

FINAL REPORT ON THE OPERATIONS CONDUCTED BY
LIEUT.-COLONEL SWAYNE IN SOMALILAND.

FROM 18TH JANUARY TO 1ST NOVEMBER, 1902.

On the withdrawal of the levies from the Dolbahanta country, after the expedition of 1901-02, a small intrenched camp held by levies was established at Burao, on the main line of communications between the Dolbahanta country and Berbera.

The Mullah, who had been driven into the Italian Haud on the withdrawal of the levies, rapidly reassembled his scattered riflemen and compelled the Dolbahanta tribes, who had submitted to us, to return to his domination, thus bringing up the number of his following to some 12,000 men with 10,000 horses.

Having received a considerable number of rifles through the Mijjarten country in the Italian Protectorate, and taking advantage of the weakness of the Burao garrison, the Mullah, on the 16th December, 1901, suddenly attacked our Ishak tribes, 43 miles to the southward of Burao, and raided the whole of their livestock, rendering 2,000 persons destitute. Men, women, and children were killed.

The Burao garrison was, at this time, not sufficiently strong, in the opinion of the Officer Commanding, to move out alone against the Mullah. A panic ensued, which spread to Berbera, and, in consequence, the Acting Consul-General sent for 100 Indian troops to garrison this place, and brought the levy up to its old strength of 1,500 men.

At the time of my arrival from England, a month after the raid, another attack was expected, and steps were immediately taken to concentrate the levies at Burao, and call in the scattered tribes and assemble them on the nearest grazing ground to Burao. On the 13th February, however, before arrangements could be completed to obtain the necessary water transport to move the levies out to the assistance of the tribes, the latter were attacked at Bale-Shele-Shale, 43 miles to the south of Burao. Men, women, and children were killed indiscriminately, and all the livestock was driven off. Although the levies were immediately moved out, and succeeded in recovering the sheep and inflicting some loss on the enemy, the latter travelled so fast that it was found impossible to recover the camels, and the troops had to return from the waterless Haud, having consumed all the water it had been possible to send with them at such short notice.

The bulk of the Infantry had, on the 13th, covered 53 miles, carrying 100 rounds of ammunition, 2 days' rations, and 2 days' water; and besides this, they had covered 12 to 15 miles in a route march, from which the levies had only just returned, when news of the raid was brought in. Thus the day's marching was brought up to over 65 miles, and advanced parties covered another 10 miles, whilst our horsemen covered 14 miles more.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the limits of endurance were reached, and that no force, except a mounted one, could possibly have prevented the enemy from taking away the camels, upon the milk of which, together with their sheep, the people are entirely dependent for food.

On the 7th February the Mullah had despatched another raiding force against our Jama Siad friendly tribes, 100 miles to the east of the scene of his raid of the 13th February, and here again our tribes suffered heavily. Burao and Berbera became filled with destitute refugees, and 2,000 persons were fed daily at Burao alone.