

battery. With these I determined to clear up the situation and, if possible, make good the nek.

12. This operation was entrusted to Brigadier-General Malleson, commanding the 1st East African Brigade, who had at his disposal Belfield's Scouts.

Mounted Infantry Company.

Nos. 6 and 8 Field Batteries.

No. 134 Howitzer Battery.

2nd Rhodesian Regiment.

130th Baluchis.

3rd King's African Rifles.

Machine Gun Battery, Loyal North Lancs.

Volunteer Machine Gun Company.

General Malleson selected as his objective the spur of Latema, which commands the nek from the north, and at 11.45 a.m. advanced to the attack. The 130th Baluchis on the right and 3rd K.A.R. on the left formed the firing line, 2nd Rhodesian Regiment the general reserve. The mounted troops watched both flanks, and the artillery supported the attack at a range of about 3,500 yards.

As they approached the bush-clad slopes of Latema the firing line came under a heavy rifle and machine gun fire. The enemy also had at least two guns and several pom-poms in action, and our infantry could make little headway.

13. At 4 p.m. the Force Reserve began to arrive in Taveta, and I reinforced the 2nd Division with the 5th South African Battalion. At the same time General Malleson, who was seriously indisposed, asked to be relieved of his command, and I directed General Tighe to assume command of the operation personally.

On the arrival of the 5th South African Infantry, General Tighe ordered the Rhodesians to advance, and to carry the King's African Rifles forward with them in an assault on the Latema ridge, the 130th Baluchis co-operating vigorously on the right. All ground gained was to be at once made good. The 9th Field Battery and 5th South African Field Battery, as they arrived in Taveta, were brought into action in support of the attack. This assault was gallantly pressed home, especially by the Rhodesians, but failed to make good the ridge. The 3rd K.A.R., who had been hotly engaged since the outset, had the misfortune to lose their gallant leader, Lieutenant-Colonel B. R. Graham, and several other officers. General Tighe found it necessary to support the Baluchis with half the 5th South African Infantry, and I further reinforced the 2nd Division with the 7th South African Infantry.

14. This latter battalion reached General Tighe about 8 p.m., and shortly afterwards he decided that the best chance of quickly dislodging the enemy from their position on the nek was to send in the two South African Battalions with the bayonet by night. This operation was no doubt fraught with considerable risk as there was no opportunity of adequately reconnoitring the ground over which the attack must be made, nor was it by any means certain that the enemy was not present in large numbers. On the other hand the moon was in the first quarter, and so facilitated movement up to midnight; the bush along the line of the road to the nek did not appear to be very dense; and, moreover, the volume of fire developed by the enemy did not seem to indicate that he had a large force actually in his first line, though he

had, as usual, a large proportion of machine guns in action.

15. The night advance of the two South African Battalions was ably organised and gallantly led by Lieutenant-Colonel Byron, Commanding 5th South African Infantry. The 7th South African Infantry formed the 1st line, with the 5th in support. They advanced with great dash through the bush, which proved to be much thicker than was anticipated, driving the enemy before them till the latter was on the crest, where he checked our advance. A certain amount of disintegration was inevitable in a night advance through the dense thorn bush in the face of stubborn opposition. Groups of men and individuals who got separated from their leaders had no course but to fall back to the position where the 1st East African Brigade was formed up in general reserve, about 1,500 yards east of the nek. Colonel Byron had issued instructions that, on reaching the crest, Lieutenant-Colonel Freeth, commanding the 7th South African Infantry, and Major Thompson of the same battalion, should wheel outwards and make good the heights north and south of the nek respectively, while Colonel Byron himself secured the actual nek. These two gallant officers most ably carried out their task. Colonel Freeth fought his way up the steep spurs of Latema till he found that the party with him had dwindled to 18 men. He was joined by a few of the Rhodesians and King's African Rifles, who had clung on to the crest of the ridge after the assault in the evening, and the small party held on till daylight. Major Thompson wheeled towards Reata with 170 men and dug himself in in an advantageous position. About midnight Colonel Byron reached the nek within 30 yards of the enemy's main position. The opposition here was very stubborn. At one point Major Mainprise, R.E., Brigade Major, and 22 men were killed by the concentrated fire of three machine guns, and Colonel Byron, who was himself slightly wounded, reached the nek with only 20 men. The enemy was still in a position which commanded the ground he had won, and, finding it impossible either to advance or to hold his ground, he was reluctantly compelled to withdraw.

16. Meanwhile General Tighe found it extremely difficult to keep touch with the progress of the fight, of which he could only judge by the firing and the reports of officers and others sent back from the ridge, who naturally were only cognisant of events in their own immediate vicinity. About 1 a.m. several requests for reinforcements reached him, and he ordered forward the 130th Baluchis. These advanced at 1.20 a.m., and shortly met Colonel Byron, who reported that he had ordered his small party to retire. General Tighe accordingly re-formed his force and dug in astride the road to await daylight. Attempts to gain touch with Colonel Freeth and Major Thompson failed.

Judging by General Tighe's reports, I considered that it was inadvisable to press the direct attack on the Latema-Reata nek further, and preferred to await the effect of the turning movement of the mounted troops, which was ordered for the next morning, and calculated to cause a speedy withdrawal of the enemy from this position. I accordingly, at 4.20 a.m., directed General Tighe to withdraw his