

Soon after the arrival of the Unit in Asmara, acting C.O. Colonel Angus Murray detailed Captain Eric Goulston and Corporal 'Snowy' Murphy, to form a mobile surgical unit with the Patriot Forces fighting as Guerrillas to re-establish H.I.M. (His Imperial Majesty) Haile Selassie as Emperor of Abyssinia.

This was not only to provide aid to the wounded, but to bolster the morale of the Abyssinians against superior and well-equipped Italian Forces in Gondor Province, where they were under the command of the Duke of Acosta.

Supplies were delivered later by Captain Innes Brodziak from the Unit to the base and assembly point at Amba Gheorgis. The force was commanded by Major Sheppard, an English Officer fluent in Amharic, who was formerly the Professor of English History at Cairo University.

He had walked over the Sudanese border 6 months earlier with 3 British N.C.Os (Non Commissioned Officers), and a supply of Maria Thera dollars useful to bribe the local chiefs, with their tribes to unite and fight together.

Eventually there were approximately 2,500 tribesmen under many local chieftains distinguished by the fact they rode on mules, whereas the rest of the conglomerate walked bare-footed.

Sustenance, ammunition and weapons were provided off the land in the former instances and the latter from booty thieved from the Italian Garrisons. Active patrolling was prevalent at night as the Italians remained immobile in darkness.

The culmination of this fantastic rear-guard action in the fabulous mountainous country of this ancient and romantic land was the capture of Gondar, a lovely old Portuguese town, 3 months later with the final capitulation by the remaining 15,000 remaining Italians.

Our role in the Campaign was to work behind Italian lines and eventually link up with the Regular K.A.R. Forces from Kenya. Sheppard's strategy of using highly mobile locals, capable of penetrating mountainous regions considered impassable was spectacularly successful, always with the lure of loot from the well-equipped Italian strong-holds.

This proved the stimulating factor for our warriors. Eventually the Italians were rounded up in their thousands and held in hastily-built POW Camps, thoroughly dispirited and only too happy to surrender to any authority who would safeguard them from the possibility of emasculation.

They knew the marauding nationals were eager to revenge their only defeat in history, by Mussolini in the thirties.

Our efficient surgical group was trained to move quickly and set-up quarters to deal with casualties mainly of general gun-shot wounds of limbs causing compound fractures, but with a fair variety of general head and chest wounds also.

There was plenty of Evipan for I.V. anaesthesia and Sulphonamides.

Italian surgical equipment was high grade. Our patients were left on-route and strewn over the mountainous countryside immobilised in plaster slabs or windowed plaster with appropriate notes and instructions to their helpers. No case of gas gangrene was seen.

These tribesmen were hardy and tough, intelligent, respectful and appreciative. Many lives and limbs were saved, as we saw the assortment of improvised stretchers and mule transportation arriving in Gondar days after its capture.

After suitable celebrations including the final victory parade with the Crown Prince taking the salute, and after considerable loot had been loaded onto an acquired Italian ambulance, the representatives of 2/5 AGH, eventually returned to Asmara, just in time to embark for Palestine.

A faithful attendant called Ato Mohamed had attached himself to our small group and proved invaluable all through. He came with us to Asmara, but was not allowed to move further.

It was an unbelievable 4 months of fun and games. Snow Murphy passed away some years ago in Sydney. Major Sheppard was awarded the D.S.O on the field at Gondar. But was later captured and killed in Greece by the enemy, while trying to organise local resistance against the Germans in that country, in 1942.

He was a great man who turned a rabble into an organised fighting force.

