

FORUM

REMINISCENCE CAN BE MISLEADING

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As a full-time military historian, I have found *Militaria* a most valuable source and invariably interesting, but after reading the 'Herinneringe' of so well-known a soldier as General 'Matie' du Toit in your issue No 10/2 of 1980, I feel that it is only fair to draw attention of all serious students of history to the fact that reminiscences cannot be entirely relied upon unless they are very carefully checked and sub-edited before publication.

To deal only with East Africa, on page 7 General Du Toit mentions that 'daarna het gevolg 2 en 5 SA Brigades onder Brig. Poole en Armstrong . . .'. In fact, of course, Brig Poole never even went to East Africa. He only took over the brigade from Brig Buchanan in the Middle East on 11 June 1941.

On page eight, General Du Toit implies that the British high command elected to choose a 1 000-mile advance through Somaliland instead of allowing 1 SA Division the honour of leading along the much shorter route north through Southern Abyssinia — which simply does not tally with the facts, which are easily verifiable. In fact, I think they are clearly set out in General Brink's own papers in the safekeeping of the Documentation Service. Towards the end of February 1941, the GOC, East Africa Force actually sent an aircraft to fetch General Brink and told him that he was going to concentrate 1 SA Division north of Mogadishu for a drive to Diredawa. Only the discovery of petrol and the need for the utmost

speed made him change his mind and use 11th African Division, which was on the spot at the right moment. There was no question whatever of robbing the South Africans of the kudos of leading the advance.

As regards 1 SA Brigade's shortage of petrol, which let the Nigerians into the lead at Miesso, General Du Toit's understanding of the position is again unfortunately not quite correct. Brig Pienaar's brigade was actually earmarked by Maj-General Wetherall to lead the advance into Addis Ababa, and it was the brigade itself which reported the shortage of fuel. He even insisted that the brigadier put it in writing before he ordered 22 East African Brigade to pass through so as to maintain the impetus of his advance. It was NOT the Nigerians, as General Du Toit states. All this appears in 'East African and Abyssinian Campaigns', which is easily available and was checked in manuscript form not only by the GOC, East Africa Force, but by General Brink and also by General Wetherall himself.

For the sake of accuracy, I do hope you can bring this to the attention of your readers.

** Militaria wishes to draw the attention of its readers to the editorial which appeared in Militaria 10/2 stating clearly, that an unedited version of Genl Du Toit's article is being published, because of the very personal nature of his account.*