements from Aden and India; and if and when they are forced to retire they are to do so upon Berbera, *leaving* – and this is the pearl – *two garrisons of 50 infantry men* each in the forts at Burao and Sheikh. [Italicized in original.] These devoted men are to hold out until (a) destroyed or (b) relieved by a strong expeditionary force from England and India, at a cost of between three and four millions sterling. What is to happen in the meanwhile to the tribal militia, or to 'our obligations towards the friendly tribes', does not appear to have been precisely settled.
6. It is scarcely possible to imagine a more uncomfortable situation. In spite of a military expenditure utterly disproportionate to the resources or the value of Somaliland, no effectual security is obtained. By far the greater part of the British sphere is not held at all, and our obligations to the friendly tribes, which are always invoked, are already plainly in default. Yet even the small portion of the country which *is* held cannot be maintained against any serious attack. At any time that the Mullah chooses to advance – and he is, according to reports, arming and strengthening himself steadily – it must be abandoned, or a powerful expedition involving an immense and indefinite expenditure must be sent. Finally, to make

quite sure that the second alternative will be adopted, two small posts are to be set up to which two pitifully weak garrisons are to be tethered, awaiting rescue or destruction.

7. The policy of making small forts, in the heart of wild countries, which cannot be held in sufficient force, is nearly always to be condemned. Especially is this so when the population or the enemy is Moslem; for then at any moment a wave of rifle – armed fanaticism may isolate them, and the whole course of the war must be compromised to relieve them within a certain short period of time. The Government have no choice as to whether they will send an expedition or not. The General has little choice as to his road or his strategy. He must advance often before his forces are strong enough, before his transport is assembled, before his preparations are complete, upon well – marked lines, upon any point of which the enemy can await him in carefully prepared positions. If he succeeds in his advance, he is often too late. If he is checked or even retarded, the fall of the place and the slaughter of its defenders, while they vastly extend the area of the war and increase the strength of the enemy, force the British Government nearly always to embark on costly and sterile operations to ‘re-establish British prestige.’ It would be easy to cite examples in modern experience.
8. But it may be doubted if these were ever more plainly threatened, or more gratuitously courted, than in the making of forts at Burao and Sheikh. The places are themselves of no essential importance, unless an artificial value is imparted to them by the erection of buildings, the accumulation of stores, and the growth of sentimental associations. They do not close the road to the Mullah’s advance. They do not keep it open for the British return. They do not guard any towns, villages, bridges, inhabitants, trade or fertile areas. They do not block the passage of any rivers, mountains or deserts. Burao, it is true, has good and important wells; but the fort does not command them at all, and there are many other roads to Berbera than by Burao. The garrisons are miserably weak. The time needed to organise a relief expedition from England and India is necessarily painfully long; and since the Mullah and his forces have on more than one occasion marched 100 miles in a single day, the danger is constant and uncertain.
9. Reviewing the foregoing considerations, I am of opinion that, without waiting for any decision upon the general recommendations submitted in this minute, the defence scheme should be altered forthwith. The officer in command of the troops should be clearly instructed that his sole duty in the event of serious attack is to cover Berbera; and that if forced to retire behind the line of the Golis, he is to secure the withdrawal of *all* troops under his command, and of as many stores as can conveniently be removed. The infantry forces in Burao and Sheikh should be reduced, the artillery and and [sic] Maxims should be withdrawn, and no accumulation of stores, and especially of ammunition, beyond what is necessary for a fortnight should be allowed. With a view to this, I have asked the Acting Commissioner not to proceed any further for the present with the construction of forts and buildings at Sheikh and Burao.
10. I desire, however, to urge a complete revision of policy in the Somaliland Protectorate. There are only two secure alternatives:
 - (a) To occupy the country effectively by holding all the important wells, and in concert with the Italians to crush the Mullah; or
 - (b) To withdraw to the coast, as the Italians have done since, and as we did before, the rise of the Mullah’s power.The first of these courses is not likely, I trust, to be seriously entertained; and it is with a

view to carrying out the second that I make the following proposals, the details of which might of course be varied without prejudice to the general scheme.

11. The British forces should be organized in two lines, the line of observation or [sic] the line of resistance.

A. The line of observation would run from Hargeisha to Las Dureh, and would be divided into three political districts under the existing political officers with their escorts of from 25 to 30 men each, and would be patrolled and supported by two mounted companies of Somalis of 75 men each.

B. The line of resistance would be the sea coast, and would consist of three garrisons, viz: Berbera. 100 Indians, 100 Somalis, 100 police.

Bulhar. 25 Indians, 50 Somalis, 40 police.

Zeyla. 25 Indians, 50 Somalis, 40 police. [footnote – The police are not included in military expenditure, being paid for under a special sub – head.]

There are at present two armed revenue cutters, maintained at a cost of about £1,100 a year; and it seems desirable that these should be increased by two more.

C. A wireless telegraphy station should be established at Berbera, communicating with Aden. It is incredible that this has not been done before. At present all telegrams for Somaliland have to go to Jibutil [sic] and thence by cable to Berbera, involving a delay of two days, and much expense. The installation and up-keep of the wireless stations would cost only two or three hundred pounds capital, and an equal annual expenditure.

I do not believe that there would be any difficulty in holding the three ports and the coast line against the Mullah with the forces proposed. But if reinforcements were needed they could be obtained by wireless telegraphy from Aden in 16 hours.

12. There would be no objection to the garrisons of Berbera, Bulhar and Zeyla spending the hot months at Sheikh or other convenient camping places on the Golis, provided that the political officers considered the country absolutely quiet, and that on no account was any idea entertained of making permanent fortified posts, which would have to be held at all costs. The two mounted companies could frequently patrol as far as Ber to support the political officers at that place. A small capital expenditure would be required to provide permanent quarters for the officers and men stationed in the coast towns, and also for defensive works around them. But these latter could be constructed by the troops at inconsiderable expense. I would also suggest that in view of the fact that service on the coast is more trying than service 40 miles away in the hills, the leave regulations of the military officers serving in Somaliland should be slightly relaxed...

13. The reduced forces of the Protectorate should be reorganized as, and comprised in, the 6th Battalion of the King's African Rifles, divided into companies as follows:

Double company, Indian, unmounted	150
Company, Somali, mounted (ponies)	150
Company, Somali, unmounted	100
Company, Somali, unmounted	<u>100</u>
	500

(There would be in addition the Civil Police and the 100 political camel-men, now charged to heads of expenditure other than military, but available for defence.)

[Section 14 contained a complete breakdown of the cost, the 500 Indians/Somalis costing £15,050, the 18 British Officers costing £7050 and transport and upkeep £3000, a total of £25,100.]

15. The estimated charges for the present year 1907-8 for military purposes are £49,500 ordinary and £5,600 extraordinary = £54,600. The resultant saving is therefore £29,500 on the estimates for 1908-9. This involves a reduction in strength of 350 men, 200 of whom are mounted, and it involves the discharge, as quickly as is justly possible, of 250 Indians, and the conversion of 200 mounted Somalis into unmounted men. The economies are, however, much greater than the reduction of staff, owing to the large savings on transport and rations which arise from keeping the troops on the coast instead of in the interior, and to the abolition of all staff not required for the organization of a single battalion of the King's African Rifles.
16. The reduction of the Indians is an obvious step; but no one can use the paring knife upon these smart companies of Somalis, mounted on their wiry active little ponies or perched on their camels, without regret. I daresay that more harmonious arrangements could be made within the limits of this scheme. But upon the policy involved I have no doubts. I claim for this proposal, first a positive saving of £29,500, or (after allowing for wireless telegraphy, extra leave, and two more revenue cutters)* [here Churchill added a footnote that 'some further allowance must be made for payments to facilitate the accelerated discharge of the Indians with whom I propose to dispense] £27,000 a year, or exactly half the whole military expenditure of the Protectorate. Secondly, that it does all it pretends to do, viz., to exercise peaceful penetration in the interior, and to hold the coast effectively. The line of observation is strictly confined to that function, and can be drawn in at any moment without difficulty or delay, without loss or fuss. The line of resistance can really be made good – with at the outside a few companies from Aden and a gunboat or two – against any force the Mullah can bring. There is no post of any significance in front of the line of resistance to be abandoned or lost. There is no man in front of that line who is not mounted, and who cannot if necessary retire as fast as the Mullah advances.

Thirdly, that being essentially self-contained and final it limits precisely the liabilities of the British Government, and closes altogether the vistas of expenditure and expeditions which now lie painfully and even deliberately exposed. It gives no hostages to fortune; and it in no way compromises future policy. It safeguards absolutely the coastal line by customs duties along which practically the whole existing revenue is raised.

17. It should be added that in practice very little change in our dispositions would be apparent. The political officers would still continue at their posts, and their work would not necessarily be disturbed. Patrols of cavalry would be often seen at Ber and Burao. Infantry would sometimes be heard of at Sheikh. The forts would remain to scare the enemy, though not to trap ourselves.

The knowledge that 'the English are talking to Aden and India, where the soldiers are, by a post without wires,' would not be lost upon the Mullah. He has much on his hands, and may be in no hurry to court what he would believe to be a renewal of the fierce fighting of 1904. He may leave us alone. He may even die; and in this case our military expenditure could be reduced to the modest standard of pre-Mullah days, and our Protectorate would once

again become self-supporting. His assertion of influence among tribes in the interior, if seriously pressed, could not and would not be resisted by us now. These wild people have always lived in anarchy and strife among themselves or with their neighbours, and the British taxpayer has already squandered millions in vain interference – often to their disadvantage. If the worst comes to the worst, and the Mullah advances and pushes back our political screen of observation, we should in my opinion deal with him on the basis that if he treats the friendly tribes properly we will allow his trade to come through our posts to the sea, and that if he misbehaves we will blockade him completely.⁴ This is not a heroic policy, but it finds much justification and many examples in Indian frontier experience, and it is the only one which the utter poverty of this wilderness of stone and scrub, and the military strength of its fanatical inhabitants, render it worth while for a British Government to pursue.

W.S.C.

28th October, 1907

In his only novel, *Savrola*, Churchill observed that ‘when civilisation degenerates: Our morals will be gone, but our Maxims will remain.’⁵

For the ‘protected’ tribes of British Somaliland, under this ‘Munich Agreement’, not even the Maxims would remain.

At the time of Churchill’s confidential memorandum, the Commissioner of the Protectorate was Captain Harry Edward Spiller Cordeaux (the sender of the original letter to the Sayyid in 1900) and he was invited to comment upon it.

He began by suggesting that expenditure was in the process of being reduced, and that Colonel Gough, the hero of Daratoleh, was in the process of an inspection to see what efficiencies might be made. Altogether, Cordeaux expected to reduce the annual deficit to £50,000. This did not include the ‘vicious’ accumulated balances, so that even further reductions might be made, and ‘as the country feels the good effects of increased order and security’ the £50,000 should be seen as a maximum.

Next Cordeaux turned his criticism towards Churchill’s comments and arguments on military matters. ‘Before examining these premises in detail’, Cordeaux wrote:

It is necessary to have a clear understanding as to the precise object of the present policy, and more particularly of the existing defence scheme, and to retrace the steps by which it was evolved in its present form.

On the conclusion of the 1904 operations His Majesty’s Government decided, after consulting the military and civil authorities on the spot, that the surest way of preventing a recurrence of the costly events of the four preceding years was ‘to arm and organise the friendly tribes in such a way as to enable them after a while to protect themselves’. To give effect to this policy, Political Officers were appointed in 1905, and under their supervision a number of Somalis were enlisted and formed into six irregular infantry companies and located at Sheikh. At the same time a number of rifles and ammunition were issued to the tribes. This system was found to have certain defects. The so-called Militia did not attract the right type of Somali, namely the men of property who had some vested interest in their tribes and the defence of their flocks and herds. Its location at Sheikh offered no security to the tribes on their distant grazing grounds – the arms issued indiscriminately to the tribes were under no sort of control and were consequently used in tribal fights and in killing

game. To remedy these defects a new system was instituted in 1906. [i.e. when Cordeaux took up the position that Swayne had vacated in 1905]. The interior was divided up into three tribal areas or administrative districts, each under two Political Officers. The old so-called militia companies were distributed among these districts, under the command of the several Political Officers, and a higher standard of training and efficiency was set. It was found, however, that the Political Officers had insufficient time to devote to the purely military work of training their companies – work for which they were in many cases unsuited both by inclination and training. Consequently these Standing Militia Companies were in 1907 transferred to military control and placed under military officers specially appointed for the purpose. Together with the four companies of Indian troops (6th King's African Rifles) they formed the armed forces of the Protectorate. By the end of the present financial year the final process of evolution will have been reached with the amalgamation of the two units (Indian Contingent and Somali Standing Militia) to form one Battalion, i.e., the 6th King's African Rifles.

In the meanwhile Political Officers have been free to devote more time and attention to the organisation and training of the Tribal Militia – *which is the real tribal defence organization* [italics added]. It consists at present of some 15 sections of 25 men each in each district, and will shortly be increased, if necessary, to 20 sections per district. Each section comes up for training once a year, and for the rest of the year is present with its rifles on its tribal grazing grounds. The men composing it are owners of flocks and herds and consequently interested in their defence. It is solely for this reason that they submit to military training and discipline at all, and that necessarily of the lightest and least rigid description.

Cordeaux went on to add that Churchill's description 'highly irregular' *exactly* described the militia, although they were not 'out of hand', as the context implied. He pointed out that the rarity of the use of British-given rifles in tribal warfare, 'given the propensity of Somalis to engage in tribal fights', was due to the system of confiscations and fines for their misuse, which reflected 'much credit on the political officers concerned'. And the militia was a new organization upon which order was slowly evolving out of chaos. Cordeaux added that:

...It must be given time to develop and crystallize before final judgement is passed on it. It may not fulfil all that is expected of it as a fighting unit in the general scheme of defence, but its moral effect is incontestable. The knowledge that they are armed and organized on their own grazing grounds, with regular troops within supporting distance, is as re-assuring to our tribes as it is discouraging to their would – be aggressors.

Captain Cordeaux now addressed Churchill's criticism of the 'hostages to fortune', the fifty-man garrisons at Burao and Sheikh. After commenting that the new arrangements had been approved by the Director of Military Operations and the Secretary of State for War – an appeal to higher authority whose force depended on their perceived competence, rather than on logical argument – he explained that the posts at Burao and Sheikh had never been intended to be held by fifty men each. 'What was intended, *and what was stated in so many words*' [italics added] went on Cordeaux critically:

was that a force of 150 Indian troops (50 of whom are to be mounted) [and quoting the 'so

many words'] 'should be a reserve mainly for holding posts on the Berbera-Burao line and to form a small mounted contingent to proceed as a reserve to support to support the Tribal and Standing militia..... The reserve mounted force of Indians should be looked upon as the force upon which a retirement could be made in case of necessity should a considerable force of dervishes require the Tribal Militia and Standing Militia to fall back before them. ... The Reserve Force should also hold the posts of Burao and Shaikh. At each of these posts strongly entrenched and impregnable posts are necessary. The Burao post, with a few improvements which have been advocated, will be sufficiently strong for the purpose required. A site for a post at Shaikh has been selected and should be built on the lines of the present Burao fort.

Cordeaux went on to say that:

the main body of troops was not intended to retire on Berbera but to fall back on the forts at Burao and Shaikh *which were purposely designed of sufficient perimeter to hold them* [italics added]. The safety of Berbera could be amply secured by the presence of a ship – of – war, and if necessary by a detachment of troops from the Aden garrison.

The mounted troops issuing from the forts would keep open communications between Berbera, Burao and Sheikh, and though unable to exclude raiders, would prevent a hostile army planting itself west of the line through fear of being caught between the forts and a relieving army. Cordeaux also pointed out that the case of a general uprising by the tribes was no more likely in Somaliland than in any other part of Africa, and would in every case have to be met by outside assistance. All that could be done was 'to render such a contingency as remote as possible. In the case of Somaliland it may fairly be claimed that this has been done', he added, referring to the Political Officers.

Cordeaux then pointed out that an organized invasion would not simply come out of the blue, but would be more likely to 'develope, [sic] snow-ball fashion, from a series of successful minor raids, the stronger organizations absorbing the weaker until we have to face a powerful combination'. He pointed out that the tribal militia were there to deal with these minor raids, supported if necessary by the mounted regulars.

Commissioner Cordeaux, who had been in Somaliland since 1898, then corrected Under Secretary Churchill, who had visited Berbera for two days, on his statement (in 6. above) that 'By far the greater part of the British sphere is not held at all, and our obligations to the friendly tribes, which are always invoked, are already plainly in default', by politely suggesting that it 'possibly rests upon a misapprehension as to our exact relations with the various tribes composing the Somali race'. He went on:

The latter is divided into two distinct racial divisions, the Ishak or Western, and the Darod or Eastern division. Although both these divisions are included within the limits of the British Protectorate, it is only with the Ishak tribes that we have entered into treaties of protection. With the Darod tribes we have no treaties whatever. [This, strangely for a Commissioner, was quite untrue – a treaty was concluded with the Warsangli clan in January 1886⁶ and the Warsangli (Warsangali) are quite certainly a member of the Darod (Daarood) clan family.⁷ Only the Dolbahanta (Dulbahante) were excluded. The Warsangli

occupied the area between the 'Ishak' (Isaaq) and the Dolbahanta and the Majeerteen. Perhaps Cordeaux considered the treaty with the Warsangli voided by their previous support of the Mullah. However, it shows that Churchill was not *entirely* wrong].

Cordeaux went on to point out that the line at present covered by the Political Officers and their escorts included the grazing grounds 60 miles in front of Hargaisa – Odweina – Burao – Sheikh – Las Dureh – Berbera: the area of the Ishak (Isaaq) tribes [this area excluded the Warsangli]. Britain was under no obligation, 'moral or trucial', to protect the Darod tribes east of the line. They were friendly now, but had supported the Mullah.

Captain Cordeaux then 'hesitated to express an opinion' on 'the general policy of making small forts in the heart of wild countries', as this was 'rather a matter for expert military opinion' (a principle that Lieutenant Churchill seems not to have taken to heart throughout his long political career!), although he expressed agreement with Brigadier-General Manning that their garrisons of fifty were 'ample'.

Commissioner Cordeaux stated that the idea of a 'wireless system between Aden and Berbera was considered at the time of the last operations, but the project was abandoned owing to the large initial expenditure required, *and also to the opposition of the Eastern Telegraph Company at Aden* [italics added]. The telegraph line to Somaliland stopped at Aden, and telegrams were sent by despatch boat to Berbera; the possibility of the somewhat Luddite objections of a private company to a measure of both administrative and military advantage to the Empire being even considered seems bizarre.

Cordeaux now quite rightly pointed out that:

Another source of weakness to our present position is the existence of large unadministered territories on our borders, namely, Abyssinian Somaliland on the south and Italian Somaliland on the east. The result of representations which have been frequently made to the Powers concerned gives the hope that these defects will gradually be remedied, in which case the present strain on our administrative and military resources in Somaliland will be greatly relieved, and expenditure reduced in proportion.

This, of course, was a very fair point. Civil authorities and military commanders do not always see eye to eye over the need for 'hot pursuit' of the enemy into 'safe havens', and when they do, wars may sometimes be widened and prolonged, instead of shortened. However, the Abyssinians had cooperated militarily, and the Italians had allowed incursions into their territory on occasion, although the delay in 'hot pursuit' when the Sayyid slipped away to Illig may have been critical.

Next Cordeaux turned to a rather strange suggestion of using the hill station at Sheikh 'as a sanatorium for the Aden garrison', adding that 'The presence of European troops at Sheikh would lend moral, if not material, strength to our position'. The historian Carlyle had once described Aden as a 'mountain of misery towering sheer up like a bleak Pisgah [an arid biblical mountain], with outlooks only into desolation, sand, salt water, and despair'.⁸ Any soldier who has served there might agree on the accuracy of this description and dream longingly of an occasional relief from the barren rocks – even those in good physical health; however, the proposition of garrisoning a fort with convalescents might not have recommended itself to the military at home, and certainly not to the Treasury!

On Churchill's proposal to withdraw to the coast, Cordeaux first pointed out that the Italians had never had any officials, either in the interior or on the coast, save the few on the Benadir coast south of Obbia, around Mogadishu, which he did not regard as forming a part of 'Somaliland proper', perhaps because the hinterland tribes were the Digil and Rahanwayn, the agricultural tribes, and the Hawiye, a nomad tribe belonging to neither the Daarod nor the Isaaq groups.

Cordeaux went on to point out that although Churchill wished to retain the Political Officers in their positions supported by their escorts and 150 mounted Somalis, they could not remain for long, and would have to be withdrawn. The friendly tribes 'would at once see that we had no intention of resisting an advance by the Mullah, and would hasten to make the best terms they could while there was still time'. A blockade, if the Mullah did not 'treat the friendly tribes properly', would be ineffective because native craft simply did not need the British occupied ports, as 'every portion of the coast – line was a potential port'. Furthermore, 'It would be impossible to differentiate between the Mullah's and other people's goods, and a blockade would thus affect our tribes who, for no fault of their own, have been forced into the Mullah's hands by our deserting them.'

Cordeaux conceded that an even smaller force than Churchill suggested could hold the coast line. But since we did not control the interior, of what value was the coast?

He went on:

Instead of our ports supplying food for the Aden garrison, the position would be reversed. We should be practically confined to the coast towns – or their immediate vicinity, like the French at Jibuti [Djibouti]...or like the Italians in their Benadir Coast ports, who dare not show themselves outside the walls without an armed escort.

Cordeaux also questioned the impact on France, Italy and Abyssinia of 'an armed and fanatical organisation having its head-quarters in the centre of a British Protectorate'. What would be the effect on the Somalis of Jubaland [now part of Kenya] and on the rest of the East African Protectorates? How were the tribes to be disarmed without force – or were the tribal levies' weapons to be left among the tribes?

Lastly, Cordeaux pointed out that:

The policy of confining ourselves to the coast is no new one. It was tried before and resulted in the Mullah and the subsequent costly expeditions necessary to drive him out of the British Protectorate. To revert to that policy now would, in my opinion, be to precipitate a state of affairs in Somaliland which we have already spent several millions in averting.

If it is true that the Sayyid *was* intent on driving Britain out of Somaliland from the beginning, this was true. But this is uncertain, as the mysterious affair of the second letter shows. But even if he might have come to some *modus vivendi* with the British which left them the coast, it does seem that he would have come to blows with the Abyssinians over the Ogaden, and if Britain had done nothing, she would have been in plain breach of her treaty obligations with that country.

Certainly, Somaliland could not pay for its defence by Britain. That was the real point. Since its importance lay in Berbera, and since the importance of Berbera lay in its supplies to Aden and its position near the mouth of the Red Sea on the Suez Canal route to India, it does seem reasonable that British India should have borne some, if not all, of the cost. But Winston Churchill, the Tory turned

Liberal, restless with huge gifts and an open, driving and unrelenting ambition, perhaps emotionally taking up once again his father's tattered flag, hid a shameful betrayal and abandonment of plain treaty obligations under the guise of prudence and economy. His very words – '... this wilderness of stone and scrub...[in which] these wild people have always lived in anarchy and strife among themselves or with their neighbours...' – sound morally similar to Neville Chamberlain's dismissal of Czechoslovakia's crisis in 1938 as 'a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing'.

On 8 December 1908, Lord Crewe, noting that Churchill had circulated his 'full and interesting Minute' to the Cabinet, thought it advisable to circulate Cordeaux's reply. He reported that he was 'in pretty general agreement' with Churchill on the policy, thinking that the garrisons at Sheikh and Burao were indeed exposed, and would need a rescue expedition if besieged, but disagreed with the effectiveness of Churchill's 'line of observation' with its retention of political officers in exposed positions. He concluded:

We must face the possibility of our being confined to the coast towns, but even this might be the less of two evils. The fact, however, that it would be an evil must make us all the more anxious to devise some method of winning the Mullah by a subsidy, difficult though it may be to do so.

Churchill, now at the Board of Trade in the middle of a trade recession, and therefore even more committed to avoiding a 'waste' of money on Somaliland, acted quickly, writing on 11 December that 'As Captain Cordeaux' [sic] note on Somaliland has been circulated to the Cabinet, I think it worth while to circulate also the rejoinder which I made at the time.' (It was dated January 19, 1908.)

Churchill first noted that both Gough and Cordeaux envisaged a relieving force in the event of a full-scale attack, committing the Government to 'military operations upon a large scale and of a practically indefinite character'.

'The rest of the Memoranda [sic] continued Churchill (in faultless English but dubious Latin) 'affords confirmation of all my main contentions.'

It is not denied that the friendly tribes whom we have armed do in fact raid their neighbours with weapons supplied by His Majesty's Government; that, in the event of the Mullah advancing, large reinforcements would be needed; that in that case, pending their arrival, the bulk of the Ishak tribes would be left to their fate; that garrisons would be isolated in 'impregnable' posts at Shaikh and Burao, which would require *relieving forces* [italicized in original, as are the italicized phrases below] within a limited period of time; that neither the Italians nor the French are such fools as to waste their money on attempting the interior control of their spheres of influence in Somaliland; that, so far from our being exposed to their complaints, if we were to withdraw from [sic] the coast, we should only be imitating their policy. It is admitted that our position in the coast towns could be maintained *even with a smaller garrison than that estimated*; it is admitted that the policy of confining ourselves to the coast-line *is the old policy*. The assertion that a blockade of the Somaliland coast is ineffectual either from Aden or by the sea is disputed by other authorities equally competent. Captain Cordeaux' suggestion that the expeditions against the Mullah resulted from 'the policy of confining ourselves to the coast – line' is a contradiction in terms, it being quite clear that the hideous waste was the direct result of

abandoning the said policy of 'confining ourselves to the coast-line' and plunging ourselves into the interior. Not the slightest attempt is made to traverse the fact that grants – in – aid of upwards of 50,000*l.* a – year, or within 30,000*l.* of the whole grant – in – aid for Uganda, will be required for an indefinite period to preserve an imperfect control, subject to the Mullah remaining quiet, of an absolutely worthless country, from which no return can ever be expected and in which we are exposed to constant danger...

From what I have read in these papers, I am all the more convinced that the policy of coastal concentration in Somaliland is indispensable unless an improper waste of public money is to be incurred.

In the 'absolutely worthless' faraway land, the Mullah, indomitable, unrelenting and unforgiving, sprang up again, like the dragon's teeth.

The Triumph of the Giant

Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

Ecclesiastes 5, 5

While the rulers of the great Imperial power indulged in these pecuniary, and sometimes moral heart-searchings, the Sayyid was not idle. After the 'peace' agreement at Illig, he had lain in Italian Somaliland, gaining strength. Up until 1907, when Churchill visited Berbera, he had been quiet. However, being a nomad in Somaliland necessitated constant looting (and being looted) and the Sayyid looted the Mijjertein in the east, despite entering into a peace with Yusuf Ali in 1906. He supported the Bagheri around Wardair against the Ogaden tribes to the west, giving himself a south western bolt hole should the necessity again arise. However, an Abyssinian expedition against the Bagheri resulted in their defeat, and somewhat dented the Sayyid's plans in that direction. A number of the Mijjertein, deserted by the Italian Government, migrated into British Somaliland, and although the British refused them protection, they were allowed to stay, since the British feared that the Mijjertein might find their only other recourse to be joining the Mullah. In February 1906, the Sayyid sent a caravan of 150 camels, with 14,000 old skins, guarded by 80 men with 11 rifles to Berbera under the command of his great friend Abdulla Shahari. The British used Shahari to try to persuade the emigrant Mijjertein to return to Italian 'protection', but there is no doubt that Shahari used this opportunity to sow discord among the Warsangli and Dolbahanta clans. The Warsangli in the northern coastal area around Las Khorai were, however, afraid of the power of the British navy to blockade them, and had even asked for a British Resident and guard at that port, which was declined on the grounds of a lack of unanimity amongst the Warsangli themselves.

The Sayyid now encouraged robber bands ('terrorist thugs', the Burad),¹ armed looters, nominally freelances, who began to raid and terrorize the tribes who were friendly to either colonial power. The Warsangli, increasingly under the Sayyid's influence, raided the Ishak (Isaaq) tribes and also raided those Dolbahanta tribes who had deserted the Sayyid, aided by the Burad, giving the dervishes access to Las Khorai and arms shipments in return. In reply, the British reoccupied Bohotle and the Ain Valley. In January 1908 the Warsangli fired on the crew of a British Government dhow, who had landed for water. Cordeaux now blockaded the Warsangli as a punishment, at the same time informing the Sayyid that the action was not directed against him. In May 1908 he replied in a moderate way, although with many complaints.

However, in August 1908 the Sayyid wrote to Cordeaux demanding that the troops at Bohotle and in the Ain valley be withdrawn, that the Warsangli be considered as dervishes, rather than British subjects, and attacking Rissaldar Major Museh Fareh, the political officer at Burao. Cordeaux, while removing the garrison from Bohotle, reinforced that in the Ain Valley. He sent a copy of the Sayyid's letter to the Italians, who now proposed a joint blockade. This was turned down by the British, who

did not wish to provoke the Sayyid into an action which would involve another expensive campaign; the British also knew that he already considered them, as the rulers of the seas, to be responsible for Italian actions.

In June 1908 the dervishes constructed a fortified post at Halin, inside British territory, and in September the Warsangli raided the British protected tribes in the Ain valley, but were deprived of all their gains in a prompt pursuit by a certain Lieutenant Rose, who was severely wounded in the process. The British tribes recovering their confidence, Cordeaux now withdrew his troops from their exposed position in the Ain Valley, leaving only some forty men of the tribal militia at Eil Dab.

But while the debate on withdrawal from the interior of Somaliland was being conducted by the rulers of the Empire, and as he grew stronger in 1909, and imported arms, and sowed dissension among his enemies, the Sayyid was almost struck down by a very serious dissension in his own ranks. The cause was an ancient one, predating the Prophets, even predating camel-rustling. 'The disturbances among the Somalis', wrote the Sayyid with some justification, 'Are chiefly caused by women and songs';² on this occasion it had been the former, a dispute over a dark-eyed beauty.³ She had excited the passions of the Sayyid's boyhood friend and best and most able lieutenant, Abdulla Shihari. Unfortunately for Shihari, and probably for the woman, she had also excited the passions or the cupidity of the Sayyid himself, and he seized her. Years of loyalty, years of friendship, years of admiration, were dissolved by the hot flood welling up from this spring of passion. As is usual with such upheavals, all the accumulated criticisms of the Sayyid's character which had been ignored or excused by friendship – his terrible cruelty, his faithlessness to treaties, his self indulgence – rose up stark and sharp before his eyes. His disillusion was complete, his hatred irrevocable. But Abdulla Shihari was in a quandary; his wife and children were in the Sayyid's camp, and his flight or revolt would have been the signal for their execution. He dissembled his hatred, he waited his moment. Then, a gift too precious to refuse! He was most inadvisably sent by the Sayyid on a trade mission to Aden, in Arabia itself, from where, to the delight of the Italians and British, he hastened to Mecca, accompanied by two prominent Sheikhs, Ali Nairobi and Ismail Isaaq, to report the Sayyid's doings to Mohammed Salih, the tutor of the Sayyid, the founder of the Sayyid's sect, the Saalihiya, and one of the well springs of his power.

The three Sheikhs were persuasive, the saintly Salih was outraged, and the three carried from the holy city a damning letter to the Sayyid. On 22 March 1909, in the port of Aden, the Italian Consul-General, Mr Piacentini, clutching the treasure, boarded His Majesty's Italian Ship *Elba*, bound for Illig. Abdulla Shahiri accompanied him. At Illig they received reports that the Sayyid was on his way. In the meantime they hurried by steamer to Mogadishu, carrying Sheikh Ismail ben Isaac and a letter from Mohammed Salih to 'the seven Sheikhs of the Benadir'; the Sheikh they left 'preaching and lecturing the population on the public roads'.⁴ The weed of dissension well and truly planted, they were returned to Illig by His Majesty's Italian Ship *Vesuvio*, to hear the Sayyid's reply and to re-embark the messenger.

The Sayyid had what appeared to be a most friendly and forgiving message for 'Brother' Abdulla Shahiri and 'Brother' Hajji Ismail, the first sentence of which expressed an undoubtedly fervent and genuine desire:

...I hope in God to see your faces. In the name of the Prophet and of our Sheikh Mohammed Saleh [Salih]. Two are the objects of this letter: (1) I greet you in God; (2) We are waiting you [sic] because we earnestly wish to see you. I pray God my wish be accomplished. Brother Haje Abdullah, Brother Haje Ismail, we are brethren...

Abdulla Shahiri, despite the addition of a small gift from his former hero, declined the invitation, perhaps wishing to meet his Maker on a later occasion, and with a less arduous and agonizing transition to Paradise.

The bearer of the letter, Soliman, reported that:

As soon as I reached the shore, I was approached by about thirty dervishes armed with rifles, who took me to the fort situated on the top of the hill; from that place I was conducted by two men to the Mullah's camp. On our way we met two riders coming from the Mullah, and I was asked by the same whether I had letters for the Mullah. I said I did, but I have orders to hand the letters personally to the Mullah. On their threatening me of death, I had to hand them over to them, and as soon as they had the letters they rode away in the direction of the Mullah's camp. I proceeded with the two men to the Mullah. We met him half way, followed by his people, and bound to Illig coast. He invited me to ride a horse, and altogether [sic] we proceeded to Illig. He immediately said me [sic] that the handwriting of the letter was not the Sayd's [i.e. the Sayyid, Salih], neither the seal was his, but that it was Abdullah Shahry's [Shahiri's] handwriting. Then he asked me if the man-of-war was there, if the consul came, and what he came for. The following morning we reached Illig. I have seen three secretaries of the Mullah reading the Sheikh Mecca letter. The next morning the Mullah called me and said: D-d those who interpose between me and the Christians; they are all spies, and they do much harm. Listen to these words and repeat same to the consul. Then he gathered all the Hajes, about twenty, and his followers, about 500 in all, and spoke to them. Listen to me: henceforth I want to alter my mode of life and be straightforward in all my actions. Be all my witnesses to such statement. He told me again he wished to obtain peace, and recommended me to ask the consul to restore him the dhow [of which more later] with her cargo and crew, and before leaving me he kissed my hand and told me, 'Who that [sic] brought me the letter from the Sheikh of Mecca, is as if he had brought me a letter from the Prophet.

In looking at this account in order to assess the authenticity of the letter, an immediate inconsistency strikes the reader. If the letter was a forgery in Shahiri's hand, and it was not Salih's seal, why did the Sayyid kiss the hand of the bearer? Perhaps the Sayyid denied its authenticity in public, and affirmed it in private, if the parting kiss and comment was unseen and unheard by his followers. Presumably the Sayyid meant by 'those who interpose between me and the Christians' Abdullah Shahiri and the other two Sheikhs, which would indicate that he did not suspect Italian and British connivance in the letter – or that he wished the Italians and British to think that he did not, since he asked Soliman to report his words. But how trustworthy was the messenger, or the translation?

Obviously the colonial powers would benefit from this denunciation, but any outright forgery could surely not be concealed for long, for traffic between Mecca and Somalia was frequent.

The letter itself was damning:

Praise be to God ...

To my brother and friend the powerful Seyid Mohammed-bin-Abdullah.

After compliments to you and your people, praying for your long life and for your welfare ...

If you want to know about me, I am well, by the grace of God...

I have always been anxious and enquiring about your doings and welfare. I know that

you have not grown weak, and are capable of fighting. I have this news before my eyes – that you and your people have got into bad ways; you are no longer minding the Shariat [Sharieh] law. I have proofs that you cease to abide by that law in that you loot and enjoy other men’s wives; you shed their blood and rob them and their property. You can be called now neither a Moslem nor an infidel [Christian]; you have ceased to know your proper religion, because you do not go according to it, and do all sorts of bad things. I do not approve of this, because it is not according to the Shariat law. The Prophet has laid down...

I think God will punish you for your misdeeds in this world, only do not forget that he is not blind to all that you do...

Henceforth I wish to have nothing to do with you and your belongings. I will not write to you, and I do not want you to write to me. Those who walk in the way of God are sure to be protected by Him, and those who do bad are sure likewise to be punished by Him...

You call yourself ‘seyid’ [Sayyid], but whence you obtained this title is not known. You do not conduct yourself like a Sheikh, or walk in the path shown to you by our Prophet Mohammed...

You had better leave off calling yourself ‘seyid’...and would do well by keeping to your self respect and instructing your people in the path of God and religion, and by ceasing to call yourself ‘seyid’, ‘Mahdi’, or any such thing. By assuming these titles, which do not belong to you, you will forget what you know of religion...

Mahommedans are not those who take their neighbour’s blood on their hands, or either those who deserve their neighbour’s curses...

Leave off all this and fear God and the judgement day, when children will have to separate from mothers...

You are at present like a shipwreck, tossing and drifting this way and that way, unable to know or to make for any harbour. I think you are quite old and wise enough, and do not therefore require any instruction.

Hearken to all I have said, and it is for you to choose whether you will listen or not; but if you do not listen to me, or continue in your present state, it will be with the protest of myself and all the other Mussulmans, who will all raise their voice and might against you and your people.

It is enough what you have already done. And now leave off your bad habits and ways, or else I will not write or have anything to do with you in the future, and will take care to inform all Mahommedan brethren of your doings, and you will cease to belong to our tarika...[Religious community]

SEYID MOHAMMED SALEH RASHID...⁵

(The gaps in the text above were, in the original, quotations from the Koran).

Yet despite all this, the Sayyid, by an ever more diligent application of his undoubted skills in torture, battle, poetry and murder, achieved a victory over the doubters in his camp, and it is reported that, in 1913, the dervishes attacked ‘shouting their weird, monotonous war – song “Mahomed Salih”’.⁶

On 8 January 1909, after persistent rumours that the dervishes were preparing to advance into the Ain Valley, Cordeaux again strengthened the garrison there by four mounted companies, and further, requested reinforcements from the East African Protectorates. Four hundred men came from

Uganda with four Maxims, and a further four hundred from Jubaland in Kenya, which included the Somali Jubaland Camel Company, with another four Maxims.

Colonel Gough, VC, Inspector General of the King's African Rifles and Commander of British military forces in the Protectorate, now wrote to Cordeaux, pointing out that the simple holding of the Ain Valley was by itself just a compromise between withdrawal to the coast and a further expedition – it was in no ways a solution. He felt that, while the force was certainly adequate to defend the Ain Valley against raids, and even to defeat a full scale attack by the dervishes – although such an attack was most unlikely – it could not seek out and destroy the Mullah. If the dervishes were inactive, or carried on a policy of raids on outlying tribes, it would result in a stalemate; should the troops be withdrawn, however, the raids would immediately recommence. The stalemate was expensive, involving the constant camel transport of water and food and ammunition – the Somali camel, after deductions for its own food, and the food and water of the driver, for the 150-mile trip to Wadamago from Berbera carried only 146lb (66kg) net, the equivalent of about 15 gallons of water.

On 15 March 1909, the whole question of Britain's involvement in Somaliland was debated in a Parliamentary Committee which was considering grants in aid. A supplementary sum of £47,000 was proposed. Colonel Seely, the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, in stating that the sum was small in comparison with previous years, pointed out that the expenditure in Somaliland depended on the activities of 'our old friend Mohammed Abdullah, the Mad Mullah'. He pointed out that the Mullah was far from insane. Extra troops had been sent to confront the Mullah after he had raised a considerable force, and sent threatening letters. The course adopted was a middle path between the extremes of another expedition, which would involve the cost of a light railway at £3000 per mile, or abandonment of the colony. It was 'a more patient policy of endeavouring to secure by pacific means as far as possible the safety of that part of His Majesty's Dominions'.

Arthur Balfour, the leader of the opposition and former Prime Minister, stated that during his term in government 'there was no more difficult and no more ungrateful task thrust upon us' than dealing with the Mullah. He cited the extreme difficulties of communication and supply in a country 'extremely difficult of military access'. He added that 'The difficulty of defence seems to be greater, the sacrifices involved seem to be more onerous, though the interests to be defended seem slight.' But he added the following comment:

...I do not believe it is possible for this country to divest itself of the responsibility it has there. We have got it and we must keep it, if for no other reason, because there is a large number of those tribes, especially along the coast, who believe in us, who have framed their policy because they know we can defend them, and whose fate would be disastrous indeed if we were to leave them in the lurch. *No such policy is possible for any responsible Government* [italics added].

He wondered whether some rough roads, less expensive than light railways, could be constructed for vehicles burning a 'liquid, waterless fuel', a curiously roundabout way of describing motor transport.

The general tenor of the debate was that an expedition was too expensive (and the Government plainly thought that a motor road was too) and abandonment immoral and dangerous to British prestige, particularly in the Sudan. However, when total abandonment was opposed, it was sometimes only because the coast was felt to be important to British interests – Mr A. Fell, for example, while insisting on the importance of keeping the coast, felt that the effort to retain the interior was not worthwhile.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Crewe, now decided to seek once again the opinion of Sir Reginald Wingate, KCB, KCMG, DSO, RA, Governor of the Sudan and Sirdar (Commander) of the Egyptian Army. Francis Reginald Wingate [he appears always to have been known by his second name only] was born in 1861, and was commissioned into the Royal Artillery in 1880. Posted to India, including a spell in Aden, he learnt Urdu and Arabic. In 1883 he joined the Egyptian Army, was present at the battle of Omdurman in 1898, and two years later succeeded Kitchener as Sirdar and Governor General, a position he retained until 1918.⁷

Arriving at barren and bleak Aden, which must have evoked many memories, Wingate received a lengthy and curious written instruction from Lord Crewe. At the beginning of the letter appeared to be a request for a report on the 'general situation'. But by point 7, it was clearly stated that 'in view of the cost (some 2,500,000*l.*) and inconclusive results of the last expedition, *an organised campaign against the Mullah is out of the question*' (italics added). Crewe went on to state (with a distinctly Churchillian ring) that:

...some alternative policy to that of catching and killing the Mullah must be determined. Faced with the difficulties of the situation as a whole, tired of having to remain indefinitely on the defensive, weary of holding a worthless country at great civil and military cost, a great body of opinion is tending more and more to incline with favour towards a policy of complete evacuation, or, as an alternative, to a withdrawal to certain positions on the coast. Evacuation or such a withdrawal would in themselves be satisfactory to His Majesty's Government if, after consideration of the pros and cons, you could recommend one or other of these lines of action...

Crewe added that the Government were 'very sensible of the criticisms which can be made damaging to a policy of evacuation or even coastal concentration', and enclosed a report of the Commons debate of 15 March 1909, which listed a number of them. Crewe classified coastal concentration as a sensible 'middle course' between the extremes of another expedition and complete evacuation, and enclosed a copy of both Churchill's 'pro' memorandum (described as 'able and elaborate') and Cordeaux's 'contra'. The policy of defence advocated therein by Cordeaux clearly foresaw that the situation might thereby be 'indefinitely prolonged', at great expense (an expense which, Crewe clearly stated, was 'impossible to justify') and that only the despatch of another expedition could achieve 'finality'. This last had, of course, already been ruled out as an option.

Crewe mooted one last option for Wingate's comments, that of 'buying the Mullah off' by a subsidy, although he added Cordeaux's objection that this would merely increase the Mullah's prestige.

Thus Wingate's expert opinion had been apparently sought, but any recommendations he might decide upon were circumscribed by the knowledge that another offensive, or even a defensive policy, were 'impossible', and he was therefore faced in reality with a choice of betrayals, between a retreat to the coast and an outright withdrawal. Yet Crewe also suggested that:

Should the Mullah increase his prestige, either by our partial or complete withdrawal, by our failure to deal effectively with him, or by some success on his part, it will be urged that the results may be disastrous for British influence outside Somaliland itself...In any recommendations which you may make you will no doubt bear this aspect of the question in mind.

Crewe's request was a poisoned chalice indeed, and intended to allow the Government to exculpate itself by steering the expert towards conclusions which the Government wished to implement, but which they knew would provoke criticism.

Also to be borne in mind by Wingate was the possible break up of Abyssinia on the death of the Emperor Menelik, whose health was not good, and he was to 'discuss the question with Captain Cordeaux from the point of view of Soudan [Sudan] and Somaliland', to enable their policies to be co-ordinated with those of Uganda and the East African Protectorate (Kenya), whose Governors would be consulted by Crewe personally.

Wingate appointed Major General Sir Rudolf Baron von Slatin, KCMG, CVO, the Inspector-General of the Sudan, as his second in command of the mission, and as Chief Intelligence Officer. Slatin had very high qualifications for the role. Born in Austria in 1857 he had left Vienna in 1878 for the Sudan, and General Gordon had appointed him Governor of Darfur, where he was captured by the Mahdist forces in 1884.

'In 1895', wrote Winston Churchill, '...Early on the 16th March a weary, travel-stained Arab, in a tattered jibba and mounted on a lame and emaciated camel, presented himself to the Commandant [of British Intelligence in the Sudan, who was Reginald Wingate]. He was received with delighted wonder, and forthwith conducted to the best bath room available. Two hours later a little Austrian gentleman stepped forth...' ⁸

Slatin had escaped, and brought with him a knowledge of the deepest counsels of the Khalifa. He wrote the story of his captivity in *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*, a book which, giving a firsthand account of their cruelties and savagery, which included showing him the severed head of the idolized General Gordon, aroused the British public against the Sudanese dervishes.⁹ He was given the title 'Pasha' by the Khedive, he and Wingate were feted on their return to Britain, and received by an impressed Queen Victoria. He had, like Wingate himself, a knowledge of Arabic, and of the Islamic world, having been forcibly 'converted' to that religion by the Khalifa.

But the report which Wingate and Slatin presented cannot have pleased the Earl of Crewe or the Government. It ran to 124 pages, with a later 18- page supplement. It appeared to cover every contingency. However, it did not endorse the 'coastal concentration' policy. The crucial arguments seemed to appear in Appendix VII, which commented on the Parliamentary debate of 10 March 1909, details of which had been thoughtfully provided by the Earl of Crewe for Wingate's comments.

First, however, Wingate briefly stated that the only policy which could achieve finality was a 'forward' policy:

...Undoubtedly the only policy – as long as the Mullah is alive – is to take such steps as shall result in his destruction, but such a policy has been declared to be at present outside the range of practical politics, and we therefore refer to it rather from the academic than the practical standpoint. Were it an admittedly feasible policy it is worth while briefly considering the steps to be taken to make it effective...

This was a little reminiscent of Anthony's funeral speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* – 'An expedition is the only path; yet Government declares it to be wrong, and Governments are honorable men'.

This alone would have ensured that the report would not be published.

Wingate then commented on the necessity of Abyssinian and Italian co-operation in such a policy. The Abyssinians had co-operated before; the Italians must be induced to do so, either

employing direct Italian military action or by giving cohesion to the tribes whom they might employ against the Mullah by the use of Italian troops.

The Sirdar now came to the retreat to the coast.

‘The question as to whether any British Government could reasonably divest itself of the responsibility it has incurred towards the tribes within its protectorate is not an easy one to answer, and appears to us to be one of degree...’ Slatin, indeed, had added that ‘As I mentioned before, an evacuation of the country under the present circumstances is practically impossible.’

Wingate later added the comment that ‘so long as the Mullah is in a position to wreak vengeance on [the tribes within our own sphere of influence], and they are not in a position to defend themselves, so long must we take steps to afford them some measure of protection’. Wingate felt that the British treaty obligations did not clearly and unequivocally compel them to protect the Somali tribes (although what had been intended by ‘gracious favour and *protection*’ he did not say) – the obligation arose rather from the campaigns in which they had participated against the Mullah, in which they had incurred his hostility. Nevertheless, by whatever means, he felt that an obligation now existed, and extended to the Darod tribes, with most of whom no formal treaty existed.

Wingate endorsed the opinions of Slatin, who criticized the policy of directly administering the interior of the protectorate, rather than leaving the tribes self-governing, and suggested that this policy (which was no fault of the men on the spot) had incurred most of the expense. The fact that the administrators spoke no Somali was a hindrance, and their reliance on appointed Somalis had, thought Slatin, rendered the British administration unpopular.¹⁰ The Akils, or tribal chiefs, had lost authority by the policy of allowing appeals to the administrators from their decisions, so that tribesmen often simply by-passed their Akils and went to the administration direct. It was of little use, thought Wingate, to arm and train the tribes while their civil cohesion was thus undermined.

Militarily, given the Government’s determination upon a defensive policy, Wingate thought that the battalion of the King’s African Rifles should be retained, with the addition of soldiers from the Aden garrison who could secure a rest from that peculiarly vile climate in a hill station at Sheikh, thus serving a double purpose. And he thought that with this force, and Slatin’s policy of tribal self government, more savings could be achieved than under Churchill’s ‘coastal concentration’ scheme.

Needless to say, the report was never published. Douglas Jardine, in *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland* published in 1923, simply observed that the report had never been published, and offered no opinion of what the report had recommended. Sir Geoffrey Archer, KCMG, Governor of Somaliland from 1913 until 1922, wrote in his memoirs in 1963 that ‘It was common knowledge ... that his [Wingate’s] view was that the only course open was the despatch of a powerful military force.’

But this, of course, was out of the question.

Winston Churchill, now Home Secretary and one of the great officers of state, was quietly influential in the deliberations of the cabinet. The policy of ‘coastal concentration’ was adopted. The Prime Minister, upon the Foreign Secretary’s [Sir Edward Grey] suggestion, minuted to Crewe that Cordeaux should:

Tell the tribes that as the Mullah continues to attack them and has broken off negotiations with us they must take what measures they think proper to protect themselves. It must be understood further that we do not undertake any responsibility for consequences of action taken by them.

This the Earl did.

The next move was the withdrawal of troops from the Ain Valley. Cordeaux had wanted to hint to the tribes that the British were to move forward, in order to encourage them to attack the Sayyid's forces, but this was opposed by Colonel Gough.

Colonel Gough, VC had shown continued evidence of his great talent, and after graduating from Staff College at Camberley in 1905, he was appointed to a position in the HQ of the Irish Command in Dublin, and from there in August 1907 was honoured with an appointment as ADC to King Edward VII. Later that year, as has been seen, he succeeded General Manning as Inspector-General of the King's African Rifles, under the aegis of the Colonial Office.

The reader will, I trust, forgive a small digression here, which shows both an aspect of colonialism from which the Somalis, due to the rigours of their terrible land and climate, escaped, and the character of Colonel Gough. Whilst Inspector-General, he blocked C. Vere de Crespigny from commanding a company of the Rifles. Crespigny 'was always looked upon as a somewhat wild and irresponsible youth' wrote Geoffrey Archer, who had attended Hawtrey's Preparatory School with him. Appointed ADC to the Governor of Kenya, he was out shooting one day. He called his boy for a glass of beer. The boy had left the beer on the sunny side of the tent, and it was warm. Knowing Crespigny, he fled in terror when he realized his error. Crespigny arose in rage and hurled a hog-spear at the lad, hitting him in the small of the back, and killing him. Tried on a charge of culpable neglect(!), he was acquitted by a jury of his white peers, who adjudged it to have been 'death by misadventure'. Despite Crespigny plainly deserving the hangman's rope for the crime of murder, the Governor could do no more than send him home. Later, after three settlers were found not guilty of violent sheep stealing from a harmless and inoffensive tribe, despite clear and damning evidence, the jury system was replaced by a panel of High Court judges.¹¹ The East African Protectorate (Kenya) was, thought Gough, 'a curious country'.¹²

Between January and June 1909 Gough was in command of the troops in Somaliland. He had proposed while Inspector-General that a striking force of 2347 officers and men and 354 non-combatant 'followers' should be formed, with 12 Maxim guns, and with 2273 camels and 1138 ponies. Of these, 806 would be mounted infantry. Six days' rations of food for the men would be carried, with 3 days' water and 3½ days' forage for the animals. Remembering Daratoleh and Gumburu, the men would carry about 400 rounds each, and there would be 8000 rounds for each Maxim. Gough also thought that a railway connecting the 80 miles between Berbera, Sheikh and Burao 'would probably cost a million by the time rolling stock etc. had been purchased but it would probably end the Mullah'. He also felt that a cheaper tram line 'might do (& I think would do) but I naturally have not enough expert knowledge to give an opinion worth a hang'. However, the far less expensive idea of a steam tractor pulling two wagons, he felt, could 'no more get up the Sheikh Pass ['which had hairpin bends at 10 yards' distance between turns'] than fly 'unless a completely new road is made'.¹³

But this had been in November 1908, before his command of the Somaliland forces. During that command he recognized that the simple defensive occupation of the Ain Valley simply could not be continued indefinitely – it was not only expensive, but it was always difficult to procure supply animals for all year round occupation – although camels were relatively easy to hire in the dry season, when the tribes were concentrated around the wells, in the rainy season they were on the move again, and needed their transport back. Further, the King's African Rifles might soon be needed – indeed, were needed, elsewhere. An Indian Battalion was requested to replace them. No decision was made. Gough fell ill and was sent back to the United Kingdom in June 1909, from where he

continued to call for some decision to be made.

In October 1909 the Cabinet decided to withdraw to the coast. It would be done furtively, without informing the tribes until it was accomplished. Captain Cordeaux was offered the Governorship of Uganda, as it was recognized by Crewe that he could hardly be expected to carry out a policy to which he was so opposed. He accepted, but requested four months' leave, which was granted, although he had to stay in Somaliland until his successor arrived in order to acquaint him with the situation. But the leave came off his two-year tenure of the Uganda position. After Uganda, he was given the Governorship of the 47 square miles of rock in the South Atlantic where Napoleon met his end – St Helena – and its 3700 odd inhabitants. However, lest the reader think that his future had been blighted by his views on the desertion of Somaliland, it is pleasant to record that his career ended in the easier environment of the Bahamas, where his Governorship was exercised amid the prosperity engendered in those happy islands in alleviating the rigours of Prohibition, by means of an overseas trade that was less than legal, but more than popular, in the Great Republic.

Cordeaux's successor, the man chosen to carry out the ignoble and secretive policy, was Colonel, brevet Brigadier-General, Manning, who had, it will be remembered, led the third expedition. On 9 January 1910, Manning wrote to the Colonial Office, asking for the restoration of his temporary rank of Brigadier-General:

...not for my personal gratification...but as a matter reflecting on my prestige among the Somalis. I served in the Somaliland Protectorate at varying times and for considerable periods from 1901 to 1907, and had then the rank of Brigadier-General, and I am known to them as 'General Manning'. I think it would be a matter of speculation among the Somalis as to why I held a lesser rank than I did formerly, and this might re-act unfavourably upon my mission.

This seems to suggest that he was arguing that the 'protected' Somalis would recognize that they were about to be deserted because the British had demoted him due to the shameful and deceitful nature of his mission. Deceitful it was. The whole carefully organized desertion was kept from the Somalis until the last possible moment.

The Italian Government were to be informed by the British Ambassador, Sir Rennell Rodd [who had negotiated the 1897 Treaty with the Abyssinians] that:

The examination of the views of the Italian Government as to the advantages of continuing the Pestalloza Agreements of 1905 and 1907 has proceeded 'pari passu' with the consideration of the results of General Sir R. Wingate's visit to Somaliland last year and the actual development of events in that country. The general consequence is that His Majesty's Government have decided to adopt a somewhat different line of policy...

Although Wingate had clearly criticized the Pestalloza Agreement and the Treaty of Illig, and the Italian Government's policy in Somaliland, the non-publication of his report meant that it could be, and was, used to justify a Government Policy which it had hardly recommended at all, save as a second best choice in particular circumstances – the quiescence or defeat of the Sayyid – which could scarcely be said to have occurred.

Manning thought that an immediate withdrawal was necessary, since:

...our presence in the interior gives no incentive for the display of self – reliance by the friendly tribes.

I am proceeding at once to the interior, and will report my further opinion; but in view of possible danger in delay, as shown above. I think that if I then find the situation demands and admits of an early evacuation, His Majesty's Government should be prepared for consideration of a recommendation for such a step.

Manning thought the Mullah weaker than before, and that the fear he had inspired was disappearing. He felt that the Darod tribes were ready to raid the Mullah, and that the Isaaq (Ishak) in the west would be at least able to defend themselves, given more arms and a little knocking about from the Mullah to re-awaken their military spirit and to restore their cohesion. He recommended that withdrawal be carried out on 15 March 1910, and this, of course, was approved, although the Earl of Crewe added that he should be informed of the date when the tribes would be told their fate, as he wished to make a simultaneous announcement.

Given the fact that the tribes, and the world, were not to be told of the Government's scuttle until the last moment, there was some difficulty attendant upon the fact that the House of Commons would be debating the matter of the Grant in Aid for British Somaliland on 3 March. It would be necessary, of course, but difficult, to fob the Members off in order to preserve secrecy. The Government's position was cleverly and deceptively put by none other than the Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Mr Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, whose paper of 1907, it will be remembered, was confidential, and unknown to most of those present at the debate.

Churchill was, of course, playing out time, and very cleverly and verbosely this master of Parliament said nothing informative.

'The debate has been productive of some very good speeches from hon. Members' he began, and after complimenting one or two members, particularly the Member for East Mayo in Ireland, Mr Dillon, who proposed the reduction of the vote by £10,000 and queried the whole policy, suggesting paying a subsidy to the Mullah, went on with a masterly summary of the recent past in Somaliland:

I do not think that anyone who looks at this matter in a cold light can be satisfied with the position we have occupied in British Somaliland during the last ten or eleven years. In the old days, when the Somaliland coastline was under the control of the Government of India, the posts held by the British Government were confined to the coastal region. It was there that the whole revenue was, and still is, collected. It was there and at Aden – the great centre of Somaliland, where the intercourse with the tribes was best regulated – that the revenue which was in those days raised upon the coast was sufficient to defray the main cost, and I think for many years the whole cost of the Somaliland protectorate. Events have drifted and marched on their wayward course, and we have been drawn in the course of the last ten or eleven years into moving forward from the convenient and safe position which we used to hold with such little trouble, to occupy in the interior a certain area – not a very considerable area in view of the size of the country. Our presence in the interior has undoubtedly led to the need of maintaining a military establishment which, if it is far too small to effectively police these vast deserts, is very far too large for the revenue which can be derived from the Somaliland Protectorate. In consequence of that we have had a prolonged period of grants in aid, which, apart from the expeditionary expenditure, cannot,

I apprehend, be estimated at anything less than £60,000 or £70,000 per year upon an average. That is not a very satisfactory situation from a financial point of view. Neither is the situation satisfactory from a military point of view. It is quite true that the hon. Gentleman from North Dorset, who has just spoken, has told that the power of the Mullah is at the present time on the decline. His reputation as a religious and spiritual guide has been very seriously affected by the Mecca letter. Instead of being, as he was some years ago, at the head of a large concentrated Dervish gathering, he is now exercising a sort of loose sway over three or four disunited and disconnected raiding parties, who maintain centres of disorder in different parts of this enormous region. But although the Mullah is at present in a period of decline, there is no doubt that any attempt to hold any large portion of the interior with a small force of 1,400 or 1,500 men for any long period of time must expose you to a certain unceasing risk of military disaster. We have seen in the late war the great rapidity with which portions of Dervish horsemen can move at the proper seasons through this waterless country, and we know well the very formidable military power which on occasion they have shown themselves capable of developing. Therefore, I say that if the financial position is unsatisfactory, the military situation is not one the indefinite prolongation of which can be viewed with any comfort or satisfaction even from the soldier's point of view.

Thirdly, I am bound to say that I have formed the conclusion that if we are not doing very much good to ourselves we are not doing very much good to anybody else by our present position. I have come to the conclusion that during the ten or eleven years we have been interfering and meddling in the internal affairs of Somaliland we have not been able to give any real security or tranquillity to the country. We have tried many different policies, and under both Governments – I hope this question will not be made a matter of party feeling... [Needless to say, the fact that half the country had been 'given' to the Abyssinians to secure trade advantages, and the rest divided by the Europeans, was not mentioned. There then followed a deliberately long drawn out description of vain expeditions, typical raids and counter raids, of immobile garrisons or futile mobile columns, followed by]...

...The country itself is barren. Certainly all authorities agree that it has no commercial, no mineral, and no agricultural properties. The poverty of the land is extreme. It is a country valueless to all except the wild inhabitants who live in it, and to them it is dearer than life.

I do not feel myself if that were the whole argument there would be any difficulty in my drawing conclusions, which, at any rate on this side of the house, would be accepted with some measure of satisfaction. But as is perfectly well known, the situation is not completely described or covered by the arguments I have used. We have been in that interior of Somaliland, and, I think, mistakenly. I think it was a great mistake to have left the secure position, which under the Government of India was maintained for many years on the coast line, and which gave us all we needed without any risk. But as we have left that secure position we have contracted obligations and responsibilities. *It is the proper discharge of those obligations and responsibilities which form the principal preoccupation in Somaliland of His Majesty's Government.* [italics added] I do not feel able to describe in any close details the actual military situation, but I will say this: we have thought it right and proper to reinforce the troops in Somaliland by a strong Indian battalion of the Baluchis. They have been brought across the Indian ocean, and placed

under the orders of General Manning, who is dealing with the situation there, who thus will be at the head of troops entirely unaffected by any local feeling, and who has been given this extra force to strengthen him in carrying out any policy which, in his own opinion and the opinion of the government, it may be desirable to embark upon. Although I deeply and seriously regret the financial demands I have to make on the Committee – although it is very unsatisfactory – I think the House may rest assured that there are forces at the disposal of General Manning quite adequate to any movements which he may decide to make...I do not wish to say any more about the actual military position, still less would I like to say anything about the prospective movements whether of an aggressive or contractive nature. [!] These are movements which may conceivably, if they were announced or spoken of in this House, cause real embarrassment to people on the spot who are dealing with the situation, and, therefore, I shall purposely deny myself the opportunity of making any clear or precise statement to the House...

Thus, under the pretence of self denial, did the Giant cover up his own policy and brainchild, if such it could be called, of the 'bolt for the beach'. After another lengthy discussion of the unsatisfactory nature of the present arrangements, he concluded with a dismissal of the idea of a railway supply line in Somaliland:

...But, again, the moment is very often reached when [our present] policy has finally to be discarded, and when sharp, clear and decisive action must be taken whether in Africa or elsewhere, and I think it is quite clear that although no doubt the building of a railway would have a very beneficial effect in the subjugation of the natives in British Somaliland there are other railways on the East Coast of Africa which it would be very much more worth our while to deal with.

When I think of this desert of scrub and sand in Somaliland on which we have spent so many millions, and turn my eye to the beautiful and fruitful region of Uganda in the East African Protectorate, which for a very much smaller proportion of the money we have squandered, would all the time have been producing far greater supplies of oil, of rubber and of cotton than they have ever achieved, when I consider how tremendously the investment of Imperial capital in this region has repaid, I do view with as grudging an eye as the hon. Member who moved the reduction the prospect of any extension of our responsibility in this barren region of Somaliland and of any military operation or railway construction likely to plunge us into large and indefinite liabilities. I have endeavoured, to the best of my ability, to address the house on this subject. I hope the Committee will have confidence in the Government and will believe we are endeavouring to relieve the cost and strengthen the situation and contract the area of our responsibilities in Somaliland, and at the same time to do justice to our obligations to those who, through mistaken policy on our part, have been led to rely, to some extent, at any rate, upon the protection of our military forces.

Sir Gilbert Parker, a Canadian, a novelist, poet, playwright (he was to be Chairman of the Author's Club), Imperialist and the Conservative Member for Gravesend from 1900 to 1918, now demonstrated how effectively the Giant had managed to dissociate himself from responsibility for what was his own, personal policy of the abandonment of the 'protected' tribes.

He said:

I could not help but remember when the right hon. gentleman was speaking his first speech made in this house, in which, in a fine apostrophe, he held up the tattered rag of economy, to the protection of which he was going to devote all his future energies in this House. I sympathise with the right hon. gentleman in his position today, as I sympathised with him in those days, and I sympathise with him in having to accept what is forced upon him. He made a very gallant defence of the Government's position today in one of those speeches in which the right hon. gentleman has some peculiar and fascinating facility...

Later, Churchill added in reply to a question about the replacement of the King's African Rifles by the Baluchis, that:

I do not see any reason why I should not state that the Baluchi battalion and the Indian contingent of the 6th battalion of the King's African Rifles, which is largely a mountain force, constitute the bulk of the troops we now have there, and they have recently somewhat contracted their advanced posts and have withdrawn from the high land. More than that I really do not wish to say. I have done my best to give all proper information.

This satisfied the questioner (Sir Clement Hill, Conservative member for Shrewsbury and African expert). However, Mr Dillon correctly discerned Government policy in Churchill's speech, commenting that:

...I cannot conceive that this forward policy will be persevered in. The speech of the Home Secretary was to the effect that it has been a mistake and a failure from beginning to end, and I conclude, therefore, that at last the Government has made up its mind to abandon that policy and to revert to the older and wiser policy which they pursued before all these troubles broke out, of confining itself to the coast line...

Now Sir Gilbert Parker asked an extremely inconvenient question about the conclusions of the Wingate report, and Churchill replied that:

I have asked my noble friend Lord Crewe what he thinks about that report, and whether it could be laid. I could not give any undertaking on that account myself, but I certainly think that the House, which has treated the government with so much indulgence in the Debate, is entitled to all possible information. I will represent to the Colonial Secretary, to Lord Crewe, the feeling there is that further papers should be laid before the house at the earliest possible opportunity, and I will also remind him of the desire of the House to have another opportunity later, if possible, to discuss this matter further... We have sent General Manning out to look most carefully into this situation. He knows most thoroughly the views of the Government, he has worked for a long time in the Colonial Office, and he is perhaps more than any other officer on the active list thoroughly conversant with the conditions in Somaliland. *I hope he may have the fullest freedom in any course which he may think it right to adopt.* [italics added]

Thus Winston Churchill played out the debate on Somaliland, and he was later that evening to give a masterly performance when the subject moved to sleeping sickness research and vivisection.

Later that evening, as was the custom for the Home Secretary, he reported the debate to the King, Edward VII:

Mr Churchill with his humble duty to Your Majesty has the honour to report that the House of Commons after dealing with the further stages of the two financial bills – Temporary borrowings and War Loan – proceeded to the discussion of Colonial Office Estimates. The vote of £96,000 extra for the Somaliland Protectorate gave rise to a languid discussion. Mr Churchill who had charge of this business was pressed to make some statement of the policy which General Manning is seeking to execute of withdrawing our advanced posts in the interior and holding the coastal towns of Berbera, Bulhar and Seila [sic]. For this movement General Manning has been supported by a good battalion of Indian infantry and more troops will be sent him, if they are needed. The moment must however be carefully timed in order that it may be fully successful. Mr Churchill therefore confined himself to very vague generalities and did not unfold to the House any clear account of the operations which he understands are now in progress. The members were somewhat restive under this and asked a great many questions which it was awkward to leave unanswered and which it was still more awkward to answer. In the end however the subject dropped, and Mr Churchill was glad to feel that no one was any the wiser for the several speeches he was forced to make.

The policy of concentrating on the Somaliland coast is a wise one. It is on the coast that all the revenue is raised and it is there that the intercourse with the tribes in the Hinterland can best be conducted. The expense of holding these few isolated posts in the interior is heavy and cripples the Protectorate. The military risks are considerable; and the tribesmen themselves are not afforded any adequate protection. No other power will be able to trespass in the region from which we are withdrawing; and the retention of the coastline will secure us every advantage which could possibly be looked for in these unpromising deserts. Mr Churchill believes that the military officers on the spot are in full agreement with the policy; and certainly Captain Dawnay, Lord Downe's son, who has just returned from being Chief Staff Officer in Somaliland, and who is now employed at the Colonial Office, is able to adduce the strongest reasons in support of it.

Thereafter the House adjourned early the business of the day, although considerable having been disposed of with singular despatch.¹⁴

During the retreat to the coast, the weather broke at Burao on 17 March, the Transport column losing three drivers and eighteen camels, as well as large quantities of stores. The march to the coast was impeded by very heavy rainstorms all the way. Long dry river beds in the desert between the foot hills and the sea erupted into life and became raging torrents. On 18 March, at 11 am, the clouds burst over Berbera as troops were marching in, and five and a half inches of rain fell in three and a half hours.¹⁵ The camps were 'knee deep' in water, and the wall of the fort had to be breached to let out three feet of floodwater. 'To their Somali comrades in arms', reported Jardine, 'it was a portent representing the tears of Allah as he gazed down upon the melancholy scene.'¹⁶

The 6th battalion of the King's African Rifles were disarmed on the excuse of keeping their weapons dry in store, and then paraded and disbanded at Berbera. Manning completed the evacuation

of the interior on 25 March.

During the occupation of the interior, ‘Godob’,¹⁷ the deep Somali principle of requiting physical or verbal injury on the clan, tribe or family of the injurer, had been heavily discouraged by the armed authority of the political agents. These injuries – and the verbal was considered to be as bad as the physical – might not be settled for decades, and would still remain open even when all the original parties lay in their graves. But were a poet to put these into triumphal or celebratory words, the humiliation inflicted would inflame the necessity for vengeance into an urgent imperative. Now, following on the heels of the retreating Imperial soldiers, the accumulated Godob, unrestrained by Imperial Britain, burst its bounds, the call of the poets rang like a fatal tocsin across the plateau, and embittered and revengeful bands, armed to the teeth with weapons given them for defence against the Sayyid, set off on their bloody missions. Before these baying hounds of Godob were called back, one-third of the population of ‘British’ Somaliland would perish.

Chapter Ten

The War Renewed and the Battle of Dul Madoba

*Woe to the conqueror!
Our limbs shall lie as cold as theirs
Of whom his sword bereft us,
Ere we forget the deep arrears
Of vengeance they have left us!*¹

Thomas Moore

On 8 April 1910 *The Times* published a letter to the Editor from its own unnamed Military Correspondent. This correspondent was Lieutenant Colonel Charles à Court Repington, CMG. Repington's brilliant military career had been ended by a scandal. A married man, he had apparently had not a few extra marital liaisons, in the pursuit of which he was hardly exceptional for one of his class, the Prince of Wales setting an example to the 'Fast Set'. However, one such was formed with the wife of a brother officer; on discovery, he had signed a formal agreement never to communicate with her again – and he had broken the agreement – although there were other circumstances, including the ill-treatment of the lady in question, which clouded the issue and in his eyes exculpated him. Be that as it may, the army lost a very talented officer, his clubs lost a paying member, and *The Times* gained a very able military correspondent.

The letter was headed 'The Scuttle from Somaliland', which Repington referred to as 'one of the most deplorable acts ever committed by a British Government'.

'...It is clearly shown', he wrote, 'that the Mullah bluffed the King's Government out of a country mis-named a protectorate, caused Ministers to remove their troops in headlong flight to the coast, and caused them to desert tribes, very numerous in the aggregate, who are now suffering in their properties and their persons for their misplaced confidence in the "gracious favour and protection of Her Majesty the Queen – Empress" which they were promised by treaty.'

He continued:

There is some evidence in their words, but not in their acts, that the King's Ministers cared anything for the fate of these unfortunate people. The concern of the Government, from first to last, was not whether the Protectorate was protected, but whether protection, in its purely financial aspect, paid. Their all-compelling fear was that, if they did not cut and run, leaving their friends in the lurch, they might have been obliged to adopt some act of vigour which would have cost money, and so have been doubly displeasing to the principles of their party. For government in its true sense they did not care...

After further comments of the sort, including disparaging references to the Roman frontier policy – which Churchill seemed to admire, and loved to cite – Repington turned to a subject which would

have caused grave embarrassment if the press had secured a 'leak':

What is the advice that Sir Reginald Wingate and Sir Rudolf Slatin have given? It is necessary that we should know it, *so that all the responsibilities may be ascertained.* [italics added] All that Lord Crewe admits is that the report of those authorities convinced him of the 'uselessness and impossibility of attempting to maintain the present state of things,' but this is not very novel, for all his officers had been telling him the same thing for months before...

Repington then sketched a plan of campaign which looked remarkably similar to that proposed by Gough, with whom he had possibly conferred, which included a force of 4000 men, part of which would be a mobile striking force. He concluded by predicting that this 'abject surrender to menaces' would have consequences across north east Africa.

It is interesting that throughout the article Repington's friend Winston Churchill was not mentioned as the author of the policy, neither was his crucial involvement in the decision referred to during the debate in Parliament. It was, of course, known to Cordeaux, who had seen Churchill's confidential Colonial Office memorandum, but no contemporary source revealed it to the public gaze.

In the Wingate Report, as we have seen, there had been criticisms of the policies by which the colonial authorities managed the Protectorate. Amongst these criticisms had been a report by Sir Rudolf Slatin on the irritation of the Somalis at the French Roman Catholic mission at Berbera and its treatment of Somali children. Berbera, Slatin noted, had been known as the 'Town of the Poor', for in a bad year the tribesmen sent their children there to fend for themselves. This Christian mission had been founded in April 1891 by Louis Lassere, Bishop of Morocco and Vicar Apostolic of Arabia, who with the permission of the assistant resident rented a house in Berbera for the purpose of feeding and educating waifs and strays. He was warned by the authorities not to attempt to proselytize the locals, and told that they would be required to leave if the locals objected to them. Indeed, the Mahomed Isa tribe had already refused him residence. However, the residents of Berbera did not object when he was finally, and after much correspondence between officials, allowed a permanent site – although they were not consulted. Later, however, the Mission was not allowed to take in children save by the consent of their relatives or tribal leader, given before the District Officer. The Mission was later permitted to establish a rest home and garden at Shimbiraleh, where they also kept flocks and herds, on the same conditions. But all this aroused the indignation of the Sayyid and certainly enabled him to arouse the religious fanaticism of the local Somalis. The modern reader, scarred by recent revelations of the *damnable* actions of some Roman Catholic priests towards children in their care, might immediately think that the children had been ill-treated or abused; but the sins of the mission were, that they had fed and educated starving and homeless children, and had not only converted them to Christianity, a sin against their religion, but had de-tribalized them – a sin against all that the Somali people held dear.

'The Kafirs are our enemies', the Sayyid had written to the Aidegalla tribe in July 1895. 'Do you not see that they have destroyed our religion and made our children their children.'²

The reader might think that the method of combating this advance of Christianity and Europeanism among their starving children which would be most congenial to a Muslim and a Somali would be to remove the children from the hands of the Christians by an equal or superior charity; but the poor waifs and orphans in Somaliland were not to benefit from a competition in kindness or pity, and in this the Sayyid demonstrated the difference between a fanatic fundamentalism and Islam, and

between nationalist fervour and the love of a country and its people.

When Manning withdrew the British forces, the Roman Catholic Mission at Shimbiraleh was withdrawn as well. The Mission was 'extremely poor', wrote Manning to Lord Crewe, and on the way back to Berbera 'much of their stock and private property was swept away and lost by the floods which were encountered...'

Manning further reported that, at Berbera, a guard of twenty-five Indian soldiers was placed over the Mission's premises at night, which would become a 'severe strain' on the garrison's strength. Manning therefore asked the Mission to retire to Aden, and requested that they be compensated with a gift of £100, which, he felt, 'would be covered by savings on the 1910–11 estimates'.³ This was sanctioned very quickly by HM Treasury.

A similar enforced withdrawal was made by the European staff of 'The Somaliland Fibre and Development Company', who were forced to leave their machinery and equipment at Mandera, as Manning felt that 'it would have taken some months to transport it to the coast'. However, Manning reported that they were not very successful financially anyway.

The Roman Catholic Church, however, were not to be dismissed so easily. The Archbishop of Westminster, Francis Bourne, now wrote to the Earl of Crewe, beginning:

Our Authorities in Rome are seriously preoccupied about some of the consequences of the *abandonment* [italics added] of Somaliland...

The consequences to which the Archbishop referred included not only material, but spiritual loss, as he added that:

It is stated that the Governor proposes that these children should now be returned to their relatives in the interior if the latter can be found; a proceeding which, it is not necessary to point out, would completely undo any work of evangelisation which may already have been accomplished...

However, the children's relatives did not come forward, and could not be found, and the children therefore departed to Aden with the Mission.

The Church, having assessed its losses, now claimed 124,405 rupees (approximately £8400) in compensation, which it felt to be 'far below' its real losses.

The British authorities pointed out, however, that the Mission at Shimbiraleh was not formally recognized; that the flood was an 'act of God'; and that Christian villages were the same as Muslim, i.e., the Government were not responsible for their losses. They accepted, however, (how could they deny it?) that the Government were responsible for the expulsion – for so it was – from Berbera. The Government valued the buildings which the Mission had to vacate in Berbera at £40,000 rupees (approximately £2600), and therefore on 8 June 1910 asked the treasury to sanction this sum, in addition to the £100 already paid. On 17 June the Treasury replied to the Colonial Office, politely asking why it was necessary to 'call upon the Mission to withdraw from Berbera', continuing with the very pertinent comment 'It is not understood how the decision of His Majesty's Government to withdraw from the interior affects the position of the Mission'.

The Colonial Office now replied to the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury that the expulsion was 'a precaution...in order to protect the Mission from the fanaticism of the Mohammedans. Their lordships will readily understand', it was stated, 'that it was essential to avoid all risk of any trouble

of this kind, especially while the delicate operation of withdrawing from the interior was in progress.'

The Treasury understood this – after all, the desertion had been for financial reasons – and concurred in the payment.

A year later, the Vicar Apostolic of Aden asked permission to return to Berbera, promising to restrict his activities to mission work in the city, and to obey all Governmental orders; but the Government, still minding Sir Rudolf Slatin's comments in the otherwise ignored and suppressed Wingate report concerning the unpopularity of the Mission among the Muslims, declined permission. By that time the mission was more needed than ever – at least by the rapidly increasing numbers of poor and orphans. Ominous signs of the collapse of order were not long in coming.

An upbeat Manning wrote to Lord Crewe, stating that he had withdrawn Customs Agents and Police from the small ports of Hais and Karam, and would be deciding whether to retain control of Bulhar and Zeyla. He drew the attention of the Noble Lord to a little problem. The Western Habr Yunis, rather than politely remonstrating with the Abyssinian Governor of Harrar, had raided the Abyssinian Ogaden to recover stolen stock:

'...As I have already forecast in former despatches', wrote Manning, 'the condition of the interior is becoming unsettled, and disorders due to the absence of our control are occurring. For some time this state of affairs is likely to continue, until a *modus vivendi* has been established...'

Further, an engagement at Hardegga between the Sayyid's forces and a combination of the Mijjertein and Dolbahanta, ended as a severe reverse for the Mijjertein, who, having separated from the Dolbahanta, had attacked and defeated a dervish force advancing towards them, only to be surrounded and to run out of ammunition before supplies could be brought up. Reuter's agent, whose reporting seemed to Manning to be 'false or grossly exaggerated', had 'unfortunately' hit upon the truth about the ammunition.

The Foreign Office now contacted the Earl of Crewe, and forwarded a copy of a letter from the British Resident at Addis Ababa, Wilfred Thesiger, to the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey. Thesiger reported that he had striven to re-establish the frontier agreement which had been made between Major Swayne and Ras Makunan, under which each side agreed to punish raiders from their respective territories. Accordingly, Thesiger had pressed the Abyssinians on this point, suggesting that an officer from each side should be appointed to sort out the tangle of claims and counter – claims which had accumulated. He had informed Manning, and duly asked for the services of an officer. Manning then informed him of the intention to withdraw all civil and military posts from the interior!

Thesiger wrote:

I am consequently now placed in a very difficult position. Having asked for and obtained from the Ethiopian Government satisfactory assurances that order will be restored, looted property returned, and raiding checked in future, I am no longer in a position to affirm that we on our side will do likewise...It is impossible to expect that the Abyssinian frontier tribes can be prevented from taking the law into their own hands under these circumstances, and when once they have been allowed to do so, they will always find a pretext for continual raiding.

Thesiger pointed out that, under these circumstances, the Ogaden tribes having long had greater facilities for obtaining rifles, the British tribes would be:

powerless to protect themselves either from the Mullah or the Ogaden tribes, and since we cannot in future extend to them more than a nominal protection, their only choice will be to throw in their lot with one or the other, or submit to being pillaged by both.

Thesiger concluded by requesting guidance on whether, in delimiting the frontier, to offer compensation to the Abyssinians in the form of additional (Somali) territory. In a later memorandum to Grey dated 15 April 1910, Thesiger added that:

...It is with considerable diffidence that I venture to give an opinion on such a difficult matter as the policy to be followed in Somaliland, but I feel it my duty to state that the policy of evacuation, as seen from the point of view of this legation, seems inevitably bound to produce a state of anarchy in Somaliland which will leave us eventually with no other alternative but to undertake a very costly and difficult expedition to pacify the country, or to give up all pretence of owning anything beyond a restricted area around Berbera, leaving it free for annexation by any nation which would undertake the responsibility.

Our present position, by which we claim the country while refusing to accept any administrative responsibility, appears to me untenable...

Thesiger suggested renouncing the eastern half of British Somaliland – even ceding it to Abyssinia – and simply holding the western half, which, he pointed out, ‘had never even been threatened by the Mullah’.

In a separate despatch, Thesiger relayed a report from Mr Gerolimato, British Minister at Harrar, dated 8 April, that the Mijjertein defeat by the Sayyid’s forces in the fight at Hardegga had been catastrophic, only seven surviving out of some three or four thousand, with some 900 rifles lost. This, Thesiger insisted, had been confirmed by the Italian Minister at Addis Ababa. If the Dolbahanta and Mijjertein combined were defeated, how were the others to face the Sayyid?

Curiously, on 27 May 1910 Manning, after looking at Zeyla, and concluding that both Zeyla and Bulhar should be retained, reported that he had visited Mr Gerolimato at Harrar, as he was, he stated:

Anxious to hear from Mr Gerolimato...his views as to the situation on the Abyssinian border as regards our tribes and the Ogaden, and also to collect any information bearing on the general situation as regards the Mullah, which, at the time of my visit, was very difficult to comprehend...

Manning stated that he had gained ‘a clearer insight into the state of affairs on the Abyssinian border’, without stating what that insight was. He mentioned nothing as to Mr Gerolimato’s earlier misgivings about the results of the fight at Hardegga. He had himself estimated the Mijjertein losses at 250 men; he had also investigated the possibilities of using an Abyssinian site as a sanatorium for sick Somaliland officials, but specifically investigating Dirre-Dawa, reported that it was dirty, malarial and arid, with poor hotels, an epidemic of smallpox – and was difficult of access for an invalid. Clearly Brigadier-General Manning’s information was scarcely reliable. Yet all this was despite the Medical Department and General Wingate recommending Sheikh for just such a role; even Churchill’s memorandum had stated that:

... There would be no objection to the garrisons of Berbera, Bulhar and Zeyla spending the hot months at Sheikh or other convenient camping places on the Golis, provided that the political officers considered the country absolutely quiet.

Sheikh was around 40 miles from Berbera; but who among the supporters of the Government's policy ever thought that it would be absolutely quiet? It can be clearly seen that Manning did not.

However, the General had, on 29 April, written to Elgin that:

During the past month there has been nothing to report from the interior, except rumours... I have already stated that I am of opinion that the friendly tribes are now in a position to hold their own in any eventuality. The incident at Hardegga occurred at an unfortunate period, but it must be remembered that *it had no connection with our withdrawal to the coast* [italics added]... I believe that in the course of the next two months it will become evident that the system of tribal defence which I have instituted will provide a solution of the problem of actual defence against dervish attack. This would be a condition of affairs which was never reached while we occupied the interior, and therefore a very complete justification of the steps taken, which will prove themselves to be the best possible for the interests of the friendly tribes. I therefore consider that, unless any unforeseen contingency arises upsetting all previous calculations, it may be considered that the policy, as entrusted to me by His Majesty's Government, for the evacuation of the interior has been carried out, and that by the end of July my presence in the Somaliland Protectorate will no longer be required... I therefore request that I may be permitted to return to England, leaving Berbera on June 29th...

On 26 May Manning reported that '... Intelligence generally points to the breaking up of the dervishes, but I cannot gain reliable information...' By 31 May, referring to a reported defeat of the Bagheri (the Sayyid's own Ogaden tribe) at Balliwein, he estimated that the 'dervish' dead were equal in number to their losses in the Battle of Jidbali. Further, he reported that 'persistent rumour is current that the Mullah has either been killed or has died.' General Manning then went on to predict that, dervishism being defeated, the tribes would use their arms to fight each other, and that his successor, who he hoped would be Mr Byatt, must resist any attempt to intervene – at least before their ammunition ran out. Overflowing with optimism, no doubt fuelled partially by a strong desire to leave the country, he added that the garrison of Berbera might eventually be reduced to fifty men. This memorandum might have come as some relief to a Colonial Office which had tried – and signally failed – to prevail upon the Viceroy of India to undertake the task of garrisoning the Somaliland coast towns, Lord Morley, the Viceroy, laconically regretting that he was 'unable to concur in the proposal'.

However, Manning did comment on Thesiger's suggestion that the eastern half of the Protectorate should be ceded to the Abyssinians, pointing out that the Abyssinian Government, although 'organised and to a certain extent civilised, is still somewhat barbarous in its methods' and had been hated by the Somalis before the British had arrived. It 'would be regarded by Somalis generally as an act of treachery on our part, and would alienate any respect they may have for British rule', he added; a curious comment from a man who had just deserted them, and representing a nation which had a few years before 'ceded' what did not belong to them – the vast grasslands of the Ogaden – to the Abyssinians. However, Somaliland was perhaps fortunate that Thesiger's plan was not adopted.

On 16 June 1910 Manning reported that:

...there is little serious inter-tribal trouble, and reports go to show that the tribes are now peaceful and contented...I can only remark that though I have been optimistic throughout as to the results of leaving the tribes to their own defence, I had hardly hoped that a condition of affairs similar to that in the interior at present could have arisen in so short a period... The scheme for defence is now in working order. Whether it will be put to further tests I cannot definitely say, but the probability is that it will not...

‘My further presence in Somaliland is unnecessary’, said the dutiful soldier. The General then went on to list his achievements – retreat to the coast, evacuation of the Roman Catholic Mission and the Fibre Company, disbandment of police and troops, organization and arming of the tribes and the reduction of the political establishment. Desertion, betrayal and dismissal were presented as triumphs, and the erection of a house of cards as impregnable castellation.

Two days before leaving, Manning reported that a ‘serious situation’ had arisen at Hais, from which small port Manning had withdrawn both agents and police. Since the withdrawal, the Musa Ismail Turwa had ejected the Musa Areh, had fired on dhows trying to enter the port, and the master of one of them had been driven into the sea and drowned. They professed (though Manning doubted) that they were supporters of the Sayyid. In the generous spirit of religious fundamentalism they had exhumed the body of a British sailor who had died at sea and been buried there, and burnt it. Manning requested that a naval vessel bombard the town, destroying its four stone buildings.

After Brigadier-General Manning’s departure, Horace Archer Byatt, the Secretary to the Administration, succeeded him as Acting Commissioner; he was not to be confirmed by King George V as Commissioner until July 1911. Byatt was born in March 1875, the son of a headmaster. He had attended Merchant Taylor’s School from 1887 to 1894, graduated with honours in Classics at Lincoln College Oxford in 1898, and from December 1898 to December 1899 acted as a private tutor, a position which he left to enter Foreign Office service in Nyasaland, acting as Magistrate and Collector. He had been in Somaliland since September 1905, acting as an Assistant Political Officer and Assistant District Officer before becoming Secretary in August 1906. Cordeaux thought his intellectual attainments ‘considerably above the average’, and found him ‘hardworking and painstaking’, and said that he ‘fully justified Swayne’s good opinion’ of him.⁴

One of his first acts was to confer with the Captain of HMS *Gibraltar*, which had been sent from Muscat to Berbera to carry out Manning’s request for a destructive and indiscriminate retribution on the Musa Ismail Turwa at Hais. Byatt and the Captain agreed that there was ‘no sufficient justification for bombarding Hais forthwith’, and the ship duly proceeded to Hais under orders to ‘use all possible care in confining punishment to the guilty parties’. The *Gibraltar* picked up the headmen of the tribe, and held them as hostages for the payment of a heavy fine, which was paid in full by November.

During August, all seemed well in the interior. After lengthy discussions with the Mijjertein Sultan and Dolbahanta Akils, Byatt reported that their tone and attitude seemed ‘most satisfactory’. But by mid-September disquieting rumours were coming in – that the Mullah had pushed forward to Hardegga, and that the Dolbahanta and Mijjertein had abandoned Bohotle and the Ain Valley without a fight. On 19 September the rumour was confirmed as true. They were persuaded to return both by exhortation and a more effective withdrawal of subsidies, but were soon in retreat again. To their ‘shamed surprise’, reported Byatt, they discovered that the dervishes had not advanced at all.

A deserter reported to Byatt that the Sayyid had for some time simply refused to believe news of

the British evacuation of the hinterland; perhaps he finally exclaimed, like Cromwell on seeing the Scots descend from the hills around Dunbar, 'the Lord hath delivered them into our hands'. Although less well armed with rifles than the Friendlies, he had – unlike them – an inflexible purpose, an iron will, a remorseless, revengeful and terrifying cruelty and a poetic voice which still echoes an embittered defiance around those harsh hills and rivers of sand, inspiring or infecting each succeeding generation. Harassed by the Mijjertein, weakened by the losses at Hardegga, facing a drought at Illig, he had proposed to his supporters among the Dolbahanta and Warsangli to go to the Bagheri country in the Ogaden. The Dolbahanta had refused to go so far from home; the Warsangli had sent him a small supply of rice and cloth. Now the British had miraculously and ingloriously retreated, he changed his plans, and moved towards Gaolo (ending up by November 1910 at Goriasan) planning to replenish his stock in the time honoured way, at the expense of the Friendlies. Further, he sent parties forward to build two small stone forts at Urgia in Bur Anod (near Hudin). They were to be the first of many, and set the British a military problem which they 'failed to solve'.⁵

By December 1910 it was obvious to Byatt that Sir William Manning's system of paying one subsidy to the head of each clan unit, rather than to the Akil or leader of each subdivision, had failed. Intended to give power to the heads, it had resulted in further internecine quarrels, the Habr Yunis being the worst affected. Byatt now reversed this system, paying money to each Akil again, and he rather optimistically reported some positive results to the new Colonial Secretary, Lewis Vernon Harcourt.

By January 1911 the Sayyid had moved to the vicinity of Gorrowei, but Byatt had to report of the Friendlies that:

From Burao to the westward, among the Habr Yunis, Aidegalla, and Habr Awal, I regret to report the occurrence of frequent and somewhat serious tribal fights...I have succeeded in arranging terms in some instances, and am doing all in my power...to prevent the spread of dissensions...

From then on, inter-tribal relations went from bad to worse. On 23 August 1911 Byatt, newly promoted to Commissioner, wrote to Harcourt as follows:

...From the time of the withdrawal until March last various dissensions had taken place among our tribes...but it had been possible in nearly every instance to exert such influence as led to a settlement of these quarrels and to a restoration of peace between hostile sections. During the past six months, however, I much regret to find that these inter-relations of the tribes have changed very decidedly for the worse. Not only is every tribe now on terms of open hostility with every other, but each is divided against itself by differences between sections and sub-sections. Raiding and fighting is a matter of everyday occurrence and the total amount of bloodshed which has taken place is little short of alarming. The roads to the interior are no longer safe, so that representatives of the more distant tribes are unable to come down to the coast in order to discuss their affairs with the Government, and those on the coast fear to leave for the purpose of looking after their interests inland.

Byatt cited two 'main causes of the anarchy'; the influx of arms, and the perception of the tribes, 'which is steadily growing among all natives', that the British were unwilling – or unable – to

intervene.

The arms themselves, blocked from entering via the ports west of Berbera, now came from Abyssinia via Djibouti, the Abyssinians not suppressing the trade although they had protested to Britain about issuing arms to the tribes. These latter, Byatt reported:

issued by Sir W. Manning for tribal defence have been sold, exchanged or discarded, to such an extent that the lists showing the numbers with each tribe are now worthless. It does not follow, as might be supposed, that our tribes, being well armed, are safe from outside attack. I feel certain that, if ever the Mullah were to advance, internal dissensions and hostile inter-relations would render their opposition of little effect...

Byatt proposed two remedies. First, that the Foreign Office should make strong representations to the Abyssinian Government to stop the trade in arms via the Ogaden. The second remedy was implied rather than spoken, for to the Liberal Government, and to the Giant within it, now Secretary of State for Home Affairs and soon to be First Lord of the Admiralty, it was unspeakable. Byatt continued:

...it is only latterly that the tribes have fully realised the meaning of our withdrawal. For many months they regarded it as merely a temporary measure, intended to demonstrate to them by its absence the real value of British administration, and there is still an idea and a hope that the interior may yet be re-occupied. But since during the present year they have seen several instances where looting on the main caravan roads and defiance of Government orders has not been followed up by active retaliation, the impression is gaining ground that it is the power rather than the will which is lacking, and, *unfortunately, this impression is, under present conditions, not incorrect.* [italics added] In former days it would have been sufficient to send mounted police to check caravan looting, but now that the tribes are fully armed there would be some risk in sending out the small force of mounted men at present available. *Ponies, moreover, are unsuited to desert work and less mobile than the old camel corps, for which, in my opinion, they should not have been substituted...* [italics added]

After citing the fears of Government employees for their own safety, and the safety of their property, in the interior, Byatt concluded:

...It remains to be seen how far moral suasion may bring about a change for the better, and I hope that I may be able eventually to report an improvement; but the process of restoring order is likely, I fear, to be a difficult and a lengthy one.

Thus, in this missive – his, indeed, was a first class mind – Byatt had referred to the ‘small force of mounted men *at present* available’, and sown the seed of a new camel corps, whilst not actually recommending one, all the while referring regretfully to the *impression* of British powerlessness, rather than bemoaning the *fact*, which would not have been politic.

In late September 1911 Winston Churchill was invited to Archerfield, the Prime Minister’s home in Scotland. Churchill had often involved himself in naval affairs, writing to Asquith direct, on the principle of Cabinet responsibility and because he relished any involvement in the armed forces. Originally he had been in favour of economy in the navy, but since the Agadir incident earlier in the

year, when Germany had sent a gunboat, the *Panther*, to Morocco, he had argued for a strong navy. Asquith now offered him the position of First Lord of the Admiralty, which he accepted at once. He took office in October 1911, in a straight exchange of positions with Reginald McKenna.

It was quite usual, of course, for the Royal Navy to be involved in affairs in Somaliland, blockading and transporting, in intelligence work, and demonstrating British power. On 16 September 1911 the Admiralty informed the Colonial Office that HMS *Philomel*, due in Aden at the end of the month, had been directed to remain there and 'place herself in communication with the Commissioner of Somaliland'. On 20 September, however, the Colonial Office were informed that the ship was urgently required in the Persian Gulf. On 24 January 1912 they reported that the promised HMS *Proserpine* was similarly urgently required there.

On 29 January 1912, Harcourt wrote to the Admiralty that he regarded it as of the 'highest importance that the coast should be continually patrolled', and was therefore 'compelled to ask' that *Proserpine* be replaced.

The Admiralty replied on 6 February, stating first that the Somaliland patrol was 'less urgent' than the East Indies requirement, and pointing out the acknowledged fact that the traffic in arms via Abyssinia 'tends to make any repressive measures on the coast nugatory'.

The letter continued:

A further point also arises on which, however, the information present in the Admiralty is neither full nor recent. The policy of coastal concentration decided upon by His Majesty's Government in November, 1909, postulated garrisons in the coast towns sufficient to ensure their safety...

The letter added that the use of the navy to protect coast towns, in the view of the Commander in Chief East Indies, 'was totally opposed to British policy'. 'My Lords', it continued [of whom Churchill was, of course, the chief] 'while concurring in his view, did not desire to raise a question of so wide a scope if it could be avoided...'

It will be recalled that Churchill's original memorandum postulated a 'line of observation' from Hargeisa to Las Dureh, and a 'line of resistance' which 'would be the sea coast' and the garrisons of Berbera, Bulhar and Zeyla. 'The line of resistance can really be made good – with at the outside a few companies from Aden and a gunboat or two', he had added.

The Colonial Office replied on 13 February, stating that Harcourt was 'not prepared to press his request', but adding that the difficulties faced by Byatt would be 'greatly increased by the absence of a warship', and concluding with the comment that:

...it will be within their Lordships' recollection that the despatch of a cruiser to patrol the coast was requested in September last in order to prevent the Mullah obtaining supplies of arms and ammunition by sea, and not for the protection of the coast towns.

On 24 February the Admiralty, reiterating that ships were still detained in the Persian Gulf, offered HMS *Dido*, which had been at Muscat on trooping duties and was now homeward bound via Aden, for a 'passing visit' to Berbera, later adding that she could 'divert her course to some part of the eastern coast of the Protectorate in order to report to the Commissioner on the position of the Mullah', regretting that 'it will not be possible to delay the "Dido" longer than may be necessary to obtain the information required'.

However, the Colonial Office, in their reply, felt that they had, because of the worsening situation, 'no alternative but to request that arrangements may be made for H.M.S. "Dido" to remain in Somaliland waters until another ship can be supplied'.

On 25 February Harcourt wrote direct to Churchill, again asking for a ship.⁶

Churchill's Admiralty now, on 2 March 1912, informed the Colonial Office that HMS *Dido* would 'cruise in the vicinity' of the Somali coast for a few days, but insisted that she return home directly after. They promised that another ship would sail from the Persian Gulf 'as soon as her services can be spared from the important duties on which all these are now engaged.' But the sting was in the tail.

The letter concluded:

My Lords hope that Mr Harcourt will recognise that every effort is being made to meet his wishes and to lessen the anxiety which he doubtless feels; but they consider it incumbent on them to register a strong protest against the Navy being again called upon to deal with a situation which appears to be largely due to the absence of an adequate garrison from the coast towns of Somaliland. They once more beg that the military arrangements for the defence of the Protectorate shall be placed on a basis which will prevent the recurrence of such demands in future.

Harcourt now reported this to Byatt, stating that he was 'prepared to press matter on Admiralty further if you consider it necessary'. Byatt telegraphed that he did not, but wanted a vessel 'when practicable'. However, the next day his letter on the deteriorating situation, and the difficulty of assessing rumours of the Sayyid's whereabouts and intentions, dated 22 February, arrived at the Colonial Office, pointing out that:

...It is difficult to obtain early intelligence, since agents going overland often pass through a hostile people and an inhospitable country, and owing to the removal of the cruiser from the coast, communication by sea is slow. The two armed dhows have been away from Berbera for three weeks, and I cannot look for reliable information from the coast towns, or for news of the alleged letter from the Mullah, until their return.

The Colonial Office replied to the Admiralty on 8 March, thanking their Lordships for their letter, and hoping that *Dido's* replacement would arrive with 'the least possible delay'.

Harcourt – for although the letter came from Mr G.V. Fiddes he most assuredly must have approved or initiated its contents – now played his trump card. Referring to their Lordships' comments on the Navy's role, it was pointed out that the defence of Berbera was now secure, and that the original policy of coastal concentration had not contemplated more than the 'two or three principal towns' being garrisoned. Fiddes went on:

It was, however, clearly contemplated that in certain contingencies, such as the present, the co-operation of the Navy would be sought and obtained; and in this connexion, I am to enclose, *for the confidential information of their Lordships* [italics added], a copy of a memorandum on the situation in Somaliland which was drawn up by Mr Churchill in 1907, and which, as Mr Harcourt understands, was before the Cabinet when they came to a decision on their future policy.

The reference to the ‘confidential information’ was a nice touch. Harcourt could, of course, have approached Churchill in cabinet, or on a friendly basis. Churchill’s memorandum was confidential, and no doubt Churchill, amid the ruinous consequences of his proposal, would have wished it to remain so. To use confidentiality as a means of exposure was a master touch! How would Winston Churchill, the Giant, brilliant, witty, with a supreme mastery of the English language, respond? How could he respond? It had to be through a subordinate, and it came through Sir William Graham Greene, Secretary to the Admiralty Board. After once again making the point that it was thought wrong by the Royal Navy that their ships should be used to defend the coast towns, which they considered to be the reason for the Colonial Office’s spate of requests, he stated that ‘They quite recognise that it may on occasion be decided *by His Majesty’s Government* [italics added] that concerted action against the Mullah, involving the co-operation of His Majesty’s ships, is necessary...’

Greene then added:

...The telegram of 12th November, 1909, conveying the decision of His Majesty’s Government to adopt a policy of coastal concentration in Somaliland stated that the object was ‘to limit our administration entirely to the holding of the two or three important towns on the coast by small garrisons sufficient to ensure their safety’ and made no reference to naval action, which was undoubtedly regarded as likely to be exceptional. Nevertheless, one, or more, of His Majesty’s ships has, as a matter of fact, been employed since then in the neighbourhood of Somaliland for periods amounting in all to about half the time which has elapsed.

...I am to add that my Lords recognise the difficulties of the present position in Somaliland, and that all departments must, to some extent, share in the inconvenience involved, but they trust that the Secretary of State may see his way to make such arrangements as will reduce to a minimum the demands made for the assistance of His Majesty’s ships.

Thus Churchill had shifted the onus onto the Government and the wording of their telegram – which by its nature was bound to be concise – and off from his own paper of 1907, although he had been following up and pushing the policy of coastal concentration all the way since then.

On 27 February 1912 HMS *Dido* with the Senior Naval Officer Aden left Henjam Island off the Iranian coast and on 3 March radioed Byatt, who asked that he visit Lashkorai and Hais to see what he might discover of the Sayyid’s movements. On 4 March she anchored in Aden, loaded 400 tons of coal and two interpreters, and left the same day, arriving at Lashkorai on 5 March. Finding no trace of a dervish force nearby, he sailed for Hais, where he heard that the dervishes had occupied the wells, and had a large force 50 miles inland – from which the friendly tribes had all fled in terror to the coast. On 7 March *Dido* returned to Berbera and informed Byatt of the news. Byatt reported that the Dolbahanta had been defeated and driven from the Ain valley, and had retired on Berbera for protection, 800 having already arrived. They could not be protected. They could not be fed. Dervish forces were within 90 miles. The garrison – 300 native infantry and 200 African rifles – would clearly be hard pressed in the event of an attack.

Sailing again to Lashkorai, Hais and Mait at Byatt’s request, he returned to Berbera on 15 March, only to hear that evening that the rest of the Dolbahanta had been routed and driven from Bohotle. On 17 March Captain Curtis, in accordance with instructions, duly sailed the *Dido* for Aden

and home, making a report to the Admiralty – who sent a copy of his report to the Colonial Office, adding that ‘it appears to indicate that the garrison is insufficient’. Byatt, in consultation with Colonel Thesiger, Inspector-General of the King’s African Rifles, thought so too, and on 28 March requested reinforcements from India (as Aden was a part of the Indian administration, and would be severely affected by the loss of meat supplies from Somaliland).

On the 29th he reported that the Dolbahanta seemed to have evacuated Bohotle and fled towards Burao and the Haud. He added:

...It is extraordinary that a common fear has absolutely no effect in welding the Friendlies together, but such is the state of dissension and anarchy prevailing generally that tribal fighting still continues with little abatement of vigour. The Habr Yunis have recently attacked the Habr Toljaala and the Habr Awal, and have been in turn attacked by the latter, and it is, in my opinion, highly probable that the Habr Yunis will profit by the disaster to the Dolbahanta to loot them of such property as still remains to them. That any tribes will combine for mutual defence it is no longer possible to hope...

4. It has been for some time growing apparent that the system of tribal defence inaugurated in March 1910⁷ in pursuance of the policy then laid down, has been giving way in spite of all efforts to support it, *and it is now abundantly clear that it has finally and completely broken down.* [italics added] It has therefore been advisable as a precaution to strengthen the garrison at the coast, but it will shortly, I think, become necessary to reconsider *ab initio* the question of the policy to be adhered to with regard to Somaliland....

More tellingly to Churchill’s system, after painting a picture of the loss of the interior to anarchy, and the closure of the trade routes, he added:

...We shall then have a needlessly elaborate machinery of administration, of which the annual cost will tend upwards, and for its maintenance an annual revenue on the downgrade...

Echoing this damning (in Liberal eyes) indictment, Colonel Thesiger listed four options: increased coastal garrisons, an expedition, the reoccupation of certain posts in the interior and complete abandonment of Somaliland [but what Great Power might rush in where the Liberals feared to tread?]

On 17 April 1912 Harcourt wrote to Byatt, suggesting that they discuss the whole affair of Somaliland personally when Byatt went home on leave in the summer, adding, however, that if he felt that things could not wait that long, then Byatt should send him a detailed memorandum with his views and recommendations.

Byatt felt that things could not wait that long, and on 1 May he wrote a detailed history and an indictment of Churchill’s policy, making suggestions for the future of Somaliland which would quietly and economically redirect Liberal policy towards the Somalis onto a path of humanity and honour.

Byatt wrote that he was ‘unable to see any prospect of an improvement’, and followed by detailing, in a separate note, the history of the breakdown of Churchill’s system. He pointed out that, although it was foreseen that ‘a period of some disorder’ would follow the evacuation, it was felt that ‘men of intelligence and strong character’ would take control and, imposing their will on the tribes, would redirect the Somalis into the ways of peace, retrenchment and platonic self interest – that they

would, in effect, become Liberals. The first prediction had been absolutely correct. Strong men had stepped forward to take control. But they were Somali strong men, and the self interest? It depended what you meant by 'self' – clan, tribe, sub-tribe, extended family, individual? Far from uniting them, self interest had narrowed them once again into tribes, and then sub-tribes. Each raided each. They raided not for the purpose of killing, but for cattle, sheep and above all, camels. Camels were their wealth, their pride, and their very life. A tribe that lost its camels lost its livelihood. Bloodshed was theoretically incidental to plunder and gain. But now, inflamed by the necessities of survival, fear and vengeance stalked the land. Camels had to be regained. Bloodshed must be doubly requited. The losers starved. The victors trembled when they reflected on the accumulated *godob*.

Byatt recited the bloody saga of the collapse of British Somaliland. It had begun with the Habr Toljaala, who had fought amongst themselves. The Habr Yunis raided the Ogaden. This had resulted in complications with Abyssinia, and they had agreed to return 1330 camels, and had sworn to desist, but immediately resumed their successful raids. The western Aidegalla engaged in 'civil' war. The eastern Aidegalla fought the western Habr Yunis. Sections of both the Dolbahanta and Habr Toljaala fought amongst themselves. The Mijjertein under Omar Doreh, well armed by the Government, had become 'general freebooters'. The Habr Yunis had crippled the coastal Habr Awal.

The fires of ancient hatreds between the Isaaq [Ishak] and Darod had not flared, but simmered, with an occasional yellow flame giving a local indication of a sudden incidence of rapine, looting and bloodletting. The Dolbahanta, the shield and barrier of the Isaaq [Ishak] from the dreaded Sayyid, fleeing in confusion, fear and despair before the bands of his now resurgent dervishes, were allowed neither sanctuary nor passage by the remorseless and ancestral hatreds of the Isaaq. They were often attacked. Were they armed again, therefore, against whom would they point their rifles?

The sensible and soothing attempts at intervention of the local officials sometimes briefly seemed to cool the hatred and restore calm, but they simply placed cold firewood on hot coals. As a sanction, the increasing tide of vagrants and destitute refugees who surged hopelessly across the desert were refused assistance if they reached Berbera. The British thought of the tribes as entities in themselves, who had to be cajoled into reason and sensible behaviour. Individuals seemed to be treated as just parts of entities. And the Roman Catholic missions to the poor and the orphans had been sent away because of the irritation they had caused to the Islamic militants [and Baron von Slatin], and their return refused – for reasons of religion.

The Ayal Yunis tribe near the coast at Bulhar, and therefore more hopeful of British influence and help, reported attacks by the Habr Yunis. The Government gave advice and moral 'support'.⁸ Now it lost authority everywhere, including the minds of its own employees; who then sought allies in the interior against the day when they should return to their homes and their families. They became unreliable, and criminals walked free because of their connections inland.

In all these disorders the raiders, the looters, the avengers found a ready supply of French rifles and ammunition. Indeed, because British ammunition supply was restricted, British rifles sold at a discount. Disorder stalked ever nearer the sea shore and the ports. The Arab, Indian and Jewish traders at the coast, their goods lying unsaleable in their warehouses, made representations to the Government.

Byatt recounted all these things in his enclosed note. Acknowledging that, since Somaliland was poor and seemingly incapable of development, political decisions would be guided by political expediency, he nevertheless dared to hope that 'the consideration of the cause of humanity may be taken into account'. Adding that it was 'impossible to estimate...the mortality', he suggested that it was 'seriously large' and that 'many have died from starvation, consequent upon the loss of stock'.

Jardine estimated that a third of the population of the interior had perished.⁹

Byatt now reiterated the four choices available: an expedition; the establishment of military posts; continuation of the present policy; and complete evacuation. The first was uncertain, the second indecisive, the third a failure and the fourth (an even greater disgrace) was, he felt, a 'political' decision (as most disgraces are). He added a fifth, which was much criticized by his successor:¹⁰

the maintenance on the coast of a small mobile striking force, which could be used to maintain order by coercion within a radius of fifty miles or so of Berbera, and keep the main roads clear. It should consist of a camel corps of natives of the country not less than 70 strong...

This fifth possibility was indeed a masterstroke of practical politics. To have demanded 300 would have been to suggest a creeping renewal of the expeditionary phase. Seventy camels! How could the Liberal Government, with Churchill very active in cabinet as always, refuse just seventy men? Byatt added that there was 'a risk of such a small force suffering a reverse', but that this risk was 'small in proportion to the good results which might be looked for'. A small risk? How could the Government then not increase it, as, although a force of seventy men was very plainly inadequate, it showed that the Commissioner's mind was properly focussed on the economics of the Protectorate. Indeed, Byatt had made the additional point that the seventy might 'open the way to dispensing with the additional troops which have recently of necessity [thus emphasizing the cost of maintaining the failed Churchillian system] been imported to strengthen the defences of Berbera and Bulhar'. A sound man indeed. He shall have 150, concluded the Government.

An obvious step to reduce the disorder in the interior was, of course, to stop the supply of weapons and ammunition which came oversea from Arabia, but above all, overland from Abyssinia. The Foreign Office, of course, attempted all in their power to stop this trade, but they were hampered by the 'coastal concentration' policy, which made it difficult to accuse the Abyssinians of disorder in their territories when the hinterland of British Somaliland was in anarchy; and by the decline in health of the great Negus Negusti, Menelik [Menelek] II. It is perhaps worthwhile to embark on a short survey of the recent history of Abyssinia, to show what Menelik had inherited, and what he bequeathed, to that great country.

The Emperor Theodore had written to the Foreign Office, proposing an embassy, but an official had pigeonholed the letter, and forgotten it. Perceiving a slight to His Majesty, he duly imprisoned and fettered some sixty British and Europeans who were in the country. The British sent a lowly Levantine to arrange their release, which increased the insult. Committing suicide after the British expedition of 1868 had rescued the prisoners, he was replaced after a conflict of four years duration by the Emperor John, who had to adopt Menelik, the powerful King of Shoa, in the south east of the kingdom, as his successor, while he ruled Amhara and the north west. As we have already seen, John was killed by a stray bullet and his army defeated by the Khalifa of the Sudan.

Menelik negotiated a difficult path between the Italians, the British, the French and eventually the Germans, and maintained his country's independence, notably on the field of Adowa, where his nephew Ras [Governor] Makonnen won his great victory. But in 1906 he appears to have suffered a stroke, and in that year Ras Makonnen died, being succeeded as Ras of Harrar by his son, Ras Tafari,¹¹ the future Emperor Haile Selassie. Partially paralysed, the great man summoned his Rases and pronounced that, on his death, he would be succeeded by his 12-year-old grandson, Lij Yasu. He

appointed Ras Tesamma as regent. He now relapsed into an almost complete paralysis, and the Rases schemed and plotted, their only restraint being the slight indications of a partial recovery which from time to time flickered over the aged monarch, for his frown was still to be dreaded. Menelik died on 12 December, 1913. He had brought a postal system, electric power, the telephone, and the railway to his land. He cured a serious outbreak of smallpox by prayer and compulsory vaccination. He abolished slavery. He tried to introduce state education, and a new legal code. In all his long and glorious career, his only serious mistake was appointing his grandson as the Imperial heir.

Lij Yasu sought his own power base among his Muslim subjects, and in 1915 he announced to an astonished and indignant nation that he was descended from the Prophet Mohammed, rather than from King Solomon. He added 'There is no God but Allah' to the national flag. He aided the Germans in east Africa. And he sought a daughter of the Sayyid in marriage. Needless to say, the Christians arose, there was a bloody battle, he was deposed, and Menelik's daughter Zauditu was enthroned as Empress – with Ras Tafari as regent and heir to the throne.¹² However, he remained at large until 1921, a menace to Abyssinia and to British Somaliland; and a blessing to the Sayyid Mohammed bin Abdullah [who, by some utterly incredible genealogy, claimed to be his cousin]. By a previous decree of Menelik, no prince of the blood could be executed; Lij Yasu was, instead, handed by the Empress to the Ras of Tigre for perpetual confinement, bound in golden chains. There ensued a struggle between the old guard, supported by the Empress, and the modernizers, under Ras Tafari, which ended with the Empress Zauditu's consent to the latter's adoption of the title of Negus in 1928. On the death of Zauditu in 1930 he was crowned emperor; he took the throne name Haile Selassie I.¹³

Attempts to prevent or to interdict the supply of arms and ammunition by sea continued, but it was acknowledged by Byatt that the armed dhows maintained by the Protectorate for this purpose were virtually useless. Their planned movements were well known in advance, the native crews being not too secretive in this respect. They were slow, slower than the smugglers, and their outlines were readily recognized from afar. Their European commanders were, in the opinion of Byatt, 'not of a high order of intelligence', and an effective discipline and control was maintained neither over their native crews, nor themselves, Byatt noting that they 'tended to general laxity'. Of those who had been employed, two were dismissed for drunkenness, one for neglect, two resigned and one committed suicide. The dhows and their crews cost £1076 per annum to maintain. They had not once captured a smuggler, or reported an instance of smuggling, despite its notorious prevalence on the coast. Their only use, thought Byatt, was to provide 'a semblance of authority'. The Commissioner therefore once again pressed the Colonial office to ask the Admiralty for a cruiser between the months of October and May – for the rest of the year the rough weather of the south west monsoon rendered even smuggling too dangerous.

On 23 February 1913, Mr H.J. Read, on behalf of the Under Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, duly requested the assistance of a cruiser between October and May each year, adding as a sweetener that Mr Harcourt would recommend to the Treasury that the Colonial Office contribute £1000 annually towards its maintenance (i.e. the savings from the redundant armed dhows).

The Admiralty Secretary replied on 10 March with the pleasant news that a ship, HMS *Espiegle*, had been allocated and had arrived at Aden on 28 February, and would remain for three months on that station. However, he noted that Mr Byatt had previously observed that a sea blockade merely stimulated the overland supply, and added that the armed dhow service, if it had not actually captured smugglers, might well have prevented their trade. Finally, agreeing that the offer of £1000 annually was 'valuable as a recognition of the principle that all Colonies should contribute something towards naval services rendered', he felt, however, that it would make little impact on the annual cost

of a ship, which he put at 'not less than £35,000'.

Harcourt replied that he would await an Admiralty report on the utility of the dhows, and that the French Government had now taken steps to prevent the importation of arms to the region, which rendered a greater need for vigilance at sea.

The report on the dhows, made by the Senior Naval Officer Aden aboard HMS *Espiegle*, Commander Nunn, while noting their limitations, repeated Greene's comment on their preventive effect. But on *Espiegle's* return to the East Indies, Byatt noted that:

within a few days of '*Espiegle's*' departure becoming generally known, a large cargo of arms was landed from Jibuti [Djibouti] on the Arabian coast at no great distance from Aden, whence no doubt a part of the consignment will find its way across to the Somali coast.

Harcourt, via Read, now (on 31 July 1913) bluntly pointed out to the Admiralty the effect of HMS *Espiegle's* early departure, and reiterated that any arms getting in overland rendered the sea blockade even more vital, as did the efforts of the French to prevent it. With regard to the use of a cruiser being 'objectionable in principle', Read wrote, with biting sarcasm, that:

...Mr Harcourt fears that he cannot accept this view, as it appears to ignore two factors in the situation which are of great importance... He understands that it has always been recognised by His Majesty's Government that the policing of the seas where it may be necessary is one of the duties of the Navy, and he presumes that there is no intention on the part of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty [especially the First Lord!] to depart from this general principle.

The letter went on to point out that the Somaliland Protectorate was in a 'special position', held for '...Strategic and other reasons *known to their Lordships*, [italics added] and not for purposes of trade or commerce'.

But matters on land now supervened in this discussion, and it will be necessary to return for a while to the creation and use of the 150-strong Camel Constabulary which was being raised, equipped and organized in Berbera. Byatt reported in November 1912 that delays had been caused by a shortage of Arabian camels, due to the Italo-Turkish war, and there were further delays due to the late arrival of saddles from India. The full complement of 150 Somalis had already been recruited, many from ex-soldiers of the King's African Rifles. They were formed into two companies, each company comprising four sections of eighteen men. The remainder were being formed into a Maxim gun team. At the head of the Constabulary stood the 30-year-old Richard Corfield.

Corfield, after leaving Marlborough College, had served in the South African Constabulary during the Boer War. He had been a political officer in Somaliland, and commanded a tribal levy, before leaving for Nigeria. Serving under him in the Camel Constabulary were two officers, Mr A. Gibb and Mr C.de S. Dunn.

The new Corps started work in December 1912 with a punishment of a combination of the Habr Yunis, Kassim Ishaak and the Habr Gerhajis Arab known as the Sulagudub, who for some months had been causing trouble, and had been raiding the coastal Habr Awal. To enhance the effect of the Camel Constabulary on this, its first mission, Mandera was occupied by the 119th Indian Infantry from Berbera, and Corfield made this his base. He was assured by the Sulagudub of their peaceful

intentions, but raids on 43 villages 3 days later, in which all the male children were slaughtered, seemed to indicate otherwise, and Corfield, in concert with the Habr Awal, pursued them rapidly; spending 21 hours in the saddle out of 24, he crashed into them with a surprise attack near Robleh, slaughtered 38 without loss to the Constabulary (although two Friendlies were wounded and one riding camel injured – which Corfield solicitously reported was ‘getting better and will be recovered’) and awarded 1282 camels, 11,300 sheep, 170 cows, 17 donkeys, 6 horses and 16 rifles to the injured tribe and to their irregular Somali helpers.¹⁴ The effect was salutary and immediate.

Next, Corfield moved to Sheikh, and thence to Burao, settling local disputes. Gibb proceeded to Las Dureh to settle disputes among the Habr Toljaala, and Corfield then took a detachment to Hargeisa with a similar purpose, returning successful to Burao in May 1913. ‘The tribes’, reported Byatt to Harcourt, ‘are so weary of internal warfare that they are very ready to accept the settlements made between them.’ Harcourt accepted these deployments, although splitting the Constabulary in this way made him ‘apprehensive’.

In June Corfield, receiving reports that dervish raiders had attacked Dolbahanta Farah Gerad karias (mobile villages) at Udaweina, moved out to support them, but they were so shaken that they retired westward, which then caused trouble with the Habr Yunis.

Byatt was on leave at this moment, unfortunately writing to the Colonial Office that ‘...The corps itself is, I believe, in no danger of attack. The Mullah has neither men nor material for an attempt to drive it back...’¹⁵ At the time, the 31-year-old Geoffrey Francis Archer was Acting Commissioner in his stead. He had seen service in Africa since the age of nineteen. Archer was an imposing man, standing six feet six and a half inches tall. In his memoirs, Collie Knox, his one time assistant, declared him to be ‘the most tolerant, generous-minded man I have ever known’. His personal courage was demonstrated many times in the hunt, at which he excelled,¹⁶ and would be demonstrated further in Somaliland, in the face of disaster. He had seen distinguished service as a District Administrator in Kenya, and was then given the task of surveying the Northern Frontier District, bordering on Abyssinian Somaliland. In May 1913 he proceeded from there to Berbera as Acting Commissioner.

Archer did not admire Manning’s analysis on his withdrawal – in his memoirs he described Manning’s appraisal as ‘completely falsified by events’ and ‘very briefly summarized’ Manning’s conclusions, adding ‘which is all that it is worth, seeing that nearly all his predictions were falsified in the end’. He also referred to Byatt’s request for a small Camel Constabulary as ‘most unfortunate’.¹⁷

Archer took Corfield to task for his move from Burao towards Udaweina, writing to him as follows:

...I cannot pass over the incident without drawing your attention to the explicit nature of the instructions conveyed to you from time to time on the subject of confining Camel Corps operations to the immediate vicinity of Burao (in the Nogal direction) with Ber as an extreme limit for occasional patrols. You are personally aware, moreover, that the Secretary of State has expressly disapproved of the suggestion of employing the Camel Corps against small dervish parties, even where danger was little and success more or less assured, on the grounds that such measures were entirely foreign to the duties of the constabulary, as well as contrary to Government policy; and there is no discretionary power of any sort on this subject allowed...

However, he allowed that 'this does not make your position easy'. The job of the Camel Constabulary was to attempt to organize the Friendlies, to enable them 'if they have the heart to do so, to offer resistance to outside aggression'.

On 6 August 1913, Archer himself arrived at Burao; on the 8th news came in of a dervish raid between Idoweina, Burao and Ber. Archer, entreated by the Friendlies for help, now ordered a 'strong reconnaissance' by the pony section of the Constabulary in the direction of Ber. At Corfield's request, he committed the whole force to Ber to 'watch developments'. However, he sent Captain G.H. Summers of the Indian force with them to advise him of the military situation. Mr Gibb, the expert on the Maxim, was unfortunately on leave.

Corfield had with him 119 men. Of these, 8 had to return to Burao, their camels being too weak to keep up. The men were armed with single loading .303 M.H. carbines. Ammunition carried was 140 rounds per man in bandoliers and cartridge belts, with a 60-round reserve in saddle bags. There was one Maxim gun, with 4000 rounds.

Retreating Friendlies gave information that a large dervish force, having looted and burned karias, was retiring towards Idoweina with a large quantity of stock. The pony section now returned, reporting that they had been heavily engaged with a large dervish force, perhaps 2000 strong, and had expended some 80 or 90 rounds per man. Corfield, forming a zariba some 5 miles north east of Idoweina, could see the lights of the dervish fires reflected in the sky on the other side of the ridge which separated the two forces.

Corfield was now assured by the Dolbahanta that some 300 tribesmen, armed variously with spears and rifles, would assist him on the morrow. These were issued with some ammunition. Summers, upon request, advised Corfield against a night attack. At dawn the two forces began to move parallel to each other on either side of the ridge. Moving ahead of the dervishes, Corfield attempted to place his force across their route. The bush became thicker and thicker, and visibility fell to some 100 yards. They were in the neighbourhood of Dul Madoba – the Black Hill. The promised Dolbahanta formed an 'armed mob' on his left. It had been Richard Corfield's intention to advance some 200 yards further into more open country, but before he could, at 6.50 am, the dervishes struck. At the first shot, the Dolbahanta fled to the bush behind, from whence they observed the action, hanging like vultures on the result and the prospects which it might disclose of looting the dead. Some, however, provided information to the Constabulary during lulls in the action.

Summers advised Corfield to form a square, as his flanks and rear were in danger of envelopment, but he declined, as this would, he thought, reduce the impact of his fire in front. Summers reported later that: 'The Camel Constabulary were thus committed to an action in an irregular skirmishing line in dense bush, without either reserve of flank or rear protection.'

The right flank was enveloped, but instead of folding back to form a side of a square, retreated to the rear, although some of them later rallied and drove the dervishes back. However, the Maxim gun itself was hit and rendered useless, and Corfield, bravely trying to repair it, was killed instantly by a dervish bullet. Summers was wounded three times. Dunn acted coolly and courageously. At one point, Summers remarked to him 'Well, I suppose this will go down to history as Dunn's last stand'.¹⁸ He and the crippled Summers and the remainder of the force formed a small zariba with the bodies of dead camels and ponies, and fought off the determined rushes of the dervishes. This was surely Gumburu all over again! But 'Dunn's last stand' ended unexpectedly, for, at midday, came salvation! The dervishes' ammunition ran out, and they retreated from the field, leaving 395 dead to be counted, but taking with them some 5500 camels and 25,000 sheep. Of the Camel Constabulary, 33 lay dead on the field, 16 were wounded, and 31 missing – all of whom rejoined the column as it retired. Of these,

24 were later dismissed with ignominy.

Was Dul Madoba a victory or a defeat? It was estimated that the total dervish dead amounted to some 600, out of a force eventually estimated at 2250 – just over 25 per cent. They achieved their original object, which was to capture stock. Jardine reported that the dervishes thereafter ‘referred to the fight as “Ruga”, which meant a crushing of bones’. They had again failed to defeat a far smaller force in the field, composed of 100 policemen and three British officers, with only one Maxim, and even that had been put out of action early on. How could they hope to win with casualties at this level against such small forces armed with modern weapons?

But the Sayyid now adopted a new tactic. At Tale, which henceforth was to be his headquarters, he built, with the aid of Yemeni masons, a fortress, complete with ‘Machicouli’ galleries, which rendered every means of ingress subject to an enfilading fire, and these he also began to construct elsewhere. He had possession of large areas of the hinterland. If defence reigned supreme, then his enemies must now come to attack him in his fortresses.

Chapter Eleven

Birth and Re-birth: The Flying Corps and the Camel Corps

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes

The past no longer enables us even dimly to measure the future.

Winston Churchill¹

While the remainder of the constabulary were in their zariba following the retreat of the dervishes, Dunn had despatched a voice messenger to Archer to inform him of the action and of their position. The messenger had imparted the information in a ‘garbled and alarmist’ form. The Acting Commissioner had immediately taken twenty men of the Indian contingent and a mob of tribesmen, together with water and supplies, and bravely marched out towards the Black Hill at sunset.

Dunn despatched pony riders to check on the dervish retirement, buried Corfield in a concealed grave,² and needing water, collected arms and ammunition together for the inevitable retreat. At 3 pm he moved towards Idoweina with a mere twenty-six men fit for action, reaching it at 4.30 pm, where in desperation they drank water which had been fouled by livestock, and then moved on towards Burao, 34 miles away. When 18 miles from Burao they met the intrepid Archer with his small band and his welcome supplies, and after a short rest, resumed their march, reaching Burao at 10 am the next day, 10 August 1913. They advised the traders at Burao to leave, and on the morning of the 12th the force reached Sheikh, where they were joined by 130 men of the Indian contingent. Archer, in his report, highly praised Summers and Dunn, the former of whom was promoted to the rank of brevet major, the latter receiving the Police Medal. But it was with ‘the greatest reluctance’ and ‘profound regret’ that he blamed Corfield for ‘a rash act’, having allowed his ‘great personal bravery, and the complete confidence he had in the men under his command to outweigh his better judgement’. But neither Archer nor Byatt raised an objection to the erection of a monument to Corfield’s memory at Berbera.

When the remainder of the Camel Corps and their wounded, accompanied by the Indian contingent, eventually arrived at Berbera on 25 August Commander Nunn, of HMS *Espiegle*, noted that many of the wounded were in a ‘most serious condition’ and that one died soon after. Of the two doctors in the Protectorate, one was on leave and the other ‘laid up with septic ulcers of the leg with inflamed glands’. Fortunately, the ship’s surgeon was on hand to minister to the unfortunates. He also noted that the temperature in the shade on board ship often rose to over 100 degrees Fahrenheit at

noon, and for several nights did not drop below 92 degrees.³

On 22 August Harcourt sent a telegram to Archer, saying that he had consulted Byatt, who was of the opinion that if he were able to remain safely at Sheikh, 'it would be advisable not to withdraw immediately from there in view of unfavourable impression which would be created by so early a retirement and the probable encouragement it would give to inter-tribal fighting'. However, Archer replied to Harcourt on 24 August that troops had begun to withdraw from Sheikh on the night of 23 August, and that 'no good purpose would be achieved by re-occupation now', following with the somewhat difficult comment 'unless I am incorrect in my assumption that you do not intend such occupation to be of a permanent nature...' Archer felt that 'the wisest course is to leave matters as they stand at present, effecting, meanwhile, the strictest coastal concentration...' He reported that he was only taking 'provisional' steps to reconstruct the Camel Corps, as he had 'grave doubt' about the Somalis as soldiers. To try to avoid inter-tribal fighting, he told the tribal leaders, the Akils, that if they renewed their fighting they would undo all Corfield's work and would hardly improve their standing with the Government, which it was essential to do if the dervishes were to be successfully opposed.

Archer requested 300 troops from India to garrison Berbera, and urgently requested a ship. The resident at Aden informed the Colonial Office that he was sending two double companies of the 18th Indian Infantry to Berbera by hired steamer, adding that valuable help might be obtained from a warship. The Admiralty stated they were despatching HMS *Alert* from the East Indies station, although this was changed for HMS *Espiegle*.

On 14 August Harcourt had conveyed, in a telegram, his appreciation of the 'courage and ability' Archer had shown in dealing with 'a very difficult situation'. Geoffrey Archer, later knighted, was awarded the Order of St Michael and St George, the youngest ever holder of this award. The thoughts of Horace Archer Byatt can only be imagined. He was an honourable man, and no doubt sincerely admired Archer's conduct and was pleased at his recognition – but how he must have regretted sending his letter a few days before, suggesting that the Mullah had 'neither men nor material' to drive his new Constabulary back. Seldom can such a very able man have been proved so wrong so quickly, and so conclusively. Seldom can leave of absence have occurred at a more unfortunate time, both his and Mr Gibb's, the machine-gun expert, who might have made all the difference at the Black Hill.

Harcourt's telegram also contained a request for an estimate of the cost of the extra troops from Aden, and of the relief of destitute Somalis. This, Archer estimated to be nearly £9000⁴ for the seven and two-thirds months until 1 April 1914, of which £1000 was allowed for the relief of emaciated Somalis made destitute by the dervishes making off with their stock – which Corfield, of course, had bravely, if unwisely, tried to prevent. This relief, Byatt later thought, should continue until March 1914, because of an unusually severe winter, and because of the outcry which would be engendered in the Press by 'a large number of starving natives'.⁵ But it was continued further, until the renewed Camel Corps could again police the grazing grounds, enabling the needy to be re-stocked and to return to a semblance of their former life.

On 18 August Harcourt asked Byatt his opinion on whether the Camel Corps should be doubled in size, to 300 men – although the cost would be in the region of £8000 per annum, it would enable the Protectorate to send the more expensive Indian contingent back to Aden. He was also asked how many additional white officers might be needed, and whom he would recommend to lead the corps in the place of Corfield.

Byatt agreed wholeheartedly with the proposed increase in the corps, and thought that an additional two officers should be recruited, making five in all. As regards their commander, although

he ‘had the highest opinion of Mr Gibb’s soldierly qualities’, he felt that ‘in some respects he is hardly fitted for a position of authority over European Officers...’ and he ‘therefore hesitated to recommend him’.

However, in September 1913 Gibb, returning from leave, was given temporary command of the Corps and supervised the recruitment of the new levies, making its strength up to the 300 authorized. Another four officers were added – their salary was to be £350 each per annum. If all seven were paid at this rate, it would form a sizeable proportion of the £8000 estimated cost of the new corps – but a major was paid at just over double the rate of a junior officer. In the end, the three company commanders received £400, the others £350. In November, Gibb was relieved by Major A. S. Lawrance of the 1st County of London Yeomanry, who had previously served in the Protectorate with the 6th Battalion of the King’s African Rifles.⁶

Byatt wrote to Harcourt on 8 November 1913, pointing out that the rifles in use with the Corps, .303 Martini-Henry carbines, were originally used in the 1902 expedition, and had seen very rough service ever since; new rifles, Martini-Enfields, had, however, been issued to the Friendlies by Manning in 1909 –1910 (many of which, as we have seen, found their way to the Sayyid). He asked for 320 new magazine carbines, ‘sighted for Mark VI ammunition [i.e. not the Mark V Dum-Dum]’, at around £3 each – although, he helpfully added, the War Department might have some good second-hand carbines at a lesser cost.

The Treasury, although approving the expenditure on the carbines, was not, of course, unaware of the renewal of operations in the interior, and of what this meant in terms of expenditure, and warned Harcourt to:

...consider how far the adoption of this proposal, [an inland base] which is clearly likely to be expensive, may be necessary...in view of the policy of His Majesty’s Government to restrict police operations to the coast-line.⁷

But as the Corps was increased and sharpened, so were its difficulties. We have already seen that the Sayyid had fortified Tale and made it his headquarters; he also established strong posts at Jidali and Urgai, and now created a new fort to command the western end of the Ain valley at Shimber Berris, only 50 miles from Burao. These forts not only provided secure refuges and commanded large areas, but they were also used offensively, as bases from which raids were conducted against the friendly tribes.

We left the battle between the Colonial Office and Churchill’s Admiralty with Harcourt’s letter of 31 July 1913, in which he made the barbed observation ‘that the policing of the seas...is one of the duties of the Navy’. The departmental battle was suspended on the news of Dul Madoba, the Navy providing HMS *Espiegle*, as has been seen, and the Colonial Office expressing their thanks. The matter was complicated by a subsidy paid to the Admiralty by the Government of India for the blockade of the arms traffic off the Persian Gulf.

However, the Admiralty Secretary replied to Harcourt’s letter of 31 July on 3 November, stating that they had ‘not overlooked’ it, but had delayed the reply until Dul Madoba could be assessed in the light of whether its results ‘were such as obviously to strengthen the case for the presence of a ship this autumn’. Indeed, it seemed that the Persian Gulf blockade would prove to be ‘less exacting than in former years’, and they were therefore prepared to endeavour to arrange to leave a ship in Somali waters until May (when the bad weather began). Their Lordships were ‘reluctant to engage in further correspondence of a controversial character’ so long as that satisfied Harcourt. This sounded like an

olive branch from the First Lord. Some doubt over this professed reluctance, however, might have been aroused when he added that 'At the same time they do not wish it to be supposed that they have withdrawn their objection in principle to the more general demands made upon them' and made 'some brief observations' upon Harcourt's arguments.

Firstly, it was argued that:

The duties of police undertaken by the Navy must...be taken to mean the control at sea of proceedings which cannot be controlled by His Majesty's Government on shore. Where they can be so controlled it is, at least, unusual, if not unprecedented, for the Navy to be called on except in distinct cases of emergency.

Secondly, the Admiralty Secretary doubted whether the control of arms overland via Djibouti was effective, citing the Ambassador to Abyssinia's comment that it was 'quite ineffective', and adding that 'It is, therefore, useless to expect that naval action can be anything but the merest palliative'.

Thirdly, no objection was raised to the ending of the ineffective armed dhows, but this was qualified by adding that '...this step will, *ex hypothesi*, in itself afford no basis for any demand for further assistance from the Navy'.

Lastly, the Admiralty corrected (it is presumed, as they hopefully were the organization which might be expected to know) the Colonial office's assertions on HMS *Espiegle's* length of stay, whilst regretting that Mr Harcourt should have found 'cause of complaint'.

The Colonial Office replied on 14 November, but somewhat slyly, for while the Admiralty had referred to the 'stationing of a ship on the Somali coast' the Colonial Office referred to this proffered service as '...the proposal that one of Her Majesty's ships should be stationed *annually* in the Gulf of Aden for the period from October to May with a *view to the prevention of the traffic in arms* between the South Arabian and Somali coast.' [my italics] It also informed the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty that 'Mr Harcourt shares their objections to departmental controversy' and that he 'did not intend to pursue the matter' as 'they agree to leave the ship on the Somali coast for the present'.

There the matter rested. But the Colonial Office now took up an idea to use aircraft. It may now, therefore, be useful to leave the sun burning upon the deeply divided and bitterly hostile Somali tribes and the pitiless enmities of the dervishes, and remind ourselves of the previous comment that the Europeans and their offshoots in America had not only left the rest of the world behind in their new sciences and their application of them to the world about them; they were widening the gap at an ever-increasing pace. Their military ascendancy had nowhere advanced faster or more securely than in their increasing mastery of the air. In the application of air power, few had been more deeply involved than the restless giant who was now First Lord of the Admiralty.

Although Wilbur and Orville Wright had first flown their aeroplane in 1903, anxiety to preserve their lead in aeronautics meant that it was not until 1908 that they flew in public for the first time, Wilbur demonstrating his machine in France and Orville in Washington. The spectators were stunned, and many realized that a new era had dawned. In the July of the same year Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin's Z4 airship travelled 240 miles, remaining airborne for 12 hours. In August an attempt at a 24-hour flight was ruined when a storm blew up whilst the airship was moored at a village called Echterdingen, and the airship was thrown against trees and the hydrogen ignited. It was completely wrecked. But now came what was called the miracle of Echterdingen. Contributions poured in from the public, 'rich and poor alike', for the German people had rejoiced and prided themselves in

Zeppelin's great achievement.⁸

In all these developments Britain had lagged lamentably behind. Serious alarm was felt in some political, engineering and military circles. There were two schools of thought about what should be done – the first, that Britain should buy an airship and a Wright aeroplane and study them closely, the other, that the British Government should institute a major programme of original research in these areas. It was Lord Northcliffe, in his *Daily Mail* newspaper, who was the foremost champion of the first plan, and Richard Burdon Haldane, the brilliant Secretary of State for War, of the second.

Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*, in autumn 1908, offered a £500 prize for the first aeroplane crossing of the channel. In the same year the paper published a despatch from their Berlin correspondent, who reported that a retired German official, who was also a privy counsellor, had informed him that a German invasion army 350,000 strong could land at Dover by airship from Calais in a single night. At the same time it was reported that France had ordered 100 Wright aeroplanes.

Now the Prime Minister, H. H. Asquith, acted. In October 1908 he appointed an 'Aerial Navigation Sub Committee' of the Committee of Imperial Defence. Chaired by Lord Esher, its remit was to 'investigate the subject of aerial navigation and its relation to the security of Britain and the Empire. The committee interviewed the Hon. C. S. Rolls, son of Lord Llangatock, co-founder of Rolls-Royce, an amateur balloonist and a man of some knowledge of the Wright brothers' aeroplanes. Rolls reported that the Wright brothers' machines could be usefully used as scouts, and that airships could deliver bombs and inflammable liquids which could set towns on fire. Rolls suggested that if the British Government would buy him one, he would investigate the Wright brothers' machine himself. All the members of the committee thought that a good idea – save one. The sole dissenter was the young and independent minded President of the Board of Trade, Winston Spencer Churchill. Churchill thought that Wright should be directly approached. But Rolls' offer was accepted, as the War Office representative, Sir William Nicholson, who was but little impressed by aeroplanes, thought that the army should not involve itself in experiments, but should leave the matter to private enterprise. The naval representative, Captain Bacon, under the powerful influence of the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fisher, steered the committee towards the purchase of a naval airship for £35,000.

The committee also interviewed Baden-Powell, who reported that huge airships might bomb Britain, or 1000 Wright brothers' aeroplanes, each carrying three or four men, might be used in an invasion. The 3rd interviewee was a Colonel Capper, Superintendent of the Balloon Factory and Commandant of the Balloon School. At Churchill's insistence a fourth interview was conducted with Sir Hiram Maxim, a naturalized Briton of American origin and inventor of the deadly machine gun which had so proved its worth in Somaliland. Maxim had experimented with an aeroplane which he had designed himself, and had predicted that 100,000 men might be transported across the channel in a single night by some 5000 aeroplanes. He also offered the gloomy prospect that, in the future, 1000 aeroplanes, each carrying one ton of nitro-glycerine, would in one night make London 'look like last year's buzzard's nest'.

However, Haldane had his way in the end, for an 'Advisory Committee for Aeronautics' was formed, chaired by Lord Raleigh, chemist, mathematician, discoverer of argon gas, Nobel prizewinning physicist, President of the Royal Society and Chancellor of Cambridge University. The facilities of the National Physical Laboratory at Teddington were made available to his committee. Haldane, an admirer of things German, was to become an innocent victim of anti-German hysteria during the Great War. His friend Winston Churchill, aware of his great achievement, stood by him loyally.

Sections of the British press now seem to have sunk into a hysteria in which German airship

sightings were regularly reported over England, supposedly supported by hidden armies disguised as waiters, and, perhaps, bakers and bandsmen. As aviation advanced, disquiet grew. The *Daily Mail* prize for flying the channel was won by the Frenchman Louis Blériot.

In 1911, after the international crisis brought about by the German despatch of a gunboat to Agadir in Morocco, Asquith called a meeting of the Imperial Defence Committee, at which it became obvious that the Admiralty and the Army had utterly differing views as to the Army's role in a future war with Germany, the Navy imagining that the Army would be used in raids and landings behind German lines, and the Army presuming that it would be on the left of the French Army. The Navy considered that this plan would be to put the Army in the mincing machine of continental war, to be destroyed in short order. All was in disarray between the two services. Haldane wanted an Admiralty War Staff to be instituted, similar to that which he had already established in the Army. He expected to be made First Lord of the Admiralty in order to do it. He was not. As we have seen, the then Home Secretary, Winston Churchill, got the job.

His position as First Lord of the Admiralty meant that the ex-soldier Churchill was in political control of the Navy, with operational control being in the hands of the First Sea Lord. This boundary, needless to say, became very blurred during Winston Spencer Churchill's tenure of office.

At the time of Churchill's accession to the Admiralty there was a great public demand for a national air force. The War Office had formed the Air Battalion of the Royal Engineers, to train a body of expert airmen. The Balloon Factory had become the Army Aircraft Factory. The Navy had got its £35,000 airship, but as soon as it was completed it was caught by a high wind while moored, and destroyed. An inquiry was conducted under Admiral Sturdee, the future victor of the Battle of the Falkland Islands. He had never seen an airship before. He offered his opinion of the airship. 'It is the work of a lunatic!' he declared. In May 1911 a delegation to the then First Lord, Reginald McKenna, reported that the establishment in the Admiralty 'had no intention of giving any attention whatever to aviation'.

However, young and enthusiastic sailors were at work, and Churchill supported them to the limit. In December 1911 naval officers fitted aeroplane No.2 with floats in addition to her normal landing gear, in case she should be forced to land in the water. She successfully alighted in Sheerness harbour, was towed ashore and flown back to Eastchurch. Later in the same month this machine successfully flew off the forecastle of HMS *Africa* when the ship was at anchor.

Churchill's appointment meant that he was in control of naval aviation, and had a seat on the aviation subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID). This subcommittee, 'impressed', they reported, 'by the evidence which has been placed before them regarding the backward state of aerial navigation in the country, when contrasted with the progress made by other great naval and military powers', recommended the establishment of a Flying Corps, later known as the Royal Flying Corps, with a naval wing, a military wing, a national corps of aviators (the Royal Flying Corps itself) and a central flying school (at Upavon in Wiltshire) responsible for training all the aviators of the Flying Corps.

The Army already had its Air Battalion of the Royal Engineers. Colonel J.E.B. Seely, then Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, forwarded a letter to Churchill from the senior flying man at Upavon, Captain J.D.B. Fulton. In this letter, Fulton complained that the whole of the staff in charge of the aeroplane pilots were Royal Engineers, who did not possess aeroplane pilot's certificates and could not fly. According to Fulton, not a single Royal Engineer officer had volunteered to learn, whereas there was a waiting list of applicants from other regiments.

Churchill then wrote a minute in his magisterial way:

Whatever happens the Royal Engineers must have nothing to do with H.M.'s corps of airmen, who should be a new and separate organisation drawing from civilian, as well as military and naval sources, and providing air scouts, skilled pilots and tuition both for the fleet and army.

2. Terms and conditions must be devised to make aviation for war purposes the most honourable, as it is the most dangerous profession that a young Englishman can adopt.

3. No regard for military or naval seniority should prevent the young and capable men, who have already done so much for the new arm, from being placed effectively at the head of the new corps of airmen.

When Winston Churchill wrote this, he was 36 years old, and had been in charge of the navy for about two months. In direct contrast to the previously mentioned officers of the Royal Engineers, he decided that he would learn to fly, a process which he later described as 'losing his aethereal virginity'.

'The air is an extremely dangerous, jealous and exacting mistress,' wrote Churchill. 'Once under the spell most lovers are faithful to the end, which is not always old age...'⁹

Churchill went on to recount instances of great flyers who had perished, and gave not a few accounts of later accidents which occurred while he was actually piloting the aircraft.¹⁰

So Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, and even before then, can be seen to have been a major figure in the growth of Britain's Air Service before 1914. When, therefore, Harcourt (via H.J. Read)¹¹ had suggested the use of aircraft against the Sayyid, Churchill enthusiastically circulated a paper to the Cabinet:

The proposal of the Colonial Office to use aircraft in Somaliland has been carefully considered. An expedition organised on the lines indicated below should be capable of rendering valuable services.

It is understood that the whole wealth of the Mullah is in camels and live stock, and that very considerable damage could be inflicted on him, apart from actual offensive operations, by stampeding his stock and keeping them from the wells.

1. It is proposed to fit modified cars to two [air]ships of the Parseval type now completing for the Admiralty.
2. Effect alterations to the smaller Army airship 'Eta,' so as to enable her to carry stores to the advanced base, to assist with a photographic survey of the trade routes, and to be available as a spare ship in case of necessity.
3. Order one portable and two canvas sheds.
4. Order suitable hydrogen plant.
5. Arrange for armament, &c., in conjunction with Ordnance Department.
6. Order airship spares.
7. Order petrol and oil.
8. Order photographic gear and equipment.

Officers and Complement

8 Officers

40 P.O.s and men

6 W.T. [Wireless Telegraphy] Operators.

3 R.A.F. [Royal Aircraft Factory] Staff.

Handling parties can be provided from the Indian troops at Berbera.

It is difficult to estimate the total cost, as it depends on how long the airships are required. Spare envelopes, &c., would have to be provided, as only experience can show how long these will last in a hot climate, but, after the first cost of providing the sheds, hydrogen plant, and transport has been met, the cost of maintenance should not be very great, and at the close of operations the plant, materials, &c., employed should still have a considerable value and be available for use in any future expeditions. The experience of the Italians with airships in Tripoli is encouraging, as the temperature of Tripoli in summer is about the same as that of Somaliland in winter, and both countries have a sandy soil.

The question of sending out a flight of aeroplanes cannot be considered until a full report is received from officers who will be sent out to consult with the local officers on the spot as soon as general approval is given to these proposals. Should it be found that aeroplanes could be usefully employed on messenger work, &c., in connection with the airships they can be provided.

Churchill estimated the cost to be £75,000.

Parseval airships were made at Major August von Parseval's airship works in Germany. Designed in 1906, they were 'as good an airship, of the non-rigid type, as had ever been built', but were later supplanted by the rigid type, as very large airships required a rigid framework.¹²

The investigations into the use of aircraft and airships were conducted under the auspices of the Admiralty Air Department (which was headed by Murray Sueter) by Lieutenant-Commander F. Boothby and by Lieutenant R. Davies. They arrived at Berbera on 8 June 1914, having first reported to the General Officer Commanding at Aden. They selected a suitable site for airship sheds and noted that a motor road connecting this with the pier could 'easily' be made by convict labour. They noted that 'a satisfactory landing ground for aeroplanes could easily be cleared' in the land around Berbera, but moving up to Sheikh they found little but an occasional sandy river bed to encourage them in the use of these very new and untried machines – after all, the first real flight of an aeroplane in Britain itself had only been achieved less than five years before.¹³ After consultations at Sheikh with the Commander-in-Chief and the Commander of the Camel Corps it was decided that, although airships based on Berbera could give useful service, aeroplanes could not, as an engine failure would mean that the pilot would be unable to find his way back through the bush without Somali help. This meant that the Camel Corps would therefore be occupied in searching for him, and in full strength, so that they were not overcome themselves. This would therefore mean the whole Camel Corps standing by at the ready during each and every aeroplane flight. The scouting work which they would do could be done, although more slowly, by the Friendlies. And lastly, they could not be used in an attacking role – at this time (1914) they might carry a rifle, or the pilot or observer might throw a very small bomb over the side, and their appearance would simply alert the enemy to disperse before being attacked by the bomb-carrying airships.

But all looked well set for the airships. By 15 January 1914, in reply to H.J. Read's original enquiry, and well before Churchill's paper to the Cabinet, three ships were provisionally earmarked for service in Somaliland:

Gamma – with a crew of 5, capable of lifting 2570lb, flying at a top speed of 32mph and with an endurance of 20 hours and a range of 640 miles.

Delta – with a crew of 5, capable of lifting 3408lb, flying at a top speed of 44mph and with an endurance of 16 hours and a range of 700 miles.

Eta – with a crew of 5, capable of lifting 2850lb, flying at a top speed of 43mph (with a steady speed of 33mph) and with an endurance of 12 hours and a range of 800 miles.

Before using the airships, experiments were to be conducted to determine the height to which the dervish rifle bullets might effectively reach out, and to therefore gauge the minimum height from which his forces could be observed or attacked, and his flocks and herds dispersed.

Now the Mullah, the bane of the Army for fourteen years, would be helpless in the face of such an advance in technology! With no science, no navy and now no air power, hunted from the skies by Maxim and bomb-carrying airships, he and his dervishes would surely soon be doomed. It was expected that the airships would be ready to assist and support the Camel Corps by October 1914. However, it would first be necessary to purchase certain items – gas envelopes, sheds etc. – in Germany.

But he was granted a reprieve of four years. On 28 June the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo, and by 1 August Europe would be ablaze, with Britain declaring war on Germany on 4 August. The Camel Corps would be left alone to deal with the Sayyid in the old military way. But the Sayyid's four short years of reprieve would see the frail and rejected aeroplane develop into a very formidable weapon indeed, a vulture's eye to guide heavy artillery and to discover the secret movements of armies and navies, an eagle's talons to suddenly descend on them, a decider of battles, and a terroriser of cities and governments.

It can be seen from the expectation of ordering airship parts and equipment from Germany just how suddenly and unexpectedly the Great War descended upon Europe. To none was it more unexpected than to the brave officers, seeking action, who volunteered for service with the Camel Corps. Two such men, famous in later life, stand out, and will reward a small digression, not only for themselves, but for their connection with the Giant; the first was Lieutenant-General Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, who as Captain Carton de Wiart sold his polo ponies, settled his debts and sailed for Somaliland from England on 23 July 1914. The second was Major-General Lord Ismay, who as Captain H.L. Ismay also sold his ponies, settled his debts and at about the same time sailed from India for Somaliland. On learning of the outbreak of war with Germany, both bitterly regretted their actions; de Wiart eventually got to France, where he suffered terrible injuries and earned a Victoria Cross; Ismay, whose organizational skills were too good, was, to his chagrin, considered too essential by the Colonial Office to be allowed to go, and was thus, perhaps, fortunately preserved, to render invaluable service in a yet greater and more terrible conflict, when mankind was, in a shattering climactic, preserved; not, alas, from inhumanity, for nothing could achieve that ideal – but from its enthronement and glorification.

Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart was a Belgian by birth, but it is scarcely possible to imagine a more typical pre-war English officer. Polo, shooting and partying seemed to fill his days. His liquid-fuelled 'parlour tricks' included jumping over four men; initially he was aided by two 'fielders', who caught him before landing. However, after an occasion when the task 'slipped their minds', and finding himself unhurt, he dispensed with their doubtful services when performing this feat. Other skills included falling over backwards in a chair, and tearing a pack of cards in half; he regretfully abandoned the former after breaking his back when a septuagenarian, and the latter, which secured a 'steady income', after losing an arm in action. His academic achievements were quite meagre; he left Oxford in the middle of a degree to volunteer for South Africa, thereby avoiding an almost certain failure. He also failed an examination for the rank of major, after securing a record eight marks out of two hundred in Military Law.¹⁴

Yet Carton de Wiart was an ideal officer, brave, resourceful, intelligent, and of great military

acumen, who knew his job well and did not forget it amid the dangers and injuries of war in the front line. He possessed vast strengths and depths of character. He was a born leader of men, as all true leaders are; and if more sober and egalitarian modern critics might shake their heads over his lifestyle and academic performance, on the field of battle, the only true testing ground for a soldier, he was a great credit to his class, his generation, his unit and his adopted country.

The early career of Captain H.L 'Pug' Ismay followed a similar path. Surprisingly failing his senior scholarship examinations at Charterhouse, he determined upon a career in the Indian Cavalry, despite his father expressing opposition to the idea by the frequent repetition of a story about a cavalry officer who was so stupid that even his brother officers noticed it. Ismay served in the 21st Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry, and would see plenty of action on the North West Frontier, and on the polo field, excelling in both. But his organizational ability was soon noticed, and he was appointed adjutant. He became a more serious student of military art and science. He was lost in admiration when contemplating the career of Winston Churchill, who had always courted both danger and publicity on the field of battle, and was influenced by Churchill's great book *The River War*, as well as by the incomparable Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and learnt passages from both by heart. He resolved to volunteer for the Indian Contingent of the Camel Corps, and to seek action and glory against an enemy whose cruelty, cunning and courage were proverbial, amid the rivers of dry sand, the dark, forbidding hills, the rending and concealing thornbush and the parched and inhospitable plains of Somaliland.

There was a yet further connection between Carton de Wiart and Ismay, for both would write enthralling memoirs, to which the Giant, by now *Sir* Winston Churchill, himself one of the saviours of a world, would add a tribute, reminding the reader of their great and useful services to their country and to the cause of liberty. Carton de Wiart served in the Great War in France, was emissary to Poland, where the brave appreciated the brave, served in the Second World War as a divisional commander in Norway, was captured by the Italians after his plane crashed on a mission to Yugoslavia, and after his release was despatched by Winston Churchill, who had 'the highest confidence in his judgement and services,' to war torn China, as his emissary to Chiang Kai Shek, the Chinese Generalissimo. Ismay, after leaving Somaliland in 1920, served in Mesopotamia, the Staff College at Quetta, studied in an RAF Staff College at Andover, became Assistant Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID), became Military Secretary to the Viceroy of India, returned to the War Office in Intelligence, to the CID as Deputy Secretary, and in July 1938, as Secretary. He later became Churchill's contact with the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COS) and a member of COS, and head of the Office of the Minister of Defence (Churchill). Churchill recounted in Ismay's memoirs the 'signal services which Lord Ismay has rendered to our country, and to the free world'.

The Camel Corps, increased to 450 men in three companies, each comprising 100 camel men and 50 mounted on ponies, was further reinforced by the addition of the 150 strong Indian Contingent to which Ismay was attached. The corps moved forward to Galoli, 15 miles south of Sheikh, and began training as a whole unit, although squads were detailed to protect the grazing herds of the Friendlies. Berbera itself, thoroughly unnerved by a dervish raid in March 1914, was held by 300 men of the Indian Army.

The men were issued with a khaki pugri (turban), a green/brown singlet, a pair of khaki shorts and a pair of blue puttees. They were barefooted. Their camels were bought from Arabia and the Soudan, and saddles were of the Bikanir Indian type and fitted with stirrups, the Somali saddle being uncomfortable to the camel. It was reported that such was the camouflage effect of the broken colours of the uniform that the men themselves were almost invisible from three or four hundred yards, the

light coloured 'Soudani' camels appearing to be riderless. A dismounted and stationary man could hardly be noticed at 200 yards distance.

The latest pattern of carbine was issued to the men, as we have seen. However, magazines were not used, as although this would greatly increase the firepower, the men might too rapidly exhaust the ammunition in an often waterless land where supplies were laboriously and often insecurely transported by camel. But this distrust of the soldier, and rather bone-headed attitude to firepower, which has persisted in the British Army, was inconsistent with the use of Maxims, those terrible scythes of the battlefield. The Army authorities seemed, and still seem, oblivious of the fact that, with an increase in firepower, fewer soldiers are needed (and fewer become casualties) and thus, apart from ammunition, *fewer* supplies are required. Bullets kill men, which if not necessarily the object, is always the indispensable accompaniment of the exercise. A withering firepower is also a useful deterrent. But extra long sword type bayonets were, however, thoughtfully issued with the carbines, 'to compensate for the reduced length of the rifle'.¹⁵

The ammunition issued was of the Mark VI, 'civilized' type, which the men were forbidden to file into 'Dum-Dum'. Each man carried 400 rounds, of which 260 were contained in saddle bags and 140 in three bandoliers, one round the waist and two across the shoulders. In addition, each man carried a water bottle and animal watering gear, a haversack, two water chaguls (leather water bags carried on the camel), a blanket, a waterproof sheet, a bush axe ('gudimo'), a hobble for the animal, five days' rations for man and beast and three days' water for himself. In the pony sections all rations, and their reserve ammunition and water chaguls, were carried by the camels. It was noted that the hardy Somali soldiers could live on a diet of meat (obtained, of course, from the enemy!) and camel's milk without any rice or vegetables at all. He could also drink the local water, whether or not it contained the salt or sulphuretted hydrogen which rendered it an all too speedy purgative to foreign stomachs.

In August 1914 command of the troops was given to the 42-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Astley (Tom) Cubitt of the Royal Artillery, with a survivor of the desperate action at the Black Hill, G. H. Summers (now promoted to major) as his staff officer. Ismay described Cubitt as 'a born leader' and 'the beau ideal of a Horse Gunner', with 'the kindest of hearts, and a remarkable flow of unprintable invective'.¹⁶ Geoffrey Archer described him as 'A real leader of men and a good judge of character', stating that he (Cubitt) had recognized the sheer ability of Ismay, predicting in 1914 that 'He will probably end up as a successor to Sir Maurice Hankey and become Secretary to the Cabinet.' This prediction was exactly correct. Carton de Wiart's memoirs gave a similar description of the character, the leadership and the language of Cubitt, describing him as 'full of a general *bonhomie* and all the human frailties that make one love a man instead of just admiring him'. The troops, wrote de Wiart, 'responded immediately' to his leadership.¹⁷ Sir Thomas Cubitt, KCB, CB, CMG, DSO, 'escaped' from Somaliland to France in 1915, where he would command a division with distinction and gain the Croix de Guerre twice; later Governor of Bermuda, he would retire as a full General in 1936. He died in 1939.¹⁸

On 17 November 1914 Cubitt moved forward to Burao. He had with him 450 Somalis of the Camel Corps with 3 Maxims and 150 men of the Indian Contingent on camels with 2 Maxims, with a further 100 Indian Contingent for garrison duty; 50 Somalis formed the Depot Company. A hundred men of the Indian Contingent were at Las Dureh, 50 at Sheikh, and 150 men of the 73rd Carnatic [Indian] Infantry were garrisoned at Berbera. This, of course, was not the whole force available, as the Illaloes, the Somali Irregulars, although not of the same quality as soldiers, were excellent scouts.

From Burao, Cubitt led his force against the six very formidable blockhouse forts which formed the Sayyid's defensive system at Shimber Berris. Approaching from the north, the army would face a steep escarpment where the Burdap [Bur Dab] range rose sheer from the plain to a height of 1100 feet (some 340 metres). From the south, the approach was scarcely less formidable, across hills and valleys covered with loose rock and a thornbush scrub. On a narrow plateau at the top stood three well sited forts covering all the approaches, and three more overlooked a ravine where the all important wells were situated some eight hundred feet below. The steep sides of the ravine – too steep to attack over, and riddled with caves – stood some 1100 to 1200 yards (approx 1000–1100 metres) apart at the top. A path nearly four miles long which ran along the crest of the hills provided a link between the three forts planted there, of which two were on a western spur, and one on an eastern.

Cubitt marched his force to a point some 15 miles south of the forts, and on 19 November, marching rapidly, arrived within three miles of the forts before he was discovered. The forts themselves presented a formidable problem. Their exterior walls, of rock cemented by mud, were some twelve feet thick at the base, and an interior chamber had walls four feet in thickness. They were two storeys high, with the upper floor supported by heavy baulks of timber. Loopholes in the walls provided a field of fire against attacking troops, who, if they survived the fire from the loopholes, and arrived safely at the dead ground against the wall, would find themselves overlooked by 'machicouli' galleries which projected out from the upper floor above them. The door was placed in the side which it was most difficult to attack, and once the door was gained, the attacker, peering inside by the dim light which came through the small loopholes, found himself confronted by a steep step down, which exposed him to point blank fire from machicouli galleries above and from the interior. Each fort could hold some fifty men, supplied with sufficient food and water to withstand a short siege – which would perhaps present the attacker with more water supply problems than those experienced by the determined defenders within.

Cubitt decided to attack the forts on the western spur. The speed of his approach had been such that the first fort, attacked by Lieutenant Howard with a party of the Indian contingent, was rushed before it could be fully manned. The second fort was manned and ready. Cubitt proposed to attack this with the Indian Contingent, but Carton de Wiart, ever ready for action, persuaded him to let his Somali 'C' Company make the assault. While the decision was being made, Carton de Wiart was amused at the antics of the dervishes, who repeatedly popped their heads above the wall to acquaint their enemies with their considered opinions of their dubious legitimacy, despite being fired on when they did so.

When Cubitt had conveyed his permission, Carton de Wiart and his men charged forward impetuously, gaining the wall of the fort without a casualty. Arriving at the door, Carton de Wiart was blasted backwards by a shot from the gallery at a range of less than a yard, which passed through his rolled up shirtsleeve; he was then hit in the eye, received a splinter in his elbow (which he pulled out) and then found his ear split, all from a range so close that he could have touched the dervish rifles with his stick. His ear was stitched on the spot by an accompanying doctor.

Cubitt sent Ismay to find out what had happened, and Carton de Wiart, ever positive, informed him that so many rounds had been fired into the fort by the attackers that few could have been left alive inside; he proposed that the Maxims should fire continuously at the machicouli galleries for two minutes, and that the five British officers on the spot should then charge. The guns duly spat out a stream of lead at the galleries, which were damaged, while the officers checked their watches. At the appointed time, they arose and charged. Lieutenant Symons had the back of his head blown off by a

soft-nosed dervish bullet, Carton de Wiart was hit in his already damaged and painful eye by a ricochet,¹⁹ but continued forward; Lawrence was hit in the arm. Arriving on the scene, Cubitt decided that it would be necessary to use artillery against the fort, and therefore to postpone any further assault until its arrival, which had already been requested. The force retreated to their positions, Ismay, who commanded the rearguard, expecting to be attacked at any moment. However, Ismay later asked a prisoner why they had not attacked him when he had retreated, and the prisoner, who initially thought that he had been joking, told him that half the garrison had been killed and that the other half were 'full of holes'. This, wrote Ismay, had taught him 'a valuable lesson', that whenever he felt frightened or discouraged he 'derived much comfort from the thought that mine enemy was probably in even greater difficulties, and even more unhappy'.²⁰ The ever positive Carton de Wiart seemed to have recognized this instinctively.

Three days later a single 7-pounder muzzle loading cannon,²¹ which had last seen service thirty-six years before, was brought up to a range of some two hundred yards and discharged at the fort; after securing three or four hits, which inflicted little harm on the thick walls, the defenders, who had fought with great courage previously, fled. Such is the power of the novel and the unexpected over the bravest mind. The impact on morale of the projected bombardment from the air might be imagined! The other fort on the western spur and the fort on the eastern were similarly cleared. The gun was moved downhill, one of the forts in the valley which guarded the wells was shelled – and the rest were instantly evacuated. However, there were no explosives with the column by which the forts could be destroyed, and the wounded – including Carton de Wiart – needed to be evacuated to Burao quickly; and so the forts on the hill were disabled by burning the woodwork, destroying the machicouli galleries and pulling down the front walls of the top storeys. The valley forts were left. The column arrived at Burao on 25 November 1914. The Sayyid immediately reoccupied the forts, in an attempt to nullify the undoubted moral advantage which Cubitt had gained. He also began to build new ones.

However, Cubitt reported to Archer that his forces were insufficient to enable the Friendlies to graze their stock in the Ain Valley and to patrol the land to the north, as this would require establishing and manning strongpoints. His success at Shimber Berris he attributed to his sudden arrival and to the ancient artillery piece. When the dervishes discovered what little real effect this antique had had on the walls, it would lose all its value. He asked for a further 600 men, a modern gun and explosives to destroy the dervish forts completely.

He got the explosives, and fourteen men of the 21st Sikh Pioneers from Aden to go with them. On 1 February 1915, 571 men of the Camel Corps, with two Indian officers and fifteen British officers, accompanied by two 7-pounder rifled and muzzle loading cannon with the Indian Contingent, and six Maxims, advanced on Shimber Berris. Geoffrey Archer, the Commissioner, was with them, 'in order to gain personal knowledge of a locality possessing grazing grounds which are essential to the welfare of our friendlies...' Tribal auxiliaries from the Habr Yunis and Habr Toljaala were placed some 10 miles east of Shimber Berris, on the dervish line of retreat, with a force from the Dolbahanta at Shimber Berris itself. The Habr Yunis performed almost satisfactorily, the Habr Toljaala less well, and the Dolbahanta miserably, convincing Archer that 'the full measure of co-operation to be looked for from the friendlies lies in the employment of small bodies of specially picked Illaloes'.

Cubitt advanced first against the partially demolished forts on the heights, and finding these unoccupied, demolished them completely. They discovered, however, that the foundations of a much larger fort had been laid. The force now advanced on the dervishes occupying the three forts in the

valley and the caves. The artillery was directed against the middle fort, which commanded the wells. The two flanking forts were captured, but the middle fort was held to the last, despite shells, Maxims and assaults. Finally the Sikh Pioneers bravely rushed the door and placed charges against it. Ismay reported in his memoirs that the charges had been expected to stun the defenders, and that the troops were straining at the leash, expecting to follow their detonation with a rush to the door before the gallant defenders could recover their wits. But it was not to be; Ismay wrote that 'the whole building seemed to rise skywards and collapse in a tangled mass of enormous boulders...'. Ten dervishes lay dead under the rubble, despite frantic efforts to dig them out alive, for they had excited the admiration of their foes. The caves were cleared by artillery and grenades, the force retired to Burao, and the wells at Shimber Berris were guarded by Somali Illaloes. Whether as friend or foe, the Somalis had proved that, when acting in a well trained and disciplined body, they were very formidable fighters indeed.

The nearest dervish post in the Ain Valley was now Jidbali, some 60 miles away. Illalo garrisons in or near the valley were planted at Waridad, Arregir, Idoweina, Kirrit, Garrero and Ainabo. These Illaloes, picked men, were successful in recovering stock lost to the dervishes by Friendlies who had approached too close to Jidbali. In May 1915 an expedition against Jidbali, reinforced by 650 men of the Aden garrison, had to be cancelled due to problems in the Aden Protectorate. The British Government now stepped in and placed a ban on all offensive operations. The Great War came first, and the casualty lists were mounting. The Sayyid would have to wait.

In May 1915 the *London Gazette* reported that Lieutenant-Colonel T.A. Cubitt DSO was promoted to Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel (his rank had been that of Major, temporary Lieutenant-Colonel) and Captain Adrian Carton de Wiart gained the Distinguished Service Order. Cubitt returned to Britain in January 1916. Major G.H. Summers, who had been Staff Officer, was given the command of the troops with the temporary rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and Ismay became Staff Officer and Intelligence Officer, positions at which he excelled.

Despite the Camel Corps standing on the defensive, the position facing the Sayyid was far from promising. A severe drought afflicted the Protectorate, forcing many more tribes to seek the Ain Valley wells, from which he was now largely excluded. The rains finally came to the western Protectorate at the end of February 1916, but not to Burao and the Ain valley in the eastern. But he was confined to the east of the Protectorate, and west of a line drawn from Ankhor through Eil Dur Elan to Badwein the friendly tribes could graze their flocks in relative safety, protected by 300 Illaloes at the wells in the Ain Valley. These useful irregulars were instructed to deal with small raids themselves, but if a larger force appeared they were to shadow its movements, reporting its position at once to the Camel Corps at Burao. The now battle hardened and disciplined Camel Corps made several raids every year into the dervish territory, familiarizing themselves with the enemy and the terrain, and imposing an attrition on the Sayyid's supplies both of men and ammunition.

The entry of the Turkish Sultan into the war might have inspired hopes that the Moslem Somalis would rally behind the Commander of the Faithful, but the more ancient and ingrained inter tribal hatreds, and the fear inspired by the Sayyid's cruelties, proved stronger. The Turks, indeed, had invaded the Aden Protectorate and established themselves near Lahej, close to Aden; but there they dangled on the end of a long supply line, with no real prospect of taking Aden, and absolutely none at all of landing in Somaliland.

Apart from a German/Turkish victory in the Great War, the Sayyid had one small hope. We have already noted the Emperor Menelik's designation of his grandson, Lij Yasu, as his successor, and that worthy's attempts to secure a Muslim power base by apostasy. His efforts certainly caused

diplomatic alarm at the time. But a letter from the Sayyid to the British Government, in which he referred to the dervishes as British subjects, and which contained a threat to 'seek help and efficient help elsewhere than from you' (i.e. Lij Yasu) received the reply (from Lieutenant-Colonel Summers, in Archer's absence) that the British 'had no need to listen to childish threats'. In Harrar province, rather than a menacing union of Muslims under Lij Yasu, anarchy reigned. Lij Yasu indeed, who had not yet openly embraced Islam, impeded any British attempt to settle the Ogaden question, and British subjects in Harrar province were 'murdered, assaulted, imprisoned without reason, and otherwise ill used' and the caravan routes were unsafe. Major J.H. Dodds, the British Consul in Harrar, suggested to Wilfred Thesiger, the British Ambassador, that many Harraris would welcome a direct British administration of the province, but fortunately, such a fishing expedition in troubled waters, which might have united Abyssinia against Britain, was not carried out.²² The Sayyid did profit with some trade and some armaments, but hopes of the formidable warriors of the ancient Christian kingdom descending from the mountains to his aid under a sympathetic, or even Muslim, Negus Negusti were wispy dreams of the dawn, which dissolved in the resurgent light of a Christian sun.

The Sayyid was also hemmed in by the Warsangli, who although they had traded and intrigued with the dervishes, felt their independence threatened, and became hostile. On 9 May 1916 the infuriated Sayyid struck north, against the not exactly innocent, and not exactly honest, Sultan of Las Khorai, using forces from both Tale and Jidbali. The town was besieged, and many atrocities were perpetrated on the local population. Casualties were high. Women and children were deliberately killed by the emissaries of fundamentalism. A group of the Warsangli seized a dhow and hastened to Aden for help. Before it could arrive the dervishes broke in, but the Sultan and his warriors held out bravely in the Arab built forts both in and around the town, while many of the inhabitants escaped into the surrounding bush. On 11 May, help came from the sea; HMS *Northbrook*²³ arrived and opened fire on the town's assailants, who fled. The *Northbrook* sailed along the coast to a point 6000 yards from the mountain pass through which the dervishes retreated. Twenty-four high-explosive shells were fired with very great accuracy, and although the dervishes were seen carrying off some of their injured and dead, 171 corpses were later found at the entrance to the pass. A landing party restored order, and ministered to the wounded. The town now received a garrison. Meanwhile, the dervishes, on their return to Tale and Jidbali, mounted an attack against the Mousa Aboker [Musa Abokir/ Musa Aboukir] tribe, who had strayed beyond the protected zone, inflicting heavy losses in both men and camels. The tiger may have been hemmed in, but his bite was still too strong and his claws were still too sharp to enter his cage with impunity.

Although the Abyssinians under Lij Yasu actually achieved little to help the Sayyid, they did make some attempts. A freelance German mechanic, Emil Kirsch, alias Casson, had drifted around Africa, mending typewriters and other machines. In August 1914 he happened to be in French Somaliland, at Djibouti, and he slipped quietly into neutral Abyssinia to avoid internment. There he met the Emperor Lij Yasu. For a mechanic, to meet an emperor is no small thing, and to be asked to assist an Imperial ally might have seemed even more of an honour, particularly as that ally was a thorn in the side of the British, with whom his homeland was even then engaged in a bitter and desperate war. He agreed to a five-month contract with the Sayyid at Tale, repairing guns and making ammunition. The Emperor pledged his surety for his safe return from Somaliland. How high had the typewriter repairer risen, and what form might an Abyssinian or a German emperor's gratitude take?

Unfortunately for poor Emil Kirsch, the itinerant mechanic, his reward came from the Sayyid. He could repair rifles, but he could not make them from nothing; he could even make ammunition, but he could not repair broken and obsolescent Maxim guns without the necessary parts. And he was an

infidel. Whenever the Sayyid was near him, he would cover his mouth and nose with his tobe, his cotton sash, to avoid being polluted by the infidel's presence. To render assistance to Emil Kirsch in his exercise in technology, he had him abused; when this proved ineffective, he attempted to aid his ingenuity by having him flogged. When his five-month contract expired, he requested permission to return to Abyssinia and to the Emperor. The Sayyid then introduced him to the science or art of mutilation, which was performed on the Sayyid's less committed followers before his eyes, and in which he was promised an experience at first hand. Resolving to escape, he first hardened his feet, as shoes would have left too easy a trail to follow. He lowered himself over the wall of the fort, and fled with Ahmed, his faithful servant. Heading into the wilderness to avoid a more obvious path, they ran out of water. Ahmed left him under a tree, dragged himself on to find water, and returning with his precious liquid, found that the spirit of Emil Kirsch, oppressed alike by a merciless fanatic and an equally pitiless land, had left him.²⁴ Whether it survived death, who can say? But it might be imagined by the more religious that, if it did, the dark soul of the Sayyid is not now offended by its presence, for poor Emil Kirsch, whatever his faults may have been, surely deserves better company in a better place.

The Camel Corps, although in insufficient numbers to defeat the dervishes completely, was certainly successful in containing them, and fought two serious battles with them. The first began in October 1917 after the dervishes under Husein Yusuf had raided the Habr Toljaala, Mousa Aboker and the Omer, capturing some 200 camels and several thousand sheep and goats, beating off an attack by Illaloes from Dongorreh before retreating with their loot. Thus encouraged, he had moved through the hills north of Eil Dur Elan against the Mousa Aboker who were grazing south east of Las Dureh, capturing 300 camels and 7000 sheep and goats. Major Breeding, who now commanded the Camel Corps, assembled a force of 2 camel companies, 2 pony troops, 1 pony company, the Indian Contingent and 5 machine guns 28 miles north east of Burao. They marched to Eil Dur Elan, where they left tired camels in a zariba under a strong guard, continuing the pursuit with 150 pony rifles, 100 camel rifles and all five of the deadly machine guns. Stopping 27 miles east of Eil Dur Elan, they received reports from the Illaloes that the dervishes were encamped some 20 miles ahead, and that across their line of retreat lay a range of hills through which there were only two difficult passes. But the 20 miles between the Camel Corps and the dervishes was broken and very rough. A message sent via the Illaloes to the Tribal Levy, telling them to seize and hold one of the passes, arrived too late. Captain Ismay was accordingly sent with a flying column and two machine guns to see what might be done to discomfort the dervishes, and relieve them of the burden of their plunder.

Ismay, on arrival at the passes, found that the dervishes and their plunder had already passed through, and had left a rear guard holding the heights. He forthwith sent the tribal levies to attack the western, Aglub, pass, creating a diversion while he stormed the eastern, the Endow, pass. An hour later, Breeding came up with the main force. The attackers forced the pass to the distance of a mile, but the looted stock was by now far away, and the age old problem of supply loomed – they had only two days rations left, and the going was very slow. They therefore disengaged and returned to Eil Dur Elan.

Despite the dervishes escaping with their looted stock, the battle of the Endow Pass was a significant success for the Camel Corps. At a cost of 10 men wounded they had killed no fewer than 70 of the enemy. At one point 32 dead and 18 rifles were counted; the abandoned rifles spoke volumes about the rapidity and disorder of the dervish retreat. The Corps had marched 135 miles through broken country, much of it unknown, and with 9 hours' rest in the 75 hours since starting, had been under arms for 57 hours. They had then stormed into a strong position. Clearly the Somaliland

Camel Corps were a remarkably tough and disciplined force, and were well led; they had now established an ascendancy over the dervishes, which lasted through to the end, for those undoubtedly brave warriors henceforth avoided encounters with the Corps, which circumscribed their looting activities considerably.

The second battle was at the Ok pass. The officer commanding at Las Dureh reported to Burao by telegraph that tracks of dervishes seen the previous day at Rujuna indicated a raid could be expected on the Saral Plain. On the next day some 400 men of the Camel Corps with six machine guns and a Lewis Gun were assembled at Negegr Spur, and advanced to Ok, which had a plentiful water supply, commanded the Saral Plain and was within easy reach of the ration dump at Eil Dur Elan. In command was Major Howard.

Leaving a pony company in a zariba under Captain R.F. Simons to guard Ok, Howard proceeded with the rest of the force to Eil Dur Elan to get supplies.

Just before dawn around 550 dervishes, mistaking the zariba for a karia of Friendlies, perhaps deliberately misled,²⁵ attacked the west, east and south faces of the zariba successively. In oft repeated fanatical rushes, they were cut down, suffering heavy casualties to the Lewis gun which was positioned at the eastern corner. The dervishes, running low on ammunition, attempted to occupy a nearby hill, but were driven off by heavy fire. They then attempted to concentrate in the bush to the south west, but once again were driven off by heavy fire, abandoning both wounded and rifles. Simons had lost two killed and three wounded in the assault; the dervishes lost sixty-four killed and three captured, as well as twenty-four rifles and twelve bandoliers of ammunition.

Captain Simons now rather wisely consolidated his position, informing Major Howard of the action and patrolling strongly. Howard, realizing that the dervishes were unaware of his presence, laid a trap. Now pursued by Simons, the dervishes were delighted to see the latter retreat (to slow the dervish retreat, as well as for supplies) and after making insulting remarks and gestures, loud were the celebrations and many the looted camels and sheep slain and eaten. The next day they were ambushed; 200 were cut down by rifle and machine gun fire, and the field crawled with their wounded; in their precipitate flight many rifles were thrown away and their loot was abandoned. It was recorded that, 'At Government Headquarters, the action of the Ok Pass was regarded as the most complete defeat inflicted on the dervishes since Jidali in 1904.'²⁶

But this battle took place in March 1919, and four months before the Allies had signed the Armistice which marked their victory in the greatest war in history. Would the British Government, sickened by the horrible casualties of the 'War to end War', and gripped by the need for stringent economy after the endless expenditure and waste of war, seek peace in Somaliland? Or would they settle accounts once and for all with the Mad Mullah by the use of the overwhelming mobilized force now available to them?

Chapter Twelve

Deus Ex Machina

*I am the rider of the wind,
The stirrer of the storm;
The hurricane I left behind
Is yet with lightning warm;
To speed to thee, o'er shore and sea
I swept upon the blast;
'The fleet I met sailed well - and yet
'Twill sink ere night be past.'*

Byron, 'Manfred'

Throughout the Great War of 1914–1918 the Giant's influence was felt by land and sea. However, he had enemies; the Tories, who hated Churchill for his defection to the Liberal Party, took advantage of the failure at the Dardanelles and the formation of a coalition Government to claim Churchill's scalp, and he was removed – almost dragged, such was his distressful reluctance – from the Admiralty in May 1915. He was made Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, a lowly position but which still carried Cabinet rank, and from which he resigned in November 1915, to see active service on the western front from January to May 1916 – where his restless mind sought radical solutions to the bloody stalemate of the trenches, and he became involved in the genesis of the tank.

But his judgements were nowhere more profound and his vision nowhere more clear, than in his grasp of the significance of air power. He had been, as we have seen, a major figure in the growth of Britain's Air Service before 1914. He had also tried to preserve the Royal Flying Corps as one institution, with naval and military wings, until friction between the two services rendered this impossible, and the Royal Naval Air Service became a branch of the Royal Navy, rather than of the Royal Flying Corps, leaving the latter title to the Army.¹ Churchill had asked the RFC military wing – the War Office were in charge of home defence – for aeroplanes to be detailed to defend certain areas such as dockyards. However, at a Cabinet meeting on 1 September 1914, he received an unpleasant surprise. Lord Kitchener drew him to one side and asked if he would accept 'on behalf of the Admiralty, the responsibility for the aerial defence of Great Britain, as the War Office had no means of discharging it'² This was a bombshell indeed, for the War Office had insisted even in July 1914 that they were solely responsible for home air defence.

However, defence, in the eyes of Winston Spencer Churchill, often meant attack. Since the German Zeppelins were the prime cause of concern, he resolved to attack them in their own lairs. He realized the great value of an advanced base for the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), as it had come to be called, at Dunkirk. This eventually proved a great thorn in the side of the German navy, which suffered repeated air attacks from the RNAS based there. In 1914 the naval planes attacked the

Zeppelin sheds at Friedrichshafen on the shores of Lake Constance, in a very daring attack which destroyed a Zeppelin and an associated gasworks.

The Giant returned to the Cabinet in July 1917, as Minister of Munitions. It might be thought that, from this position, his influence on air power and the strategic direction of the Great War would not have been great. However, in October 1917 he wrote a paper for the cabinet entitled 'Munitions Possibilities for 1918'. Now it is certain that the munitions programme for 1918 was dependent on the strategy to be adopted in 1918; but in Winston Churchill's eyes, this intimate connection between the two seemed to mean that, as the Minister of Munitions was involved in the decision as to what grand strategies were possible in 1918, he should at least present his suggestions! He therefore gave an analysis of them. His paper began:

In deciding upon the munitions programme for 1918, the first question to be answered is 'What is the war plan? When is it to reach its climax? Have we the possibility of winning in 1918, and if so, how are we going to do it?'

There then followed a magisterial survey of the war to date, the state of the combatants, and of the path to victory. The theme was one of how, after the collapse of Russia, the small Allied numerical advantage expected for 1918 could be improved and magnified by the Allied use of mechanical factors such as tanks, artillery, transport and, above all, aircraft.

Point 19 of this marvellous analysis began: 'Most important of all the mechanical factors which are available comes the air offensive...'

A little later comes the classic Churchillian sentence 'War proceeds by slaughter and manoeuvre...' By manoeuvre, Churchill included the war on and under the seas, and in the air.

In this analysis, he discusses the possibility of winning by strategic bombing alone.

'It is not possible', he wrote, 'to speak of an air offensive as if it were going to finish the war by itself.'

It is improbable that any terrorization of the civil population which could be achieved by air attack would compel the government of a great nation to surrender. ...therefore an air offensive should consistently be directed at striking at the bases and communications upon whose structure the fighting power of his armies and his fleets of the sea and air depends... the supreme and direct object of an air offensive is to deprive the German armies on the western front of their capacity for resistance.

In a later paragraph on the air war, he concluded that:

We have greatly suffered and are still suffering in the progress of our means of air warfare from the absence of a proper General Staff studying the possibilities of air warfare, not merely as an ancillary service to the special operations of the army and navy, but also *as an independent arm* [italics added] co-operating in the general plan. Material developments must necessarily be misguided so long as they do not relate to a definite war plan for the air, which again is combined with the general war plan.

23. In consequence of this many very important points are still in doubt or dispute, on which systematised staff study could have by now given very clear pronouncements. The dominating and immediate interests of the army and the navy have overlain air warfare and

prevented many promising lines of investigation from being pursued with the necessary science and authority...

He went on to contrast the extremes of opinion on the possibilities of air power, from detractors who pointed out that military life continued even under massive artillery bombardment, and the proponents, 'who claimed', Churchill said:

that aerial warfare had never yet been practised except in miniature: that bombing in particular has never been studied as a science: that the hitting of objects from great heights by day or night is worthy of as intense a volume of scientific study as, for instance, is brought to bear upon perfecting the gunnery of the fleet: that much of the unfavourable data accumulated showing the comparative ineffectiveness of bombing consists of results of unscientific action – for instance, dropping bombs singly without proper sighting apparatus or specially trained 'bomb droppers' [the equivalent of gun layers] instead of dropping them in regulated salvos by specially trained men, so as to straddle the target properly...

Churchill went on to suggest that:

On the assumption that these more sanguine views are justly founded, the primary objective of an air force becomes plainly apparent, viz., the air bases of the enemy and the consequent destruction of his air fighting forces. ...If, for instance, our numerical superiority in the air were sufficient at a certain period next year to enable us in the space of 2 or 3 weeks to sacrifice 2,000 or 3,000 aeroplanes, their pilots being either killed or captured, in locating or destroying by bomb or fire, either from a great height or if necessary from quite low down, all or nearly all of the enemy's hangars, and making unusable all or nearly all his landing grounds, and starting grounds within 50 or 60 miles of his front line, his air force might be definitely beaten, and once beaten, could be kept beaten.

Once this result was achieved and real mastery of the air obtained, all sorts of enterprises which are now not possible would become easy...

Churchill, in this memorable paper, argued for an independent air force. He also argued for a sort of Blitzkrieg effort brought on by armoured battlefield transport as well as by tanks and artillery. It was precisely this combination of air force, tanks, artillery, machine guns and infantry working in close co-ordination which broke the German army in 1918.³

The German air attacks on London in 1917, which caused severe disruption and popular disquiet, led the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, to form a committee which consisted of himself and General Smuts, the brilliant Boer leader of 15 years before, and now an Imperial General, conqueror of German South-West Africa, who happened to be in London at the time. General Smuts, given power to consult the highest reaches of the British civil and military world, wrote two reports. The first dealt with the organization of UK defence against air attack, and the great diversion of forces which even a small air attack could engender.

His second report was dated 17 August 1917, and stated that:

...The time is, however, rapidly approaching when the subordination of the Air Board and the Air Service [to military and naval direction and policy] can no longer be justified...

There followed an ominous prediction:

Unlike artillery an air fleet can conduct extensive operations far from, and independently of, both army and navy. As far as can at present be foreseen there is absolutely no limit to the scale of its future independent war use. And the day may not be far off when aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale may become the principal operations of war, to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate...

An independent air force became reality on 1 April 1918, when the Royal Air Force was created; Britain now had three fighting services.

When the war ended, however, and the old order of things, reality and normality seemed to be restored, and no major military threat, no life or death struggle, faced the Imperial power, the RAF came under attack from the old order, the Army and the Navy. Surely the independent role of air power was an exigency of wartime only, an emergency measure, and the RAF had no longer any real reason for existence? What could be its role in Imperial defence, save as an adjunct to the Army and Navy?

How could the RAF, under heavy attack from the Army and Navy, and all three under heavy attack from His Majesty's Treasury, defend itself? Surely two services were less expensive than three? Who could be found to defend its independence?

In December 1918, after a general election, but before the results were known, the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, asked the Giant whether he wanted to return to the Admiralty, or whether he would prefer the War Office. Winston Churchill was enthralled by a chance to return to the Admiralty, a position he had filled with such energy and foresight, and from which he had been so ignominiously dragged in 1915. He felt that he would 'add more weight' there than at the War Office. He also pointed out that 'there will be good reason for connecting the Air with the Admiralty', for as aeroplanes grew in size they would increasingly become substitutes for 'many classes of warships'.⁴ They could never, he felt, be a substitute for armies. But later, the Prime Minister added the Air Ministry to the offer of the War Office. Churchill accepted, becoming Minister for War *and* Air. His prime task was to preside over a huge demobilization of both services.

Winston Churchill now called on the assistance of an extraordinary man to preside over the RAF as Chief of the Air Staff. Sir Hugh Trenchard had briefly occupied that position before, but declined Churchill's invitation, believing that they would be unable to agree on the policy for the future of the service, and that the combination of the two offices of Army and Air signified Lloyd George's belief that the two forces should again be united. Churchill asked him to go away and write down his views on policy, while he did the same, and suggested that they should then exchange their notes the next day. On reading Trenchard's, Churchill said that he had had no time to write his own, but found nothing disagreeable with his own thoughts in Trenchard's note! By this ruse Churchill employed the man who saved the RAF.⁵

Churchill and Trenchard had, indeed, met before – on the polo field in India, Trenchard having raised a polo team in his *infantry* regiment (against the initial opposition of his Commanding Officer)

and so organizing the purchase of ponies that he and his less well off colleagues competed on equal terms with the more wealthy cavalrymen. The two had clashed on the field, due to Churchill's somewhat lax and self-indulgent view of the rules, but had made it up afterwards. They were to clash furiously from time to time, Trenchard keeping Churchill to his stated belief in the RAF when he felt that the mercurial Giant occasionally became too easily influenced by whoever had put their case to him last.

To ensure that the new service was seen as distinct and separate from the others, Churchill insisted on new ranks and new uniforms. Major-General Trenchard now became Air Vice-Marshal Trenchard.⁶ Hugh Montagu Trenchard was born in 1873, the son of a captain in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He was powerful in both mind and voice – his later nickname was 'Boom' – but the power of his mind was sometimes obscured by his difficulty in communicating his thoughts, for his speech was often inarticulate and his writing illegible. Several examination failures had led to his entering the Army via the Militia, and he was commissioned into the Royal Scots Fusiliers. He was dangerously wounded in 1900 during the Great Boer War of 1899–1902, although he returned to serve later in the war, in the Mounted Infantry. He subsequently served with distinction in Nigeria. By February 1912 Trenchard was casting around for new fields, applying to the colonial defence forces of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and later, the Macedonian Gendarmerie. All these applications were under consideration by the War Office who, had they acted sooner on any of them, might have changed the course of history. But the newly formed Royal Flying Corps came to Trenchard's notice. He discovered that in just ten days he would be considered by the War Office as too old to fly! He immediately applied to learn, and passed on 13 August 1912, after just seven days.

In his new discipline his grasp was phenomenal, his talent great, and his energy and application unequalled. By 1 October 1912 he had become an instructor. By 23 September 1913 he rose to Assistant Commandant. By 7 August 1914, just three days after Britain's declaration of war on Germany, he applied himself to the huge task of expansion of aircraft, of pilots and of mechanics. He was by now a Lieutenant-Colonel. Three months later he was in command of the First Wing at St Omer, and by August 1915 of the whole of the RFC in France, continuing in this position until 1918, when he briefly became Chief of the Air Staff for the first time.

During his time in France, Trenchard elaborated his doctrine – that of a relentless offensive. This doctrine had, to some extent, been dictated by circumstances, for the German Army, retreating from the Battle of the Marne in 1914, had skilfully occupied positions which overlooked the Allied lines. Reconnaissance, photography and artillery spotting had therefore to take place over the German lines.

The central truth upon which the doctrine rested was Trenchard's belief that 'The moral effect of an aeroplane is out of all proportion to the damage it can inflict.' If you attacked, you multiplied the effect and injured the enemy's morale; if the enemy attacked, he multiplied the effect and injured yours. An attitude of defence meant the acceptance of this grave disadvantage. Further, because of cloud and the difficulty of locating attacking aircraft in those pre-radar days, Trenchard propounded another great truth – the bomber will always get through, and therefore 'the aeroplane is no defence against the aeroplane'. The aeroplane was thus an offensive weapon, and defence simply detracted from the power of the offensive. The moral effect of an enemy's attack on you must be countered by redoubling your attack upon him. This doctrine led to the relentless air offensive conducted by the RAF in the Second World War. It was Trenchard who had used the adjective 'relentless'; the relentlessness, however, was in respect of your own casualties, not, as might be expected by the moralist, the enemy's. The terrible losses of the RFC in the Great War, and of Bomber Command in

the Second World War, were a reflection of just how relentlessly the doctrine would be pursued.

When the war ended and the RAF came under attack from the older services, Trenchard therefore had two main defences; he proposed an inexpensive, minimalist force, 'building the foundations for a castle which may be built at some later date but in the meantime building a cottage upon those foundations'. The superstructure of the castle might be built in the cloudy and distant future; it would be an essentially *independent* Air Force deterrent to any attack on London and the other cities of Britain, with all its known, expected, and rapidly increasing horrors – carnage by blast, incineration and asphyxiating and poisonous gas or terrible microbes and bacteria which would result from the yet unforeseeable event of another war with a major industrialized power. These fears, grounded in the experience of the previous attacks and multiplied by every advance of science and aeronautics, gripped and terrified and chilled government and people alike.

But these terrors were not foreseen for the *immediate* future, and financial retrenchment was; the threat to the independent RAF remained. So Trenchard also proposed that, because of their moral effect being out of all proportion to the damage which they could inflict, the aircraft of his minimalist, cheap, cottage-sized *independent* RAF could end or manage colonial wars, now and in the future, far more cheaply than could the army. He cast around for a colonial war which might provide a useful example of this, and act as a pillar of the independence of the RAF – and out of the blue, one day in May 1919, Lord Milner, the Colonial Secretary, invited him to a private discussion. The subject was British Somaliland. The Giant had been busy.

No colonial campaign was more tiresome or more wasteful or less successful than that waged for the last twenty years against the Sayyid in Somaliland! How was the Mullah to be dealt with? The Commissioner had pressed for action during the Great War (although Somaliland was the very least of the Army's worries) calling for forces against the Mullah like an Old Testament prophet railing against Nineveh. He wrote to Fiddes at the Colonial Office in 1916, during the Battle of the Somme. Fiddes had agreed, and the Colonial Office had asked the Army Council, who, although they understood the need, were 'unable to concur' in any immediate campaign. Archer enquired again in early December 1917, but was told that demands on shipping were too great. The year 1917 had seen huge sinkings of British ships and huge losses in the offensive at Passchendaele; the year 1918 opened in expectation of a big German offensive, a last-gasp effort made possible by a temporary superiority of numbers due to the collapse of Russia before dwindling resources, civil unrest, blockade and the constant reinforcements of American troops led to inevitable defeat.

But with the defeat of the German offensives, with the German Armies in full, though disciplined, retreat, the indefatigable Archer tried again, calling on the War Gods on 15 October 1918 for consideration of action against the Mullah. At last the Prophet's call was answered! General Hoskins was sent to Berbera, 'to consult as to the possibility of undertaking successful operations against the Mullah either during the coming winter or at a later period'.⁷ All at Berbera were delighted. In 1914 Cubitt, when the Sayyid was stronger, had estimated some 600 additional men would be needed. Ismay hoped that his intelligence reports would convince the General that the Sayyid was 'ripe for the sickle', with only a 'very small addition to the local forces' being needed.⁸ Archer, the Commissioner, thought that 'two or three Battalions, plus a few aeroplanes' would suffice.⁹

Major-General Sir A.R. Hoskins arrived at Berbera on 8 December 1918. The next evening he and his staff were invited to dinner by Archer. Talking to the General, Archer was disconcerted by a conversation which he overheard at the other end of the table. Hoskins' Chief Staff Officer, Colonel French, appeared to say of the General 'Of course, I do not know what the ultimate recommendation

of the General will be'...but carried on 'but assuming that he feels a couple of Divisions would do the trick...' A 'couple of Divisions'! Even after the recent reduction in the size of a division to three brigades of three battalions each, an *additional* force of eighteen battalions, when the current force required a grant in aid, represented a major expense. Why would Parliament approve this now, with the need for retrenchment after the expenditure of vast sums in the *War to End War*? Archer tried to dissuade Hoskins, but the latter, who had seen service in Somaliland before, in the King's African Rifles, drew him aside and said 'You and I, Archer, are *bush-whackers*, but it is the modern officer with his high military training who knows best what should be done.'¹⁰

On 10 January 1919 Viscount Milner became Secretary of State for the Colonies. Milner wrote the foreword to Douglas Jardine's *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, in which he stated that he 'well remembered the reluctance of the Government to sanction the expedition'. He added that:

the thought of a fresh war, on however small a scale, was abhorrent to all of us. And in view of our growing financial difficulties, the cost of the expedition, which, to judge from previous experience, might last for months and involve the expenditure of several millions, presented a formidable difficulty.

The Army Council had informed the Colonial Office that satisfactory results could only be obtained by an expedition of 'considerable magnitude' as recommended by General Hoskins, and this would also involve the co-operation of the Italians and Abyssinians; the former power was seeking territorial compensation for her huge and scarcely rewarded efforts in the Great War, perhaps in British Somaliland, and the latter power was in its own Imperial crisis, as we have seen. Further, public opinion was not in favour of fresh military trials. After the peace treaty had been signed, perhaps an expedition on this scale could be organized from the garrisons of Egypt and Palestine.¹¹

Archer, faced with the prospect of the Mullah being allowed to continue to plague his administration:

...thought it advisable to take advantage of the presence of Major-General Hoskins and his Staff to draw up for the information of the Colonial Office and the War Office a joint memorandum regarding the military policies which might be followed in the Protectorate.

Archer now suggested a greatly scaled down attack, a raid, by an additional 900 men, suitably armed with Vickers machine guns and 3.7-inch howitzers, all intensively trained, together with a flight of Handley Page aircraft based on Aden, to attack the Mullah's 'Haroun' (his armed encampment) at Tale, with the possibility of scattering his forces and possibly capturing or killing him.

Archer pleaded his case before the Under Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, L.S. Amery, with Cubitt and Hoskins also present – but the War Office, anticipating a demand for a relief expedition to rescue an inadequate force, considered Archer's scaled down proposals to be 'ill considered and ill advised', and he was formally informed of their rejection in a note, signed by 'seven members of the Army Council headed by a Field Marshal'.¹²

But these were the old ways, the old ideas albeit with new grafts. It was time for the new. Archer was informed that it was considered that the RAF could solve his problem *alone!* The Giant's shadow once again loomed over Somaliland, this time in conjunction with the formidable figure of Hugh Montague Trenchard. We have seen the opinion of the new Secretary of State for the Colonies,

Viscount Milner, on the cost of another army expedition presenting a ‘formidable difficulty’. But Milner had continued:

...But Mr Churchill and his advisers at the Air Ministry succeeded in persuading me that, with the help of the Air Force, the work could be much more quickly and cheaply accomplished, and of this I in turn succeeded in persuading the Prime Minister. Once the case was clearly put before him, he decided it with his usual promptness, and the expedition was sent...

Well, Milner was basically correct. However, it was he, as we have seen, who had invited Trenchard to discuss Somaliland, and Trenchard had advised him to confirm with Churchill the RAF’s capability of dealing with the Mullah. Soon after, Churchill chaired a meeting at the War Office with Milner’s Deputy, Leo Amery, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff – Sir Henry Wilson – and Trenchard. Wilson objected strongly to Trenchard’s scheme, but had to accept it when informed that ‘under no conceivable circumstances’ would he be asked for troops.¹³

On 13 August 1919, in the Secretary of State’s room at the Colonial Office, and in the presence of Viscount Milner, Major-General Seely (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Air Force), Lieutenant-Colonel L.S. Amery (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Colonies) and his secretary Major H.C. Thornton, Geoffrey Archer, Colonel Nugent of the General Staff and Wing Commander Chamier¹⁴ of the Air Ministry, the great Trenchard laid out his wares, laced with warnings against *any* dilutions or compromises.

Geoffrey Archer, the Prophet, who had constantly invoked the war gods against the Mullah, and now seated among the war gods themselves, set out the case for action against the Mullah. No longer a purely religious leader, he held his force together through sheer terror, for desertion, if successful, resulted in the death of all the deserter’s relatives. If his force were broken up, however, many would take the opportunity of flight and freedom from paralysing fear.

Archer, telling the assembled war gods about the Mullah’s fortress at Tale, suggested that there were:

...two views as to the nature of the operations which should be undertaken.

(1) The first involved close co-operation between the Camel Corps and Air – Craft [sic]. The object of this operation would be to bomb Tale effectively, and then immediately to send the Camel Corps forward to defeat and scatter the main Dervish force and to complete the destruction of the forts, thus inflicting the maximum of loss on the Mullah.

(2) The second involved aeroplanes acting alone. If this operation were successful in demoralising and scattering the Dervishes a column could be employed subsequently in pursuit and could march leisurely to Tale and blow up the forts, if required. In either case it would not be necessary to hold the place.

Seely duly stated that ‘there was a great deal to be said for a purely air operation’, for a ‘succession of bombing raids would have the greatest moral effect’.

Archer agreed to the second plan, but thought that ‘we ought to use the force we had at hand...the camel corps...and our friendly tribesmen would provide the best chance of killing or capturing the Mullah himself’.

Trenchard now magisterially objected to the first plan with an argument that also scotched Archer's suggested amendment to the second. He pointed out that:

...directly you move men forward your air-strength would be dissipated in *defensive* [italics added] measures to guard the men, with the result that there would be very few machines left to carry out the actual bombing.

Milner then enquired how many aeroplanes would be needed. Trenchard's answer was a calculated risk, a touch of *panache*, which would be bound to capture the Treasury; he suggested one flight, accompanied by the personnel of a squadron, to be drawn, with the permission of the War Office (and Winston Churchill, the Minister for War, was hardly likely allow a refusal!) from the garrison of Egypt. This was just *six* aeroplanes, with six spares! Needless to say, all ancillaries, all medical and supply forces would be supplied by the RAF alone. The Army must not be involved at all. Trenchard also threw in the offer of a free airship, as the RAF already had plans to experiment with one in that area of the world. This might be useful in reconnoitring the ground beforehand.

Trenchard now gave an estimate of the cost – £66,000 for six months. However, from this he deducted £30,000, which represented the cost of the maintenance of the flight, which the RAF would have had to bear anyway. Trenchard, however, felt that he could not *guarantee* that the expenses to be borne by the Colonial Office would not exceed £36,000. This was an offer which surely could not be refused by anyone responsible to a war satiated people and a hard-pressed Treasury. A sum of £36,000 to rid the Empire of this troublesome priest who had already cost it four million! Who *could* refuse? Certainly not the Colonial Office. Not even the Army – and certainly not the Giant who stood at its head as Secretary of State for War – and Air!

Colonel Nugent did offer the opinion that it would be better to postpone operations until man power and shipping were available to put General Hoskins' scheme into effect, as this promised the capture or killing of the Mullah himself. But he had been trumped. He felt that he could not object to Trenchard's scheme, providing that it involved no land forces. Trenchard again confirmed this, for this was, of course, his aim – adding that he would arrange the shipping. It would be an operation by the *independent* RAF, and the RAF alone. This was Trenchard's cool cast of the die, for success or failure would heavily influence, if not decide, the three services' struggle over the future of air power.

Archer now pointed out that, if the Air Force scheme were successful, he could dispense with the loan of the half a Battalion of Indian Infantry which was now at his disposal. Another cost saver, another benefit to be considered by the powerful Lords of His Majesty's Treasury!

The Committee, needless to say, adopted Trenchard's scheme. General Seely was deputed to 'mention the matter' to the Secretary of State for War – and Lord Milner was deputed to seek the latter's concurrence – but as we have seen, this office was occupied by that same farseeing and gigantic personality, Winston Churchill, who already controlled the air power of Great Britain; it hardly seemed that any great amount of persuasion would be necessary, for Churchill was fully involved with Trenchard in his farsighted and long maintained advocacy of RAF independence. On 8 October 1919 Lord Milner also sought the agreement of the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George (who thought that he had already agreed to it anyway) and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom he would also furnish with Archer's estimates of the great cost savings which were likely to arise from the operation. He then immediately informed the Air Ministry of the Prime Minister's wish that operations should be conducted at once.

The War Cabinet Secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, asked the Colonial Office

to send a short note to the War Office, but Milner declined, asking that circulation be restricted on the grounds of the great value of surprise in the aerial effort. This said much for the Sayyid's intelligence service, or little for War Office security.

On 22 October, at a discussion in London between the Colonial Office and the RAF, it was confirmed that the costs which the Colonial Office would incur should only be in excess of the normal peacetime expenditure of the flight on personnel and materials. The RAF insisted, however, that the costs of airfield clearance should be borne by the Colonial Office, as had been agreed with the Governor.

The plans were now laid. The RAF unit involved was designated 'Z' force, and placed under the command of Group Captain Gordon (whose rank was described as 'Colonel' in Geoffrey Archer's reports – the RAF ranks had, of course, only just been designated, and must have been largely unknown or unfamiliar outside the RAF). The RAF personnel were warned on 22 October that:

The success of the operation depends to a great extent on the element of surprise: the necessity for the greatest secrecy will therefore from the start be impressed on all ranks. Although it may be impossible to ensure that some news of the projected operation shall not reach the enemy, they are unlikely to consider the danger as serious until aircraft or typical aircraft stores such as aeroplane hangars, appear on the borders of the administered territory...The necessity for maintaining secrecy precludes absolutely the undertaking of reconnaissances other than those essential to the success of the aerial raid itself...

But it was noted at Berbera on 6 November that bombs from Egypt had arrived badly packed in open crates, and if this were not enough to compromise security, marked 'aerial bombs'! The Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, had been requested by a cypher telegram to ensure that the bombs were marked with a large 'Z'. A port detachment consisting of one officer and two aircraft hands was sent to Aden to deal with this consignment, which also included oil and petrol.

Geoffrey Archer immediately asked Milner to expedite the aerial attack.

On 12 December 1919 Group Captain Gordon and his staff officer met with Geoffrey Archer at Government House in Berbera to discuss the forthcoming operation. Archer wielded unusual power for a British Colonial Governor; like Caesar, in his *provincia* he was in charge of both the civil and military power. The only independent commander with complete liberty of action was Group Captain Gordon, and then only in his initial aerial operations; even in that, however, he had to report via the Governor to the Colonial Office and to the Air Ministry. 'The idea of a Government Department in London exercising close control of a war in a remote corner of Africa', thought Ismay, 'had at least the merit of novelty.' In subsequent operations His Excellency the Governor, 'by virtue of his functions as Commander-in-Chief...should be in a position to secure adequate coordination as between the air and military forces throughout the campaign.'

This unusual arrangement cleverly avoided highly sensitive and political questions of the Air Force being under ultimate Army control, or vice versa.

Also present at the meeting were the Officer Commanding the Army in Somaliland, Colonel G.H. Summers; the Commandant of the Camel Corps, Lieutenant-Colonel H.L. Ismay; Captain A. Gibb, in charge of the Friendlies; Major H. Rayne, in charge of Supplies and Transport; Dr F.E. Whitehead, the Senior Medical Officer; and last, but not least as far as history is concerned, the Secretary to the Administration, Douglas J. Jardine, OBE, who acted as Secretary to the Conference, and to whose book *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, published in 1923, the present author is in a

great, and happily acknowledged, debt.

Colonel Summers had advocated a forward movement of the Camel Corps to Eil Dur Elan, but Archer had delayed this until the arrival of the aeroplanes of 'Z' force at Berbera, in case the Mullah should take alarm and move his Haroun, becoming difficult for the fliers to locate. However, he now sanctioned an immediate move, as the aerodrome was to be built there, within half a mile of running water, instead of at Las Khorai as originally planned, being deterred from that place by the monsoon wind, which for six hours a day blew a 'continuous form of sandstorm' some 200 feet high, as well as the necessity for the unloading of supplies over an open beach from native boats. The Friendlies, under Gibb, were to be deployed far from the Haroun as a blocking force to intercept the Mullah's flight, and a reward of 5000 or 10,000 rupees¹⁵ 'dead or alive' was mooted to encourage and prioritize their efforts to kill or capture the Mullah himself, rather than, in accordance with their time honoured and campfire recounted delight and pride, making livestock looting their first priority.

Group Captain Gordon outlined his timetable of operations. The *Ark Royal*, an aircraft carrier converted from a merchant ship, would be wired the next day (13 December) to proceed to Berbera from Alexandria with the crated de Havilland DH9 aircraft (two seaters, with a bomb capacity of 460lb) and their crews, arriving on 23 December. Two machines would be ready by 31 December, and five by 2 January. Allowing seven days for contingencies, the attack on the Mullah would commence on 18 January 1920. The Camel Corps were scheduled to arrive at Eil Dur Elan on 1 January.

In fact, *Ark Royal* did not leave Alexandria until 21 December, arriving at Berbera on 30 December. The first aeroplanes were put together on 1 January 1920 (they had been 'carelessly packed'¹⁶ in England, occasioning some delay) and by the 8th the first three had had a test flight. The camel track between Berbera and Las Dureh was made fit for light motor vehicles; by 17 January the airfield at Eil Dur Elan was ready with stores and personnel, apart from the men and machines who were to fly from Berbera – one of which turned back due to engine trouble.

Warrant Officers, NCOs and other ranks were issued with their kit at Halton before departure from England. Their kit, thirty-eight items (to start) was detailed down to the last jot, each man, for example being issued with tins of dubbin (to soften boots) – but not more than 2oz per month – and identity discs to be inserted in the active service paybook. Officers, whether flying or non-flying, had to report for a medical examination before inoculation, vaccination, and dental overhaul. Surely a force of well chosen, well cared for, fit, eager ground staff!

But the RAF was simultaneously undergoing huge changes; it had not been independent two years yet, but was demobilizing the largest air force in the world, some 22,000 machines in 1918, to the minimal force which Trenchard had secured despite attack from a critical Treasury and an acquisitive Army and Navy. Its future might depend on this operation, but with change and uncertainty whirling all around, how well would 'Z' Force's 32 officers and 158 Other Ranks (ORs)¹⁷ perform?

Some serious weaknesses existed. The Medical Officer noted that, despite a preliminary medical examination in Egypt, some airmen of 'Z' Force arrived in the hard and taxing climate of Somaliland suffering from congenital hernias, chronic double hydrocele (fluid in the scrotum), recurrent rheumatic fever with serious cardiac complications, chronic cardiac disease, and anaemia. The Medical Officer wrote:

Passing such men fit for General Service in a tropical country and especially in a unit organised on a minimum basis for a short, sharp and successful thrust, with no opportunity

to replace its sick wastage – and where every man counts is a dangerously short sighted policy.

These men inevitably find their way into Hospital and remain [underlined in original] there as they did in ‘Z’ some of them practically through the whole operations. This is a very serious handicap upon a small unit and emphasises the necessity for a strict selection to a reasonable standard of fitness.

It was also noted that the armourers were, ‘with one exception’, inexperienced. They improved with instruction, but although ‘very willing workers’, they were ‘doubtful armourers’; of the three men sent from Egypt, two were Batmen, (officers’ servants) and remained in that category. One of the wireless operators was also a Batman, having failed his Wireless Telegraphy test. Four operators sent out, ‘having no experience... and being able to send and receive on average ten words per minute were almost useless and spent their time in buzzer practice’. However, the report stated that:

...the five men [wireless operators] who volunteered and forfeited their three months re-engaging leave to come on the expedition worked splendidly and contributed largely to the success of the work.

Seven aircraft flew from Berbera to the airfield at Eil Dur Elan on 19 January, and another followed on the next day.

On 20 January five machines flew on a reconnaissance to the north east of Eil Dur Elan, while two located the Camel Corps near El Afweina and dropped messages. All was now ready for Trenchard’s great gamble.

Chapter Thirteen

The End of the Sayyid

*...And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods...?*

Lord Macaulay, 'The Lays of Ancient Rome'

The RAF independent strike against the Mullah was to take place from Eil Dur Elan airfield on 21 January 1920. The aircraft would strike at Jid Ali and Medishe (some 12 miles to the north west of Jid Ali¹ where the latest intelligence reports placed the Sayyid) to demoralize and scatter the dervish army, and to kill or stampede his stock. Simultaneously, 'A' Force, consisting of three camel and two pony companies of the Somaliland Camel Corps together with one and a half companies of the 101st Grenadiers, Indian Army, were to advance towards Jid Ali to prevent the escape of stock, or troops, and hopefully the Mullah himself, to the south. 'B' Force, consisting of the King's African Rifles at Musa Aled (less one company in garrison at Las Khorai) were to march to the dervish fort at Baran and block escape to the east. Independent air operations were to continue until the Mullah's stock had been scattered, and no more suitable targets could be found.

On 21 January six aircraft took off from Eil Dur Elan on their vital surprise mission. However, clouds obscured areas of the country, with which the flyers were not familiar anyway. Four of the aircraft failed to find Medishe, but bombed the fort at Jid Ali and attacked livestock in the surrounding country. One machine had to land at Las Khorai with engine trouble. But one aeroplane, carrying machine guns, bombs and Trenchard's and the Air Force's reputation and perhaps survival, found Medishe.

The Sayyid had observed the approach and disappearance of all six aircraft. As yet still unaware – perhaps disbelieving – of Allied victory over Germany – and Muslim Turkey – in the Great War, he enquired of his advisers just what they were and who had sent them. However, as torture and immolation were the rewards of bringing bad or pessimistic news to the Sayyid, no one was foolish or truthful enough to suggest that the machines possibly carried aerial assassins; some, perhaps a little over optimistic, suggested to the unpredictable and deeply religious potentate that they were chariots sent by the all merciful God to conduct his beloved and faithful Sayyid to Paradise. However, the *merciless* dervish might, if he had any realization of the nature of his deeds, have surely realized that a *merciful* Allah would scarcely express such approval of conduct so opposite to his strictures. A Turk, however, suggested that his master, the Ottoman Sultan, the Commander of the Faithful, had sent messages to announce his victory over the infidels in the Great War. This seemed to make sense to the assembled company, and the return of one of the aircraft seemed to confirm this supposition.

To meet the Sultan's emissaries, the Sayyid dressed himself in his finest set of clothes, and

together with Amir Hassan, his uncle and advisor, upon whose arm he leaned, he waited under a white canopy for the arrival of the messenger. But the message which descended from the aeroplane was an altogether more sinister one, composed not of poetic and flattering words but of high-explosive packed into an iron case. The explosion killed Amir Hassan outright, reportedly killed the Mullah's sister as well,² and singed the Mullah's clothes. It was followed by raking machine gun fire. This single aeroplane had come within an ace of ending the twenty-year war altogether.³

The other four aircraft, although they failed to locate Medishe, had bombed the fortress at Jid Ali to good effect, and also attacked the dervish livestock, a vital target, the destruction or loss of which would render the dervishes helpless, starving and almost immobile. This might well prove decisive; however, despite war exigencies and the de-sensitizing experiences of the Western Front – and the knowledge of the ultimate fate of the flocks anyway – the bombing and machine gunning of sheep might still evoke a sad reflection on human nature in worshippers of the Good Shepherd.

On the morning of 22 January, four aircraft left to bomb Medishe again, but again one returned with engine trouble. The remaining three machines failed to locate Medishe, but bombed Jid Ali and attacked nearby stock. In the afternoon three aircraft again took off for Medishe, but again, one of them returned with engine trouble. The two remaining aircraft found and bombed Medishe, and 'large numbers of dervishes were observed running away'. The RAF report went on to say that:

...The village was bombed from 1,000 to 2,000 ft.; direct hits obtained on village and southern Fort; also direct hits on stock moving eastward from the village and apparently following river bed in direction of Jid Ali. Machines then descended to 900 ft. and shot up dervishes and stock with good effect. Estimated amount of stock 2,000 Camels and six flock [sic] of sheep. No big movement of dervishes seen. By the numerous huts scattered all round Medishi [sic] and Handies area it is considered that his forces are still scattered tending their various flocks.

Ismay, however, thought that the Mullah and his followers had 'taken refuge in deep caves, and no great damage was done'.⁴ Archer concurred in this opinion, stating that, unknown to the British at the time, the Mullah had 'taken refuge in a cave fifteen miles to the north-west' where he left his treasure, his weapons and those unserviceable prizes, the Maxims captured at Gumburu and Erigo. Archer reported that the dervishes in the Fort had 'continued firing at the aeroplanes as they came over with the utmost valour, while screaming defiance'.⁵

On 23 January, six aircraft started out, but three returned with engine trouble. Large numbers of livestock were observed when the three serviceable aircraft attacked Medishe, and movement was seen in the village. Incendiary bombs had started fires in several huts. 'Very heavy casualties' were caused to flocks of sheep by accurate bombing, after which the planes descended to 800 feet and used their machine guns until all their ammunition was expended, causing panic 'among the dervishes and stock' – that among the latter being hardly surprising. The large amount of stock seen around Medishe – considerably more than the day before – led Gordon to consider that the Mullah had collected them in preparation for a move.

On that afternoon, two aircraft reconnoitred the area, and saw no dervishes, and no sign of activity. Two fires were observed close to the fort at Jid Ali, which was again bombed, but without securing any hits. Medishe was bombed again. Dervishes who attempted to extinguish the fires which had been started were attacked from 300 feet and dispersed. Quantities of dead stock from the

morning's raid were observed, and added to by further machine gunning, with 'excellent results' achieved. The village was 'practically destroyed'.

On 24 January three aircraft flew over Medishe and Jid Ali, finding only a small flock of sheep, which they duly machine-gunned. At Jid Ali some twenty animals were gunned down, and the Fort was again bombed, with hits to the south-west corner. The whole area for some 30 miles around was then searched, with only two 'trotting camels' seen. The three aircraft then bombed the wells in the area, in the hope of killing or stampeding any stock which may have been concealed there. One machine failed to return. The crew walked to Raguda, on the coast, where they were picked up by the crew of HMS *Odin*.

Wing Commander Gordon now decided that the aims of the independent Air Force operation had been achieved; the Mullah's forces had been scattered and his livestock killed or fled; Jid Ali had been bombed, Medishe destroyed. It was clear to Gordon that the fugitive Mullah was in hiding, 'preparing to flee', and there was no sign of large bands of armed men. He therefore informed the Governor, and combined operations began the following day, 25 January.

On the morning of 27 January Ismay and the Camel Corps, 'A' Force, having advanced from El Afweina by rapid marches, reached Jid Ali. The RAF dropped a message to inform them that they were about to bomb Jid Ali Fort, which they straddled, and secured one direct hit, although they had doubts about the damage caused due to the thickness of the walls. A small amount of livestock was machine-gunned.

Gordon's report went on to say that an aeroplane, shooting into the fort to cover the Camel Corps' advance, 'compelled ten of the garrison to evacuate hurriedly, last seen flying into the bushes'. The Camel Corps bombarded the Fort with a 'Stokes Gun', a three-inch trench mortar, and the remaining garrison got away during the night of 27/28 January. Troops occupied the fort on the morning of 28 January, finding 'one small boy and a half-witted woman' therein.

Ismay, however, tells the story with a slightly different emphasis; the Stokes Gun attack was met with a determined defence; 'far from being demoralised', wrote Ismay, the defenders 'fired away merrily and seemed in excellent heart and voice'.⁶ The assault was delayed until the morning and the expected arrival of explosives and hand grenades; but the dervishes evacuated the Fort during the night.

The reason for the difference in emphasis, which runs like a thread through the various campaign reports, is immediately apparent at the commencement of Gordon's final report to Winston Churchill 'on the Air side of the operations in Somaliland in January and February, 1920', which was sent in May 1920. It ran, after a brief introduction, as follows:

...2. Opportunity was taken to test the theory that the moral effect of the new arm, with its power to carry out, without warning, a form of attack against which no counter measures could avail, would so disperse and demoralise the dervish following that troops would be enabled to capture the Mullah's stock and destroy his forts.

This object was attained in full...

The RAF had found a new reason for the necessity of its independent existence, a new Imperial task, which it alone could achieve *economically*; it possessed a new, *unique* power to demoralize, and it would see, and emphasize, this demoralization in every description of the campaign. Its life depended upon it.

In the meantime the 6th King's African Rifles, 'B' Force, advanced upon the fort at Baran,

arriving on the morning of 23 January. Stokes Gun fire was ineffective against the thick walls of the fort. The attack was broken off at night, and resumed the next day, again without effect, the dervishes defiant and shouting abuse. In the night, explosive charges were laid against the walls. Next morning a platoon discovered the dervishes retiring from the fort, and it was taken in a rush, the remainder of the garrison being killed. One brave man had remained in his tower, defiantly fighting to the inevitable end, which came in hand-to-hand fighting, by revolver fire from an officer.

A naval force from HMS *Odin* and *Clio* stormed the fortress at Galbaribur, the garrison fighting bravely to the last man, despite suffering attack from the air beforehand.

News was now received of the Mullah himself. A deserter arrived at Jid Ali, reporting that he had fled south from the Surud hills, intending to make for the Leopard River, the Shabeele, by way of the Nogal Valley. On 31 January tracks were seen heading towards the waterless Sorl Haud, and the Camel Corps, pursuing by a parallel, well-watered route, tried to cut them off. At El Der, large numbers of livestock were encountered and some rounded up, but because of the necessity for speed, most were allowed to escape. An aerial reconnaissance discovered the Mullah still ahead, and so the parallel pursuit was continued. El Afweina was reached at midnight on 1 February. On the evening of 2 February the Corps reached Hudin, having marched 150 miles in 72 hours.

On 1 February an air reconnaissance of Tale revealed the defences of that place to be even more formidable than previously thought, and it was presumed that the Sayyid would aim to arrive at that fortress. Accordingly, it was bombed on 4 February. Three machines scored three direct hits with 112lb bombs on the main fort, and a further four direct hits with 20lb bombs; one direct hit was achieved on a smaller fort. Huts outside were ignited by incendiary bombs, the fire spreading rapidly in a strong wind. The machines then 'shot up' the inhabitants from low level.

On 2 February two aircraft dropped a message to Captain Gibb, in charge of the Friendlies, at Duhung, warning him to watch out for the Mullah – which he acknowledged by waving his hat. After 4 February *all* military despatches were carried for a time by aeroplane, the Army wireless telegraphy system having broken down completely. The Air Force dropped messages and ferried Summers and Archer to consult with Gordon at Eil Dur Elan. It was decided to bomb Tale intensively from close range, to break the dervish morale, before assaulting that formidable fortress. Accordingly, supplies of petrol, oil and bombs were sent to Gaolo, and the bombing was scheduled to begin by 20 February.

Gibb and the Friendlies enjoyed a considerable success on 6 February, intercepting the Mullah's caravan near Tale and capturing 1400 camels, 50 ponies and 400 cows, and in addition capturing 51 rifles, 300 rations and parts of the Mullah's effects, which included a letter of support from Lij Yasu, the Abyssinian Emperor. Five of the Sayyid's closest aides, including his son Hagi Omar, deserted to the Camel Corps at Gaolo. They reported that their master had been in the Fort at Tale when it was bombed on 4 February. In these circumstances it was decided not to wait for all the stores to arrive at Gaolo, but to bomb Tale on 13 February from El Afweina with all the aeroplanes at his disposal, to exploit the 'moral effect'. But on 12 February two machines landed at Gaolo and brought stirring news from Ismay's Camel Corps.

The report told how on 9 February one of the Sayyid's sons, Abdurrahman Jahid, and his uncle, deserted, giving information that his father would leave Tale that night; now Ismay with the Camel Corps and Gibb with the Friendlies had decided to 'make a demonstration' around Tale, to 'prevent the Mullah from bolting'. Gibb's pickets had been attacked by 150 dervishes issuing from Tale, and Gibb then saw the Mullah and some 70 horsemen leaving; informing Ismay that he believed the Fort to be lightly held, he stated that he was going to attack Tale with all his force. Panic had ensued in Tale,

all the forts had fallen by the following day, 45 dervishes were killed, 600 rifles and some 450 camels and 40 ponies were captured. Ismay, who lay some 3 miles to the south, took up the pursuit at daybreak. The Sayyid was reported to be retreating towards the Sorl, and from thence to Halin. The Camel Corps rode hard in pursuit all day. However, the animals were not in a good condition after the very hard marching of the recent past, and several officers were 'prostrated by vomiting and violent diarrhoea' as a result of drinking water which was 'more than usually filthy'.⁷

Ismay now decided to pursue the Mullah with fit men only; just 6 officers and 150 of the fittest of the men and animals – but with two mortars and three machine guns. They started off again at moonrise, famished and tired. Ismay reported that he found, in his haversack, a piece of fat which had fallen unnoticed out of a sandwich eaten 'several days' before. However, 'Decency', wrote Ismay, 'compelled me to offer a portion to my adjutant,' adding that 'He was as grateful as if I had given him a five course champagne dinner.'

The Sayyid's northward movement had been a blind; he had doubled back and headed south for the border with all speed, and Ismay's pursuit had begun to flag, labouring forward under the burning sun of Somaliland, often chasing mirages of wild asses, believing them to be horsemen. However, when their leading patrol surprised a picket, all were galvanized into life again. The prisoners reported that a large number of men, women and children were resting in the Bihen nullah, a dry watercourse near Gerrowei, about a mile ahead. They were surprised and attacked. Ismay reported 'a scene of wild confusion, women and children screaming blue murder and riflemen firing in all directions'. The riflemen, thirty in all,⁸ charged by the Sayyid with the protection of his wife and children, *far* from being demoralized, nobly died to the last man, fighting, like the Spartans at Thermopylae, 'in obedience to their charge'. The women and children were 'providentially' unharmed. Ismay wrote that his men, starving as they were, gave titbits, and very weak tea, to the women and children, adding that 'There is a rough chivalry among soldiers the world over.'

The next morning Ismay gave chase to a party who were moving south past their camp, capturing the Sayyid's favourite wife. Searching the area for the leader himself, a scout reported that he had tracked a horseman, accompanied by some twelve footmen and two camels, heading south. Ismay pursued with just twenty ponymen – all that were left who were able to manage more than a walking pace. One horseman, the rest walking – this seemed as though it could very well be the Mullah himself! They were overtaken after a two-hour chase; but the man was an Abyssinian, by name Bayenna, by military rank a Fitaurari (commander of the advance guard, the third highest rank under Ras, a governor, and Dejasmach, a general).⁹ He had been in the Mullah's camp for a number of years, and had now been given an escort home. However, with almost all his bodyguard, he died fighting.

Ismay, whose soldiers had been on half rations for a long time, with less than one day's food left for men and animals, and some 60 miles from supplies, now reluctantly gave up the chase. The fittest of the camels were given to the captive women and children. Sixty of the Mullah's personal following had been killed; this included seven sons, seven other close relatives, and four immediate advisers. Six of his sons, all five wives, four daughters and two sisters were in captivity. A son, a brother and a few other 'notorious dervishes' escaped with him into the Abyssinian Ogaden.¹⁰

This seemed to Ismay and Gordon to be the end of the campaign. Yet, incredible to relate, the Sayyid now started again. Golden words reinspired fervent adherents. 'Only he is lost, who gives himself up for lost' was the later motto of Hans Ulrich Rudel, the skilful and courageous Second World War Stuka pilot, and the Mullah lived out that sentiment and precept to the last. Recognizing his

enemy's amazing recuperative powers, Archer sent him an offer; live in peace in Somaliland, concerning yourself only with religion, and the past will be forgotten! He was required, however, to appear in person – a letter of acceptance of the terms would not be regarded as valid. Almost needless to say, the reply was by letter, and temporized. Three sheikhs and seven Akils were now sent trembling on the road to the Ogaden, bearing precise terms. One sheikh had vomited in terror on being asked; the rest were despatched with every sign of trepidation and reluctance, being hardly sanguine of their chances of survival. Their eventual return was received by their heirs with genuine surprise, feigned pleasure and secret consternation, their goods having been apportioned among them on a rumour of their deaths.¹¹ Such was the reputation of the Mullah for savage and unrelenting cruelty that he had been *expected* to break a truce – ‘an ergo’, a peace deputation – whose observance was sacred to the Somali Muslims.¹²

In addition to the terror felt by the embassy at the Mullah's expected malignity, the Bagheri part of the Abyssinian Ogaden, extending from Walwal to the Shabeele, to which the Sayyid had escaped, was both lawless and fever ridden – the Abyssinians themselves were reluctant to administer, or even enter it – and they were therefore reliant to an extent on his active protection. ‘There were many stray bullets’, wrote Jardine, ‘...looking for a billet somewhere.’

What they encountered was utter contempt. They waited before the Mullah in silence – for two hours – before being invited to dismount. They were asked if it was a meeting of Christians and Mohammedans, or Mohammedans only. They dared not reply. The Mullah wrote their names on his bare arm with a thorn. Around them singers positioned themselves, chanting their battle cry ‘Mohammed Salih’. Some 500 riflemen and 150 horsemen sang ‘The unbelievers are beaten: the unbelievers are not circumcised.’¹³ The armed men then surrounded them, blowing horns.

However, they were fed well, and their food was tasted beforehand to prevent unauthorized poisoning by his enthusiastic followers. Any postprandial security they may have begun to feel was swept away by the punishment publicly given to a man who had deserted his post; he was whipped terribly on his face, his chest and his belly; he collapsed in a merciful oblivion, awakening only to find himself burning alive.

In a loud voice, so that the Ogaden in the camp could hear, the Sayyid accepted Archer's terms, on condition of receiving back what he had lost, which he put at £100,000 in gold coins, vast quantities of livestock, five boxes of diamonds, all dervishes who had surrendered or deserted, all his forts, quantities of weapons (including 30 Maxim guns), ivory, feathers, 20,000 dollars, 30,000 piastres, pearls and books, amongst other things. He also required guarantees of peace from the other tribes.

With this somewhat heavily qualified, colourful and contemptuous ‘acceptance’ of the peace terms, the delegation returned with their hands empty – but at least still attached to their arms. The Mullah, now more secure among the Ogaden tribes, and still recruiting, began to grow again. He raided. He captured livestock. He gained arms. He gained ammunition. He prepared for a triumphal return to British Somaliland.

But now Archer struck hard. He summoned an Akil, Haji Mohammed Bullaleh, also known, significantly, as Haji *Warabe*, the *Hyaena*, who had hitherto been restrained from avenging himself for raids by the Abyssinian Ogaden, and unleashed him. Three thousand Habr Yunis, Habr Toljaala and Dolbahanta crossed into the Ogaden and hit the Mullah's encampment at dawn. The Mullah escaped by the skin of his teeth. His fighting men, those who stood, died on the spot. Some 60,000 livestock and 700 rifles rewarded the Hyaena, but he was cheated of the real prize, the Sayyid himself, who drifted away westward, arriving at Imi sometime in October, still defiant, still with

some 400 followers.

There came to him there a more dangerous and sinister enemy than all those at whom he had hurled poetic defiance in the past. In *The War of the Worlds*, H.G.Wells wrote that the hitherto invincible Martian invaders had been 'slain, after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon the earth'. The Sayyid succumbed, on 23 November 1920, after defying the devices of three powerful empires for over twenty years, to the deadly strain of influenza, the enemy of all and killer of so many, that had swept the world after the Great War, killing many more than the war itself.¹⁴

Thus, almost alone at the last, his wives and children dead or in captivity, perished the human frame of the *Wadad Wal*, the 'Mad' Mullah, the Sayyid. A dome was reverently erected over his remains. But for what had he so liberally shed the blood of men, women and children? His enemies were triumphant. His fortresses were destroyed. The empires against which he had fought still controlled the destiny of the lands over which the Somalis roamed. The lords of Britain, whose rule had often benefited the vast lands over which they held sway, had been deterred from investing in the future of the Somalis by the vast expenses of the campaigns against him. His followers now dispersed, forgiven by the British, to beg, to return to the clans from which they had been called, or to die unheeded and alone.

Yet through that great harsh land his spirit still roves, embodied in matchless verse, sometimes to the good of his people, and sometimes to their bane; his voice yet echoes in every barren hill, whispers his message through every dry river bed, and roars defiance with every gust of wind in a blazing camp fire.

Chapter Fourteen

Retrospect

*There's no deformity so vile, so base,
That 'tis not somewhere thought a charm, a grace;
No foul reproach that may not steal a beam
From other suns, to bleach it to esteem!*

Thomas Moore, 'The Sceptic'

The great men who have passed across the flickering historical screen of British Somaliland are now all dead. Some bravely, but rashly, left their bones in Somaliland, like Plunkett and Corfield; many others fought with the utmost courage and died in battles under the leadership of others; dervishes, 'British' Somali, Yaos, Indians and British breathed their last and lie forgotten in a desolate wilderness. Even Gibb, who survived the Mullah's war only to fall victim to a premature attempt by Archer at taxing the nomadic tribesmen of the hinterland, met his end there.¹

Of those who returned to their homeland, many achieved a fame which eclipsed a brief acclaim earned in Somaliland. 'Johnny' Gough of Daratoleh fame became a general, only to perish in the Great War. Lieutenant Ismay became Major-General Lord Ismay, and played an essential part in achieving victory in the greater war of 1939–1945. Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, who so nearly met his end at Shimberberris in 1915, survived to become a successful general and a trusted emissary. Interestingly, on hearing the news of the death of the 'colourful and romantic' Mullah, he felt a 'real personal loss'. He had held his force together, he thought, 'by the sheer force of a magnetic personality'.²

But there were two great personalities in that almost forgotten conflict who will ever be remembered; the Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hassan, and the greatest man of the greatest of the empires, the Giant himself. Sir Winston Churchill, who would later breathe a lone and magnificent defiance at the most wicked system ever to infect a civilized nation, had in 1910 abandoned those under Imperial protection, and shrunk from the renewal of a contest with such an *expensively* implacable antagonist – but had later returned to the charge, after a decade, brandishing, and preserving for their finest hour, the Empire's new *independent* RAF.

The Greek historian Plutarch, writing in Roman times, composed a series of 'Parallel Lives' of Classical Greeks and Romans, seeking to find a common thread in apparently disparate personalities; but at first glance, of course, few lives could appear so dissimilar as those of the great parliamentarian Churchill and the despotic Mullah, the breadth of vision of the one seeming only to emphasize the narrowness of the other. Yet certain similarities do exist.

Sir Winston Churchill was born into a family and a tradition of great abilities and political influence. His mind was capacious, but in his early years, undisciplined. His wit was legendary. His book *My Early Life* is filled with self-deprecating humour. His memory was impressive. His natural command of the English language was enlarged and enriched by the close study of great authors,

especially Edward Gibbon. He delighted in using his rhetorical powers to persuade others of the truth of propositions which he did not believe himself, and many feared to dispute a point with him however wrong they felt him to be. His sympathies were large, his emotions both deep and apparent, and his liberalism sincere. His oratory was magnificent, rising to heights which inspired a nation and freedom's cause in a great climacteric in world history, when the forces of darkness marched triumphant over Europe.

Perhaps the first similarity which may be seen in the lives of the two men was in the 'paths of glory' which seemed to shine before them at their birth, the Sayyid having a family tradition of religious eminence as formative, perhaps, as Sir Winston Churchill's political inheritance. His great grandfather, Sheikh Ismaan of Bardeere, earned a reputation for piety, his tomb being still an object of veneration in the area. His grandfather, Hasan Nuur, set up religious centres, and devoted himself to worship. His father, Abdille, likewise devoted himself to religion, and was, like his grandfather, awarded the title of sheikh.³ Thus the Sayyid was as born into religion as was Sir Winston Churchill into public affairs. When he learned the Koran by heart at 11 years old, he was following a parallel course with Churchill, who had at 13 learned 1200 lines from Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome* by heart at school, being influenced throughout life by them;⁴ although not, perhaps, regarding them with the same total reverence as the Sayyid did the Koran.

When Churchill spoke of 'lift[ing] again the tattered flag he found lying on a stricken field', his sentiments were much more personal than the Sayyid's, who on returning to his homeland with a newly refined and purified vision after his experience in Mecca, had surveyed the condition of Islam in his native land, feeling it assailed by complacency and Christianity alike. In this sense neither man was a revolutionary, for Churchill was as deeply attached to a glorious vision of the past and to an evolution from that to an ideal world order, as was the Sayyid to his notion of the system of life revealed to the Prophet Mohammed so long ago. Churchill, indeed, although as a liberal he was a reformer, and although his great mind embraced new inventions, had a horror of revolution. He loved to quote the predictions of man's future mastery of the air in Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall' (published in 1842):

...When I dipt into the future far as human eye could see;
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonders that would be;
Saw the heavens filled with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;
Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghostly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;...

But Tennyson's prediction of revolution deeply disturbed the aristocrat:

...Slowly comes a hungry people, as a lion, creeping nigher, Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly dying fire...

Churchill never nodded and winked before the lion of revolution, and would never let the fire of liberty die down. Except, of course, long ago and far away in Somaliland. Perhaps both men would have agreed with Tennyson's end to war:

...Til the war – drum throb'd no longer, and the battle flags were furl'd In the Parliament

of man, the Federation of the World.

There the common sense of most shall hold a fretful realm in awe, And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in universal law....

However, their respective visions of the universal law in which the earth was to be lapt would be very different, and only Churchill would have agreed to:

...Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change...

Both men had their own distinct view of the world as young men, which did not change as they aged. Both felt a sense of a great destiny, an urge to advance their cause, and themselves, beyond the wildest dreams of most men. Both felt, or knew, that they had been born for a great purpose. The paths which the Somali Mullah and the imperial aristocrat took to play out their destiny were necessarily different. Their tools – a commanding personality, a wonderful facility with language and an oratorical power unequalled among their peers – were the same.

A sense of the Sayyid's powerful message comes at the beginning of his career, in a call to arms against the Abyssinians, in which he detected signs of 'the last days' in the oppression of Moslems by the 'Amhaar', the Abyssinians, who had come to 'corrupt our ancient religion, to settle our land, to seize our herds, to burn our [villages] and make our children their children', ending 'if you follow me, with the help of God, I will deliver you from the Amhaar'.⁵ This apocalyptic message, with its stark warning and promise of deliverance, thundered out by the Shakespeare of the Somalis, had a telling effect. However, as we have seen, these great successes were counterbalanced by his cruelties; his rash act of the murder of the Dolbahanta Sultan immediately divided his following and reduced his power. On the capture of Medishe, the remains of a dervish who had incurred the Sayyid's displeasure were discovered suspended over a slow fire.⁶ Burning people alive may possess a certain persuasive power in securing unthinking and swift obedience, but its efficacy when compared to securing a genuine devotion to a cause is to be doubted. But the Mullah's words were persuasive, and are still. Perhaps the power of his words has increased because his cruelties are no longer to be dreaded.

That Churchill was capable of ruthlessness is undoubted; certainly legal restraints precluded any torture of his foes! Yet it is difficult to reconcile the character and history of Sir Winston Churchill with any hint of mere wanton cruelty. As Prime Minister in the desperate days of 1940, when the looting of bombed houses carried a maximum penalty of death, he used his influence to mitigate the punishment of a police officer who had removed whisky from a ruined off-licence. As Home Secretary, he was well known as a great reformer of prisoners' conditions. Although the wars waged by the two men were utterly different, one fighting to impose authority on his countrymen while a hunted rebel, the other wielding legitimate power in an organized and well ordered state, it is still difficult to imagine the one using savage cruelties, or the other relaxing harsh laws for the sake of humanity.

The dervish political entity which the Sayyid founded was quite unlike any of the Somali tribes; the dervishes were governed by a ministerial council, to qualify for which Saalihiya '...orthodoxy, prowess in warfare, generosity, allegiance to the Sayyid, eloquence and other qualities deemed important by the Somalis' were necessary.⁷ Then there was the army, organized into regiments, with

separate quarters, arms and horses, each with a commander appointed by the Sayyid. The 'civilian' population, less committed, mainly followed the Sayyid for the grand Somali reason – loot. A bodyguard, composed of the much feared Midgans, with their poisoned arrows, ex-serfs who spoke a different language from Somali and who owed all, including wives and possessions, to the Sayyid, and who called him father, ensured his supremacy over all.

Thus the Sayyid's position in the dervish organization was analogous to that of Augustus in the Roman Empire, nominally a 'first among equals', but in reality a dictator. In the Augustan Empire, the path to power was by military command, and the ruler was careful whom he permitted to conduct campaigns. Power in the dervish state was exercised by religion and poetry, and the Sayyid, controlling religion absolutely, was as guarded in permitting poetic composition by others, as Augustus in allocating military provinces.⁸ He was regarded by his followers with a superstitious awe, and was believed to be capable of killing crows in flight by chanting verses from the Koran.

Both Churchill and the Sayyid possessed an indomitable spirit. Both were, at one time, voices 'crying in the wilderness', warning of those whom they saw to be the enemies of their country, of mankind and of God. Both were sustained in a struggle against odds by a self-belief, a belief that they could save their cause, and that no one else could. But their differences in method are not solely due to circumstances. Mohammed had looked at the same stars as the Sayyid, had breathed the uncompromising air of a harsh land, had been deprived of his inheritance, and had endured persecution for his beliefs; yet his God is a merciful God. In old England, Alfred the Great had been a hunted fugitive, pursued by a fierce foe in his own land, had survived many a desperate and flesh-hewn battlefield, yet when finally victorious, was magnanimous. The Sayyid's cruelty was simply inexcusable, a character flaw which set at nought all his genius and all his many gifts, and ensured that the great majority of Somalis, Muslims as they were, would turn in fear to the alien children of the West for succour.

What military lessons might be learned from the campaigns? Perhaps the first for the British was that, because there existed no enemy capital city, no seat of industry, no place which simply had to be defended at all costs, you had to possess first class intelligence and superior mobility in order to bring the enemy to battle, or to capture his flocks and herds, for it would only be for essentials that he would be *forced* to fight. Without a containing force, to hold him while he was hit, it was like trying to swat a fly with a garden fork. He had not only to be defeated, but cornered, or he could retreat into the unadministered Italian or Abyssinian Somaliland, which would then necessitate a combined operation, or lengthy diplomatic negotiations in order to allow British forces to pursue. If left there for any length of time, flocks and herds would be replenished by the most expert rustlers in the world.

The alternative was to occupy every well in order to exclude the enemy from them. This, however, meant a huge camel-borne supply operation, and very large forces, and therefore, very large costs. Another possibility was to build motor roads and railways so that the forces could move with greater speed and ease than the enemy, and the supply situation would be transformed. But again this vast expenditure, on a very poor province which could not repay the investment, was anathema to a Liberal Government bent on peace, retrenchment and reform. And once again, the enemy could simply retire into the unadministered parts of Somaliland, to the Abyssinian and Italian areas, leaving these huge costs to mount up for no return.

All this, of course, was well known to the Mullah, who played the game consummately. 'He was author, stage manager and principal actor in a play that ran for 21 years', said Ismay, 'and he pocketed all the receipts.' Nor was there any question of an understudy carrying on if the principal actor was removed, for he allowed no one to play 'Khalifa' to his 'Mahdi'.⁹

The Sayyid was always well aware of the close relationship between politics and war, and Ismay was an admirer of his insight ‘not only into the minds of his own people but also of the British politician’. A letter to ‘The English people’ which he sent to Lieutenant-Colonel Swann as he passed just 35 miles south of Bohotle, contained the statement ‘I like war, but you do not...’ But in this, he was right about some politicians – often the majority of them – but this could not be applied to the armed forces, nor to the general public; in this he was fatally wrong. Nations are composed of individuals. Many did not like war in England, and desired ‘Peace, retrenchment and reform’ – but many *did*. There were always enough young officers seeking glory, and the sentiments that rang through many a music hall spoke of the soldiers of the Queen, the trumpet’s call to battle and ‘the fight for England’s glory, lads’.¹⁰ To the armed forces he was unfinished business. He had opened up an account with these, and payment would be demanded until the end.

But there was another, much more dangerous, way of bringing the dervishes to battle. If they had no vital spot save their army itself and their herds, and you could not *force* them to battle, then you could *induce* them to attack you.¹¹ To do this, you would have to either be a small force, or deceive the enemy into thinking that you were. This latter method worked very well in the campaign leading to the fight at Jidbali, where the Sayyid had been convinced by Egerton’s manoeuvres at Obbia that his line of retreat to the south was blocked, and had no idea of the strength of the forces facing him.

A small force had great advantages in ease of supply and therefore movement. And British firepower was vastly greater than the Mullah’s, for the enemy had no machine guns and their fire was often wildly inaccurate. Their most dangerous method of attack was in a rush of spearmen from cover. Imperial troops, on the other hand, including Somalis, were trained¹² to deliver an accurate fire, supplemented by the deadly Maxims. But you simply had to have, in the face of greatly superior numbers of very brave enemy soldiers, a copious supply of ammunition. The enemy suffered very heavy casualties at Gumburu and Daratoleh, and had Plunkett’s force possessed a few thousand rounds more, Gumburu would have been a glorious victory. As it is, the Mullah could have afforded few such victories. The crowning irony was that after the actions of Gumburu and Daratoleh, the 1100 men with 8 Maxims at Bohotle stayed put, and Colonel Swann, commander of this formidable force, allowed a desperate Mullah to retreat close by the fortress with all his flocks and herds. ‘It is as hard to understand, as it is to excuse, his inertia’, said Ismay.¹³ Another irony is, that had Swann commanded at Gumburu, and Plunkett at Bohotle, the Mullah would surely have been no more, for a little more caution in the former, or daring in the latter, would have ensured his defeat. Wars are fought, and won or lost, by individuals.

With Churchill’s ‘bolt for the beach’¹⁴ came the Mullah’s last real chance of gaining Somaliland. But although one third of the population perished in the anarchy and the *godob*, the release of pent-up revenges and settling of old scores, he failed to unite the Somalis, and failed to capitalize on British bad faith and weakness in order to unite the tribes. The chasms that separated the Somalis from each other were too deep, and their clan and tribal loyalties and animosities too strong. British rule, when it was exercised, was light, and there was no colonization to deprive the Somalis of their lands, and no industry or mineral wealth to attract the voracity of western ‘entrepreneurs’. And towering above all these reasons was the infernal inhumanity of the Mullah himself, which made him dreaded in his lifetime, if legendary after death.

But in 1914 came a new suggestion, to use airships or aeroplanes to locate the enemy, and to panic and kill his herds. Here lay vastly superior speed and mobility with no supply problems at all. This new method and idea captured Churchill’s imagination and met with his approval. Had the Great

War not broken out in Europe, the airships of the Lords of the Admiralty might have altered the situation entirely. But with the Great War, Somaliland sank back into a temporary obscurity.

Yet the Camel Corps, with the Illallos as their eyes and ears, by supporting and stiffening the Friendlies, and by raiding and confronting the enemy, ground down the dervish strength, permanently denied at least half the Protectorate to the Mullah, and made his hold on the other half less and less secure. By 1919 the Mullah's strength was but a shadow of former days. But such was his resolve, and his terrible sincerity, that when all was going badly, and portents of his doom swirled and thundered around him, he refused offers of what amounted to retirement on a Government pension. This offer, in view of his twenty years of intractable, expensive and bloody animosity, was not motivated by generosity, but by respect for the sheer magnitude of his talents.

Then came Trenchard, the *Deus Ex Machina*, with the Gigantic Churchill behind him, incanting a doctrine of *uniquely* demoralizing and war winning terrors descending like harpies, spreading uncontrollable panics by the thunder of aircraft engines, the shriek of bombs, and the insane metallic laughter of machine guns seeming suddenly to materialize from the skies. Smuts had warned that this might be the future of war – airborne desolation and dread, with armies and navies in a subordinate role. But this prediction was of warfare between powers possessed of all the defensive paraphernalia and all the cohesion that science and civilization could muster. What of 'savages' – uneducated, unscientific, superstitious; if civilized men and women in mighty nations might be driven by airborne fear and destruction to surrender, what unreasoning horrors might afflict *their* minds? No mighty industry of the air would be involved here – just a few aeroplanes, sudden and unforeseen, and their resolution would be broken. And *cheaply!*

So the twelve aeroplanes of 'Z' Force – one flight, with six spares! – carried in their fuselages the hopes of the RAF. With the useful aid of partial report writing, they succeeded admirably. All states and all armed forces are organizations, whose only concrete reality exists in the individuals from whom they are formed. Panic those individuals, break their morale, and you break the organization. The RAF seemed to have shown that an air force was uniquely capable of doing this.

But they also evoked ghosts of a past, and future, warfare. To panic or kill individuals in order to dissolve an army or a state into its component individuals, or into other and less hostile or militarily capable groups, seemed a useful and most economical method of conducting war. But would it not be even more efficient and economical if, recognizing that certain individuals in the enemy organization were more important, or more hostile than others, you could target just those individuals?¹⁵ Here there was a fundamental dichotomy. Attacking the *state* by breaking the morale of the people was a loose and incoherent doctrine, and seemed to excuse bombing inaccuracy; targeting certain *individuals* required absolute exactitude. In the past, an Ismaili sect of Persia and Syria had terrorized the Middle East with this form of combat, for rather than sending armies or navies to conquer a state or a group, with all the bloodshed and uncertainty involved, the legendary 'Old Man of the Mountain' had sent *Hashishim*, assassins, to target specific leaders or individuals who met with his displeasure, or the displeasures of the wealthy who could afford his fees.

This was, and is, a peculiarly precise and economical form of warfare. Regarded as odious in the Age of Enlightenment, this method is now accomplished by the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, flying assassins, operated coldly from consoles two continents away. In the future, among state organizations armed to the teeth with thermonuclear weapons, it may not be too fanciful to predict that perhaps remotely controlled aerial assassins, using bullets or perhaps bacilli aimed at a particular DNA, will mark down for death those in an enemy state who are on a proscribed list, rather than involving millions in a universally fatal inferno.

The RAF had narrowly missed raising the ghosts of the old assassins, or anticipating the new techno-assassins, in the first bomb dropped in its campaign. It had singed the Sayyid's clothes, and killed his uncle, upon whose arm he had leant. Had it killed *him*, the campaign would have been over with the first bomb. A demonstration of air power's unique ability to attack *morale* would have been complemented, or perhaps substituted, by a demonstration of a unique ability to target individuals with precise attacks.

But not all organizations are so utterly dependent upon their leader as the dervishes were upon the Sayyid. Although the targeting of hostile individuals in an organization would certainly tend to discourage vocal and open hostility, in Somaliland it was always a war against the Mullah, rather than the dervishes, and such was his magnetic power among those dervishes that it only ended, and such his resolve that it *could* only end, with his death. Perhaps Winston Churchill, in 1940, was as essential to Britain, or to the West as a whole, for he embodied the spirit of defiance in the middle of disasters; he saved the state then, and *no one else could*. But as the war progressed, he became increasingly sidelined. The Sayyid was always, however, the indispensable central essence of the dervishes, the only casualty they could never afford to suffer. He became thereby the perfect target.

The RAF now, after its triumph in Somaliland, perfected the technique of using aircraft in small wars, which was termed 'air control'. As there was little or no anti-aircraft fire, and no fighter opposition, relatively slow aircraft could bomb or strafe from low level, with great accuracy. As it was accurate, it could be humane; Air Commodore Chamier, in a lecture,¹⁶ referred to the 1904 Somaliland Expedition as 'tortured by the sun, attacked by fever, and parched with thirst...' and noted that the 'tracks of that waterless country were marked by the bleaching bones of dead transport animals that had been virtually [sic] killed in the struggle to keep the column supplied with water'. He added that 'I can only thank science for its gift of the aeroplane to mankind.' He did not, needless to say, refer to the bleaching bones of animals *actually* killed by machine-gun fire from aeroplanes in 1920. But his point was well made. The air force might destroy villages in exercising control, but so did the army, at much greater cost. The brilliant Air Chief Marshal Sir Edgar Rainey Ludlow-Hewitt summed the question up in his usual incisive manner, pointing out that in the 'burn and scuttle' policy of army control, the object in advancing on a village was to get the tribesmen to defend it, so that you could inflict casualties upon them (suffering some yourself) before burning it and retreating, having inflicted a bloody lesson in the realities of power. The object of the air force attacking a village – which attacks were carried out over a period of time after a warning to the villagers to evacuate their homes – was not to destroy the village, but to force the villagers to live uncomfortably outside their village for a time, with none of the conveniences of life, and to demonstrate that they could do absolutely nothing in their own defence against a virtually invulnerable enemy.¹⁷ Even a glorious and noble defeat was denied them.

The Air Force campaign in Somaliland was used by the RAF as a very useful tool in justifying its separate existence by the acquisition of a new role, and in Iraq, Palestine, on the Indian frontier and in Aden this role was played with varying military success and unvarying financial saving. But how much of the success of the Somaliland operation was due to air power?

As we have seen, Group Captain Gordon reported that the theory that air power could so 'disperse and demoralise' the enemy that troops would be enabled to capture his stock and destroy his forts had been proved. He compared the attack on Baran fort with those on Jid Ali and Medishe. Baran had not been attacked from the air; it 'only fell to the King's African Rifles when surrounded and heavily bombarded with Stokes guns, and not until the last defender was killed.' Medishe and Jid Ali, 'stronger forts in every way than Baran were abandoned almost immediately after the air attacks'

and ‘quantities of rifles were left behind – an absolutely unheard of occurrence in any former campaign against the dervishes’. Tale also ‘fell in practically as simple a manner’, and two days after its fall the Governor was carried there by air, 270 miles from Berbera, which made a ‘most profound impression’ on the assembled Akils and tribal leaders.

The aeronautical magazines had a field day when the results of the operation were announced. *The Aeroplane*¹⁸ carried an article stating that ‘On February 17th it was made known officially that the RAF had won its first war...and for the first time took its place as the primary striking force.’

But the author detracted considerably from the quality of his argument by an attempt to denigrate the quality of the ground forces, claiming that ‘The small mixed force of Indian native infantry, East African nigger troops, and very irregular Somali levies were only there to clear up the mess made by the RAF.’

The periodical *Flight* carried a similar paean to the Air Force, but refrained from trying to accentuate its achievement by belittling the ground forces. It contained a short history of the twenty-year campaign in Somaliland, noting that the Mullah was often defeated, but:

nevertheless more often countered by a blow which has not seldom been disastrous and always humiliating to British prestige. The difficulties consequent on conducting a campaign in the wild country beyond the coast were, in 1909, judged to be insurmountable and the grave decision was taken to abandon the *hinterland* to the Mullah and his followers and confine our administration to the coast towns...

The writer went on to say that ‘...under [the Mullah’s] rule the *peaceful* [italics added] inhabitants endured “untold suffering”’.

The author of the article made the point that:

...it was all done at a cost of £30,000 against an estimated figure of 2¼ millions before the [Great] War, or 6 to 7 millions now, had the campaign been conducted on the older plan without the co-operation of air power. Really, comment would indeed be superfluous.

Noting that, in 1914 it had been proposed to use ‘an [sic] airship of the Parseval type’, the author went on to say:

How much could have been accomplished by such a craft is purely a matter of speculation now, but it is certain that nothing approaching the swift decisiveness of the attack by the flying aeroplanes so well described by the Under Secretary for the Colonies [Leo Amery] could have been achieved.

The smallness of the ground forces was pointed out rather to illustrate the RAF achievement than to decry the quality of the force, and it was hoped that the Government would be impelled to ‘revise its present policy – or want of policy – in relation to Imperial defence. It must realise now that war is in very truth an affair of three dimensions and not of two as in times gone by.’

In the magazine *Aeronautics* the argument was similar:

...The aeroplanes were the main striking instrument, the Camel Corps and infantry being

more in the nature of clearing-up troops, only to come into action if the aerial bombardment were a success. This is a striking reply to the arguments of Colonel Repington and others who share the view that the aeroplane can never be more than an assistant arm to the infantry...The importance of these operations can be realised when it is remembered that the Mullah has been a veritable thorn in our flesh for many years, and that it has been proposed to build a railway from the coast into the interior as the only effective means of dealing with him.

Lord Ismay disagreed entirely with these claims. The Air Force, he maintained, because the insignificant operations in Somaliland aroused little public interest, was enabled to 'peg out claims... which no one in Whitehall had the desire or the knowledge to question'. He pointed out that all the vital intelligence had been gathered by the Army over a number of years. He added that 'All who visited Tale, Jid Ali, and Medishe after the aeroplanes had done their worst could scarcely detect any traces of the bombardment.' But the Air Force had not claimed the *destruction* of the enemy's forts, so much as *demoralization* of the enemy. This, Ismay disputed from personal experience; attacking Jid Ali 'almost immediately after two aeroplanes had aimed all their bombs at it' he reported that the garrison were 'cheerful, utterly defiant, and grossly slanderous about my parentage'. The Mullah had fled before the Camel Corps, not the Air Force. But Ismay, while commenting that there was no doubt that the claims by the Air Staff were 'ill-founded', added:

...it is quite certain they were justified a hundredfold if they did anything to strengthen the case for an independent Air Force. One shudders to think what would have happened in the Second World War if the Admiralty and War Office had had their way and the Air Arm had again become an auxiliary of the older Services.

But in 1922, when Churchill was Secretary of State for the Colonies, a disturbance which resulted in the murder of Gibb was quelled by just *two* aeroplanes which he allowed to be sent from Aden, the tribes agreeing to heavy fines rather than enduring air attack.¹⁹

The air operations in Somaliland were the beginning of the salvation of the RAF. And certainly the Independent RAF won the climacteric Battle of Britain. Its bombing of Germany was an essential part in the eventual Allied victory. Their belief in the decisive effect of morale in war was indubitably correct, and their argument that the aeroplane was uniquely able to affect morale carried great weight, supported by the Somaliland operation and others which followed.

In the Second World War bombing of cities, the enemy were given the choice of defending the city and its production at all costs and staying there, with huge numbers of anti-aircraft guns and civilian shelters and fighter aircraft having priority over resources for the Army, or abandoning it and confessing themselves powerless. But to take too many resources from the Army, or to evacuate all civilians, was to lose the war. To evacuate just women and children took huge resources, and hurt the morale of those who stayed. The Nazis compromised, still taking vast resources from the Army. Paradoxically, this was the reverse of the method of 'air control' which had saved the RAF – it was a reversion to the Army control method, forcing the enemy to fight in defence of a city. Eventually it worked: it severely limited weapons production and German morale broke – but its effect was only seen when the armies arrived at their frontiers, and civilians and wavering soldiers alike had someone to surrender to who could stop *both* of the opposing and opposite terrors – that from the sky, and that from the Nazi party. In command of all this destruction stood the Giant, who had spurred the

bombers on in what he described as an ‘exterminating’ attack on the enemy, as being the only means of victory in the dark days. When victory and daylight came, he turned his face from the destruction they had wrought, and disowned and dismissed them without praise. The Giant now shrank to the size and morality of the politician he had, of course, always been.

The success of the Somaliland operation and air control helped the Air Force to stay independent; yet air control in Iraq, as in Somaliland, also proved that, with the 100 per cent Air Force commitment to the battle given by having an Air Force overall commander, the Army became so effective that the numbers employed in an operation could be reduced. It simply underlined the importance of air support to the army – an air support that was sadly lacking at the beginning of the Second World War. Unfortunately, the independent Air Force did little for naval aviation either, which was handed back to the Royal Navy in 1937 with few and obsolete aircraft. Britain, which thanks partly to the Giant had led the world in naval aviation by 1918, lagged sadly behind Japan and the United States by 1941. Whether the Royal Naval Air Service, had it remained separate from the RAF, would have done better, no one can tell; but the evidence seems to point towards a predominant ‘battleship mentality’ prevailing in the Royal Navy, which suggests that it would not.²⁰

So much for the influence of the Somali wars on Britain. For Somaliland it might be said that the arrival of the Europeans in the area was a disaster for the Somalis, with their territory arrogantly partitioned and given away. Indeed, the British liberal establishment now turn with horror from imperialism as an idea and a practice, and feel that the idea that one race should consider itself so superior to another as to be entitled to rule it is utterly wrong; indeed, in Britain it is a crime to openly maintain it. ‘Racial’ justice dictates that bad government by your own race is better than good government by another. This is a natural and understandable reaction to the vicious, almost insane, excesses of the holocaust, as well as to the excesses of imperialism, which saw the extermination of the Tasmanians, and the almost complete dispossession of the Continental Australians and Americans, as well as the conquest and, for some, enslavement and transportation of the Africans.

But the new world order seeks to replace racial injustice with racial justice. The truly opposite course to the evil of racial injustice is, however, the double opposite – individual justice – since the concept of race lay at the root of the injustice itself, and was the idea that the injustice fed upon and was nourished by. Now racial inequality is tackled by elevating an individual’s race to be his or her main quality, to ensure or enforce racial equality, with their religion, sex and sexual desires following closely. The individual has become submerged in the group to which he or she is held to ‘belong’; Hitler and Himmler might have smiled had they known that the result of their devilry would be the acceptance of the basis of their ideas – race – by the liberal establishment.

So the land of the Somalis is looked at as a racial entity. That entity was parcelled out; an injustice was done. It can now only be righted by war, unless the Ethiopians and Kenyans negotiate their pieces of ‘Somalia’ away. But war with Ethiopia requires unity, and unity is far away. It also, in all probability, means defeat, Ethiopia being a considerable power locally, and backed by the United States. The Somalis are also less than popular internationally, for piracy, militant Islamism and terrorism are rife – at least in the south. ‘Surely’, wrote Ecclesiastes, ‘oppression maketh a wise man mad.’ Yet worse than all this, an unpredictable and therefore unreliable rainfall results in periodic famines, made worse by the masculine pride of the Somali male, whose primary aim seems to be to produce male heirs, both for status and to enhance the relative strength of the tribe. However, it is not thought decent in modern liberal circles to suggest that famine arises from a mismatch between *two* variables, food supply being often out of the control of man, while population size lies easily and well within it. Americans and Europeans can only assist with money or food – never advice!

In the meantime, global warming is held to be a great danger facing the world, which cannot, surely, it is held, owe *anything* to vast increases in human populations.

But the Somalis, although they are thought of as one 'people', one 'race', do not therefore *have* to form one state only. After all, the history of the country is one of separate organizations, of independent tribes. Because these tribes raid each other as a warlike tradition, the West disapproves. They also have the wrong kind of 'democracy', being too close to the Athenians' style of direct rule by the people to appeal to the liberalism of the west, where party domination of the media, selection of parliamentary candidates and rejection of the referendum, ensure that only a self-perpetuating elite – those who consider themselves as Plato's 'Guardians' – rule, whatever the party. Indeed, Somaliland – the old British Somaliland, centred on Hargeisa – has formed a successful and stable society; but it cannot gain recognition by the liberal elites, because it does not comprise all the (available) Somalis, and it was not invented by them, so has no 'legitimacy', despite the will of its inhabitants. It has disputes with its neighbour Puntland. In the meantime, thousands of individual Somalis live within it in relative peace and security, while in the rest of the country foreign troops, including Ethiopians, fight Islamic fundamentalists and attempt to preserve order amid chaos and revenge, and the sun of the early twenty-first century blazes down over the horn of Africa upon different individuals, but similar *political* circumstances, to those of a hundred years before.

Yet the coming of the Europeans brought vast advantages to *individual* Somalis; and to those who were sick, or lame, or lepers, or blind, or starving, or doomed to a life of slavery, it brought salvation. To all it brought new opportunities, new worlds and new vistas. The high abilities of individual Somalis are making their mark in many modern industries where intelligence, resourcefulness, confidence and drive are essential requirements. The Somali is largely an individualist, wrote Jardine, citing an African as saying 'Somalis, they no good. Each man his own Sultan.'

It is not the purpose of this history, or within the competence of this historian, to suggest future political solutions for the Horn of Africa. Tyrannical native government with no individual liberty – the state of the Sayyid – was pitted in the past, in the name of national and religious freedom against a foreign government with no real interest in Somaliland save stability and the denial of a part of that inhospitable, but strategically important, land to others. The foreign government parcelled out parts of the land to other governments in its own interest. War resulted, costly and inconclusive while the Sayyid lived. Abandonment of the interior by the foreigners at the instigation of their greatest citizen proved to be disastrous. They returned. For four years they fought a desultory campaign which gradually wore the Sayyid down. But while the Sayyid stood still, with the same purchased weapons and the same primitive technology, the west had created wireless communication, the motor car, the tank and the aeroplane. Indomitable will was not enough.

Yet for all this, the twenty-year campaign was in reality a civil war, Somali against Somali, in which a loose and slight domination – called protection – by the foreigners was preferred by the Somalis to a ferocious home-grown absolutism. Churchill, although motivated by ambition and finance, recognized this, writing that 'these wild people have always lived in anarchy and strife among themselves or with their neighbours...' But this, if you looked at the Somali tribes and clans as sovereign units, was exactly what had always happened in the Europe that Churchill so admired – and after Churchill's comments, two further devastating wars among the European sovereign units proved the point. The British Government made the same moral point over Czechoslovakia in 1938, and abandoned that far off and little-known land, or rather, allowed it to defend itself, as Churchill freed and abandoned the Somalis. But Sir Winston Churchill saw more clearly than most the nature of the

German regime, and that so close to home, Britain's spoon was not long enough to sup with the devil. His deep and generous sympathy with the oppressed, his admiration for the Jewish people, his love of freedom and hatred of tyranny all ensured that he must oppose Hitler's bitter and brutal creed, and his furious suppression of contrary opinions. He may also have remembered a fanatic Mullah of long before, and that he had once faltered, and betrayed a trust, in the long and indivisible battle between rationalism and the liberty of the individual – whatever his culture – on the one hand, and fundamentalism, oppression and the regimentation of thought, on the other.

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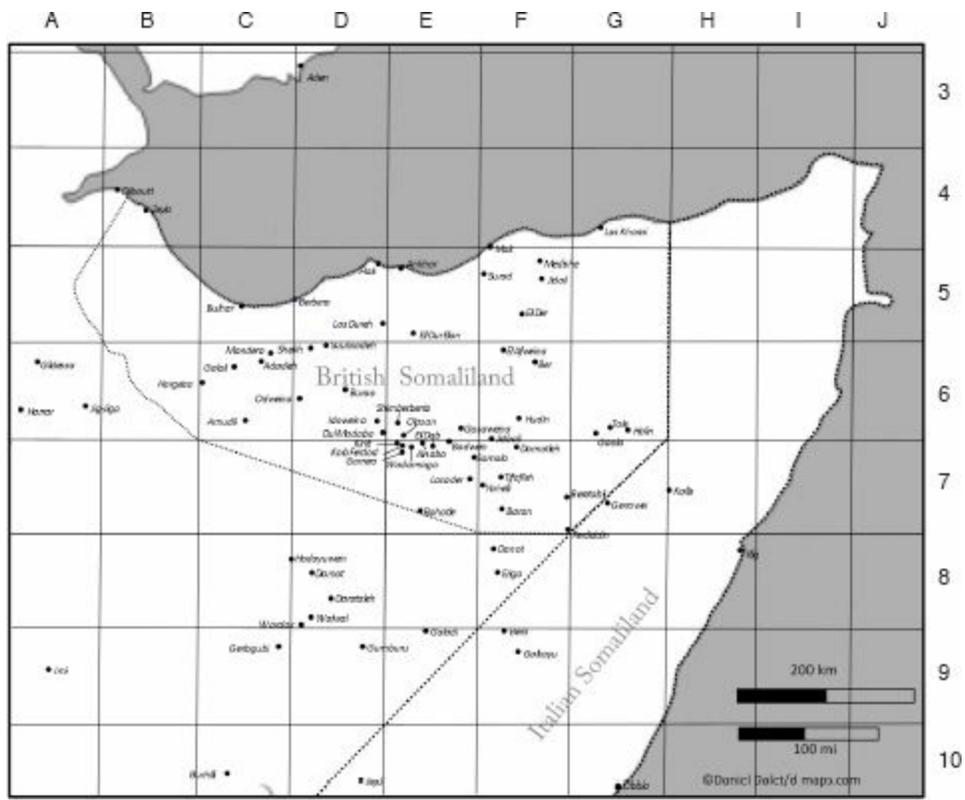
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Somaliland and the Ogaden



Somaliland and the Ogaden, physical geography

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, Negro Universities Press, 2nd ed., New York, 1969, 17.
2. Sir Richard Francis Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*, Kindle Edition, 2004. I see no purpose in finding and quoting a page number from a 'hard copy' edition, since the Amazon Kindle edition is free to download, is far more readily available than the original, and is searchable.
3. Jardine, 17.
4. Described in the contemporary sources as Shebelle or Shebelli.
5. Ioan Lewis, *A Modern History of the Somali*, Ohio University Press, Athens (Ohio), 2002, 22–24.
6. Ioan Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland*, Hurst & Company, London, 2008, 1.
7. The poet who inspired the Spartans to victory over the Messenians, doubling their territory.
8. Movable village.
9. Harald G C Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland and a Visit to Abyssinia: with Supplementary Preface on the Mad Mullah Risings*, Rowland Ward, London, 1903, 8 (available through Nabu Reprints).
10. e.g. Said S Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism; the Case of Sayyid Mahammad 'Abdille Hassan'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, digitally reprinted 2009, 65–67.
11. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, 36 – 54.
12. Which is reckoned like the Jewish in lunar years.
13. Although some celebrate the first four, some seven, Imams.
14. Ioan Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland*, 2,
15. Samatar, 10 and Jardine, 19.

Chapter 2

1. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1981, 512.
2. Slavery itself was not abolished until 1833 in the British Empire.
3. Wilberforce's speeches make dreadful reading 200 years later.
4. When Singapore was surrendered to the Japanese Army in 1942, very few Indian soldiers joined the Japanese sponsored Indian National Army, despite the savagery of their Japanese captors.
5. Derided by W.S.Gilbert as 'the very model of a modern Major-General'; a later ditty, listing military attributes, went on: '... Genius strategic of Caesar and Hannibal, Skill of Sir Garnet in thrashing a cannibal...'
6. Not for the first time, e.g. in 1827 under the guns of HMS *Tamar* Capt Bremer RN negotiated compensation from the rulers of Berbera for the plunder of the Brig Marianne.
7. NA WO106/18.
8. NA FO844/3.
9. But not exactly the same, the clause concerning wrecks not being in the Gadabursi treaty, for example.
10. Built in 1883 by the Emperor Menelik for his Empress.
11. Sir Rudolf Slatin Pasha, *Fire and Sword in the Sudan*, John Lane, N.Y., 1899, 264.
12. Winston S. Churchill, *The River War*, Four Square Books, London, 1964, 83.
13. Chris Peers, *The African Wars: Warriors and Soldiers of the Colonial Campaigns*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2010, 215.
14. The Dictator Mussolini, again desecrating that fatal image, would in 1935 avenge the defeat, by a very temporary conquest of Abyssinia.
15. Harald G.C. Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland and a Visit to Abyssinia: With Supplementary Preface on the 'Mad Mullah' Risings*, Rowland Ward, London, 1903, iv–v.
16. Which method was still in use in the Ogaden at least until the 1960s – see Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, 36–37.
17. Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, 92. The Abyssinians, emboldened by their victory at Adowa, made wide claims, including much of Somaliland and the Nile area, which they claimed as being within the ancient limits of their kingdom. They had, as we have seen, already occupied large areas of Somaliland around Gildessa, and to dislodge them would have involved a considerable military expedition, as well as ruining British influence in Abyssinia, and possibly pushing them to perhaps support the Khalifa, and worse still, into the welcoming arms of France, which had claims to the Nile area itself. What price the protection of a few tribes, against these wide ranging British interests? (see Sir J Rennell Rodd, 'Social and Diplomatic Memories, Second Series, 1894–1901, Egypt and Abyssinia', Edward Arnold and Co., London, 1923).

Chapter 3

- [1](#) Notably the otherwise Anglophile and hugely influential American navalist Alfred Thayer Mahan.
- [2](#) Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism*, 100–104.
- [3](#) Swayne, 6–7.
- [4](#) NA WO28/372
- [5](#) Sir Richard Burton.
- [6](#) Jardine, 53–54.
- [7](#) Samatar, 138.
- [8](#) Samatar, 183–4.
- [9](#) Said S. Samatar, 92, quoting B.W. Andrzejewski and I.M.Lewis, *Somali Poetry: An Introduction*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964, 57.
- [10](#) Jardine, 39.
- [11](#) NA WO106/18
- [12](#) Samatar, 115
- [13](#) Sir Richard Burton reported that a mule’s bridle had been stolen, which was ‘the first and last case of theft which occurred to us in Somali country; I have travelled through most civilised lands, and lost more.’
- [14](#) Jardine – 9th per Samatar
- [15](#) Jardine, 43.
- [16](#) Samatar 117–8, NA WO106/18
- [17](#) Jardine, 46. However, Jig-Jigga was a Pyrrhic victory, says Samatar, as the Sayyid lost 170 men – perhaps this should read 1700; the Abyssinians claimed 2500; they could not have been that terrified! They certainly did not surrender Jig-Jigga.
- [18](#) But for the wise intervention of Prince Albert in the Trent Affair, Britain might have been at war with the US in 1862.
- [19](#) NA WO106/18.
- [20](#) Harald Swayne, *Seventeen Trips Through Somaliland*, v & vi.
- [21](#) Jardine, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, 57.
- [22](#) Jardine, 70.

Chapter 4

- [1](#). Commander of the Advance Guard, a military rank immediately below general (Dejasmach).
- [2](#). General.
- [3](#). Staff Diary of Brevet Major Hon A.H.C. Hanbury-Tracy, Royal Horse Guards, attached to Abyssinian forces operating in the Ogaden, 17 March to 4 October 1901, NA WO28/372.
- [4](#). This expedition resulted in the suicide of the Emperor Theodore and the taking of the Kebra Nagast, the Glory of Kings, a fourteenth century book which traced the descent of the Ethiopian Kings from Solomon, to the British Museum. This book, a translation of an Arabic text of 1225AD which was itself reputed to be from a Coptic original in Alexandria, was so vital to the next Emperor’s legitimacy that the Trustees of the Museum returned it. See A.H.M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, *The History of Abyssinia*, a Kessinger Legacy Reprint of a 1934 original.
- [5](#). Sir Geoffrey Archer, KCMG, *Personal and Historical Memoirs of an East African Administrator*, Oliver & Boyd Ltd., London, 1963, 84.
- [6](#). Samatar, 36.

Chapter 5

- [1](#). NA WO106/18. Jardine has four companies retained at Burao, and a fifth at Berbera. However, the WO file is the annual report of Acting Consul-General Cordeaux to the Foreign Secretary at the time of the transfers, whereas Jardine writes in 1923. Not without trepidation, I have preferred Cordeaux’s contemporary version.
- [2](#). NA WO106/18.
- [3](#). P73.
- [4](#). NA WO106/18.
- [5](#). Jardine, 73.
- [6](#). NA WO106/18.
- [7](#). NA CAB127/1, Lecture by Major (later General Lord) Ismay.
- [8](#). ‘Dervish’ meant poor, from the profession of poverty by the *Sufis*.
- [9](#). HMSO, *Official History of the Operations in Somaliland, 1901-04, Vol I*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1907 (reprinted

2010 by 'Lightning Source UK Ltd), 105.

[10.](#) Jardine (P82) reports that they were crying 'Allah, Allah' as they came on'.

[11.](#) It is curious that the enemy dead who lay by the front of the square were counted by Swayne, but not the others. This was surely vital information. Were they left unburied?

[12.](#) Major Ismay, lecture at Quetta, 1922, NA CAB127/1

Chapter 6

[1.](#) NA WO106/18.

[2.](#) Official History, I, 115.

[3.](#) Sir Winston Churchill gave an account, in *My Early Life*, of a small detachment being cut off by the enemy.

[4.](#) Angus Hamilton, *Somaliland*, Hutchinson, London, 1911, p270–1. This book was reprinted in 2005 by Elibron Classics (Adamant Media Corporation).

[5.](#) NAM 2002-08-2, letter of Lt J.W.C. Kirk to his father.

[6.](#) Jardine, 103.

[7.](#) CA Char1/40.

[8.](#) He certainly recovered. He was mentioned in despatches nine times in the Great War, and retired as a General.

[9.](#) NAM 2008-02-2 (117), letter of Lt Kirk to his father, 11-5-1903.

[10.](#) NA Cab/127/1, lecture by Major Ismay.

[11.](#) NA WO32/8429.

[12.](#) Official History, I, 172.

[13.](#) Hamilton, *Somaliland*, 283–4.

[14.](#) Hamilton, 287.

[15.](#) NA WO106/236.

[16.](#) Major Gough later recommended two officers for the Victoria Cross for their courage in attempting to save a severely wounded officer in the action at Daratoleh, and the recommendations were accepted. He had failed to mention his own part in the affair, and later, when it was revealed, would receive the VC himself for his courage. This brilliant and most promising officer tragically died on the Western Front in 1914.

[17.](#) NA WO32/8424.

[18.](#) NA CAB127/1.

[19.](#) Sent on 26 April.

[20.](#) Ian F.W. Beckett, *Johnnie Gough VC*, Tom Donovan, London, 1989, 97.

[21.](#) NA Cab127/1.

[22.](#) NA WO32/8425, Manning (at Galkayu) to S of S for War, 27 April, 1903,

[23.](#) NAM Lt J.W.C. Kirk, letter to his father, 11-1-1903. He later described him as 'a most chicken-hearted puppy' for being too lenient with mutineers.

[24.](#) Swann retired in 1914 as a major-general.

Chapter 7

[1.](#) NA WO32/8426

[2.](#) NA WO32/8432.

[3.](#) An army staff report of 15 May 1904 gave the strength on 4 July 1903 as British Officers 318, British rank and file 1055, Indian rank and file 4594, African rank and file 1934, making 7901. Camp followers numbered 10,913, making 18,814 in all. NA WO32/8460. However, an appendix to Egerton's report in WO106/238 gives a strength of 6892 soldiers in July 1903, rising to 7551 by March 1904.

[4.](#) This is contradicted by the Veterinary Report which accompanied Egerton's Report (WO106/238) which mentioned that a Somali camel carries 240lb. However, on the road from Berbera to Wadamago and back (153 miles each way) it, and its driver, consumed 94lb, making a delivery of 146lb.

[5.](#) NA WO32/5932

[6.](#) Both men were lieutenant colonels, with a local rank of brigadier-general.

[7.](#) NA WO32/8441.

[8.](#) Jardine, 133.

[9.](#) Jardine, 143.

[10.](#) Lt Col Kenna, of the 21st Lancers, would die a Brigadier-General at age 53, at the Dardanelles in 1915, where his grave overlooks the sea.

11. NA WO32/8441, Egerton's Report 5/4/1904.
12. An offer of his life, and the life of his family, upon the surrender of himself, the two Maxims he held, and 1400 rifles was either ignored or, more probably, never received
13. Interestingly, limejuice 'was found to have little or no effect...bulky and heavy, and in many cases productive of severe dyspepsia...' due to chemical changes which occurred due to the heat and the length of time it was stored. Fresh limejuice was good – but unobtainable.
14. NA WO32/8460, Medical Report on operations by Colonel J.F. Williamson, Army Medical Service.
15. And, presumably, British.
16. Jardine, 152-153.
17. NA FO881/957. Strangely, however, the Sultan was eventually rewarded with 30,000 rupees as compensation for the British campaign in his territory, although the Italian Government agreed not to ask for a further 15,000 rupees on his behalf.
18. Per Samatar; Abdulla Shahari, per Jardine.
19. Samatar, 126, who adds a little harshly that this 'may have been added... to pander to European liberal opinion at home'. Anti-slavery was not a monopoly of the liberals, but a sincere and almost universal feeling.
20. Jardine, 158.

Chapter 8

1. C.A. CHAR 28/27. WSC to his mother, Lady Randolph Churchill.
2. Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill, Vol 2. Young Statesman 1901-1914*, Heinemann, London, 1967,19-21.
3. Amended to £42,100 on the document.
4. It will later be seen that Churchill, when First Lord of the Admiralty, thought that this would be ineffective owing to supplies coming via Djibouti in French Somaliland.
5. Randolph S. Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill, Vol 1. Youth 1874-1900*, Heinemann, London, 1966, 515.
6. The treaty itself may be found on NA FO844/3
7. E.g. see Samatar, 10.
8. Quoted in Sir Richard Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa*.

Chapter 9

1. Burad in the British documents, more correctly, Bur'Ad, see Samatar 126.
2. NA FO881/9508
3. Samatar, 127.
4. NA FO881/9508
5. NA FO881/9508, and Jardine, 185.
6. Archer, *Memoirs*, 73.
7. M.W. Daly, 'An Historical Introduction' to the catalogue of the papers of General Sir Reginald Wingate (Incomplete), Durham University Library Special Collections Catalogue <http://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc>.
8. Winston Churchill, *The River War*, 89.
9. Slatin, *Fire and Sword*, 206.
10. Unfortunately, the Somalis spoke no Latin or Classical Greek, at which the British officials excelled.
11. Sir Geoffrey Archer, *Memoirs of an East African Administrator*, 33–34.
12. Ian F.W. Beckett, Johnnie Gough, VC, 125.
13. NA CO535/15.
14. C.A. Char12/15.
15. NA CO535/18,
16. Jardine, 196.
17. See Samatar, 23–36.

Chapter 10

1. Thomas Moore [The Irish Burns], 'National Airs'. Jardine described the Somali as 'The Irishman of Africa'.
2. NA FO881/9507, The Wingate Report, 17.
3. NA CO 879/103.
4. NA CO535/15.

5. NA Cab127/1, Ismay lecture.
6. Char13/8. Unlike Harcourt's, Lord Crewe's letters had been to 'My Dear Winston'.
7. The original memorandum had mistakenly put 'March 1912'.
8. Anticipating the liberal establishment's attitude to crime in Britain itself.
9. Jardine, 198.
10. Archer, *Memoirs*, 52.
11. From whom is derived the 'Rastafari' of Jamaica.
12. A.H.M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, *History of Abyssinia*, 153 – 159.
13. A.H.M. Jones and Elizabeth Monroe, *History of Abyssinia*, 161 – 2.
14. Jardine 205 – 6, and WO106/272, *History of the Somaliland Camel Corps* and CO879/110.
15. He wrote on 23 July, and the Foreign Office and the Director of Military Operations received copies on 7 August. Corfield was killed at Dul Madoba on the 9th.
16. All this makes sad reading today – the slaughter of animals for fun being rightly condemned. But courage is courage, and we are to an extent creatures of our times and our programs.
17. Archer, *Memoirs*, 52.
18. Nelson Colonist, Volume LVI, Issue 13860, 17 November 1913, page 7, courtesy of the National Library of New Zealand.

Chapter 11

1. Char8/319.
2. However, according to a report in 1914, a dervish raiding party 'dug up the body, mutilated it, and carried away a hand'. See NA Air 1/2526.
3. NA CO879/110.
4. In these costings it is interesting to note that while the emoluments of 3 British officers amounted to 425 rupees, 274 sepoy (private soldiers) cost 376 rupees 12 annas (there were 16 annas to the rupee).
5. Byatt to Harcourt on 28 February 1914, NA CO879/111.
6. Lawrance possessed a tame cheetah which, dashing out upon some goats, was run through with a spear by the very brave old woman who tended them. See Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2011, 50. (Orig published 1950).
7. NA CO879/111.
8. Alfred Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1989, Chapter 1.
9. Churchill Archives Char8/319.
10. Sir Winston Churchill never did gain a pilot's licence; Lady Clementine, his wife, consistently and very wisely opposed his efforts to master the aeroplane, and the Giant eventually yielded to her entreaties, writing to her on 6 June 1914 that, although he had flown 'nearly 140 times with many pilots, and all sorts of machines...' he gave it up '...for many months and perhaps for ever'. How different world history might have been had Lady Churchill failed to stop him! See *Speaking for Themselves: The Personal Letters of Winston and Clementine Churchill*, ed. by Mary Soames, Black Swan, London, 1999.
11. Ray Beachey, *The Warrior Mullah*, Bellew Publishing, London, 1990, p.102, states that the suggestion came from Sir Percy Anderson. I cannot trace this reference at all.
12. Walter Raleigh, *The War in the Air* [Vol 1], Naval and Military Press/Imperial War Museum, Uckfield, Reprint of 1922 original, 91.
13. Alfred Gollin, *The Impact of Air Power on the British People and their Government*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1989, 11.
14. Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart VC, *Happy Odyssey*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2011 (First published by Jonathan Cape, 1950). The foreword to this hugely entertaining book was written by Sir Winston Churchill.
15. NA WO106/272, Camel Corps History.
16. Ismay, *Memoirs*, 24.
17. Carton de Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*, 49–50.
18. See *Who was Who 1929–1940*, Adam and Charles Black, London, 1941, 314.
19. The damaged eye was removed, despite Carton de Wiart's protestations. Behind it was a Dum-Dum bullet.
20. Ismay, *Memoirs*, 26.
21. Some 35 per cent of the friction tubes, used to ignite the charge, were defective. NA WO106/272.
22. Although Ras Tafari himself had been agreeable to British *assistance* in administering the Gambela district, this had been dropped. See NA WO32/5809.
23. In *Jane's Fighting Ships of World War I*, the *Northbrook*, ex of the Royal Indian Marine, was a converted troopship with six 4-inch guns.

- [24.](#) Jardine, 247 – 8. In NA WO276/102, *The History of the Somaliland Camel Corps*, German agents conspired with Ras Mikael – who, presumably, was a supporter of Lij Yasu.
- [25.](#) Jardine, 253, reports that a ‘crafty old woman’ deliberately misinformed them.
- [26.](#) NA WO106/272, History of the Camel Corps.

Chapter 12

- [1.](#) Gollin, 282.
- [2.](#) Gollin, 318
- [3.](#) Also sadly prescient was his idea of the sacrifice of 2000 or 3000 aircraft with the pilots either killed or captured. But this was to occur in the next war, when 55,000 men of Bomber Command would perish in a vast sacrifice initiated by Churchill himself which laid waste the cities of Germany. The survivors of this heroic campaign were denied a medal, or a mention in his victory speech, by Churchill.
- [4.](#) CA Char2/103, letter to P.M. 29/12/1918.
- [5.](#) Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, 199.
- [6.](#) He was so described in the minutes of a meeting at the Colonial Office on 13 August 1919. Later, of course, he became Marshal of the Royal Air Force, the very highest rank in the new service.
- [7.](#) NA Air1/23/15/1/116
- [8.](#) Ismay, *Memoirs*, 29.
- [9.](#) Archer, *Memoirs*, 96–97.
- [10.](#) Archer, *Memoirs*, 97. Sir Geoffrey Archer later recorded (p114) that General Hoskins had admitted, after the fall of the Sayyid, that he had been wrong in his estimate.
- [11.](#) NA WO32/2858
- [12.](#) Archer, *Memoirs*, 97–98.
- [13.](#) Andrew Boyle, *Trenchard*, Collins, London, 1962, 36–369.
- [14.](#) Chamier was the first to suggest a ‘speed bomber’, with a bomb load no greater than the armament load of a fighter, and thus just as fast or faster. From this came ultimately the Mosquito, the best bomber of the second world war. Roy Irons, *The Relentless Offensive*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2009, 47.
- [15.](#) However, it was reported in October 1919 that the rupee purchase rate had fallen from 15 rupees/£ to 10, making the mooted reward some £500 to £1000 in value. The rupee, however, was the currency used by the Somalis, sterling being of no value to them. See NA Air5/1310.
- [16.](#) NA Air1/23/15/1/116, W. Cmdr Gordon’s draft report.
- [17.](#) The Force also contained 4 Officers and 25 ORs of the RAF Medical Service.

Chapter 13

- [1.](#) Eight miles in W. Cmdr Gordon’s report, 12 according to Ismay’s memoirs., 12 per Jardine.
- [2.](#) In NA Air 1/23/15/1/116 (Wing Commander Gordon’s full report,) the Mullah’s sister is reported as having been killed, but on another, briefer, copy this is pencilled through, and on yet another is left out altogether. The presumption is, therefore, that this was subsequently found to be incorrect.
- [3.](#) Jardine 266 – 7, and W. Cmdr Gordon’s report above.
- [4.](#) Ismay, 31. Rayne, *Sun, Sand and Somals*, 213–214, reported that the Mullah had originally taken the Maxims with him, but changed his mind and hid them in a cave at Helas.
- [5.](#) Archer, *Memoirs*, 104.
- [6.](#) This is confirmed by Jardine and Archer (who, however, derived much of his own from Jardine’s account).
- [7.](#) Ismay, *Memoirs*, 32.
- [8.](#) Jardine, 276.
- [9.](#) Angus Hamilton, *Somaliland*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 299. Reprinted by Eilbron Classics 2005.
- [10.](#) Jardine, 27 –278.
- [11.](#) Archer, 108.
- [12.](#) Jardine, 290.
- [13.](#) Jardine 296
- [14.](#) British Somaliland lost some 7 per cent of its population – see Wikipedia, quoting R. Pankhurst, ‘An Introduction to the Medical History of Ethiopia’.

Chapter 14

1. He was murdered by tribesmen when a tax was imposed on them. He was avenged by air power. The tax was repealed.
2. Carton de Wiart, *Happy Odyssey*, 47. He qualified this by adding that 'he was a godsend to officers with an urge to fight and a shaky or non-existent bank balance'.
3. Said S. Samatar, 100.
4. Randolph Churchill, *Winston Churchill*, Vol I, 112–113.
5. Said S. Samatar, 112.
6. Rayne, *Sun, Sand and Somals*, 216.
7. Said S. Samatar, 120.
8. Said S. Samatar, 175.
9. NA CAB127/1, Ismay's lecture at Quetta in 1922.
10. An offer of assistance from New Zealand was declined. The New Zealanders, the finest soldiers in a martial Empire, were to suffer more military casualties per head of population in the Second World War than any other western nation, including Britain, France and the United States.
11. It was this strategy which led to the French disaster at Dien Bien Phu in their war in Vietnam.
12. Although it was noted that until 1914 Somali recruits had been sent into fierce actions almost as soon as recruited – see NA Air1/2526, Lieutenant Commander Boothby's report on the general situation re use of Airships/Aeroplanes in 1914.
13. NA CAB127/1, Ismay's lecture at Quetta in 1922.
14. So described by Ismay in his Quetta lecture to the RAF
15. Strangely, Sir Henry Wilson would die by this method in 1922, hit by an IRA assassin.
16. To the Royal Central Asian Society in March 1934, RAF Museum Ref X001 – 0545.
17. In 1945 it was proposed, if the Nazi 'Werewolf' resistance materialized, to do the same to selected German cities.
18. *The Aeroplane*, Volume XVIII, No.8, 25 February 1920.
19. NA Cab24/136/36.
20. However, even this might be thought superior to current defence planning, which seems to envisage some advantage from the possession, for a period, of fleet aircraft carriers with no aircraft at all.