

tance of the enemy, except in the small sector near the sea coast opposite Gaza.

3. My proposals received the approval of the War Cabinet, and preparations were undertaken to enable the plan I had formed to be put into execution.

I had decided to strike the main blow against the left flank of the main Turkish position, Hareira and Sheria. The capture of Beersheba was a necessary preliminary to this operation, in order to secure the water supplies at that place and to give room for the deployment of the attacking force on the high ground to the north and north-west of Beersheba, from which direction I intended to attack the Hareira-Sheria line.

This front of attack was chosen for the following reasons. The enemy's works in this sector were less formidable than elsewhere, and they were easier of approach than other parts of the enemy's defences. When Beersheba was in our hands we should have an open flank against which to operate, and I could make full use of our superiority in mounted troops; and a success here offered prospects of pursuing our advantage and forcing the enemy to abandon the rest of his fortified positions, which no other line of attack would afford.

It was important, in order to keep the enemy in doubt up to the last moment as to the real point of attack, that an attack should also be made on the enemy's right at Gaza in conjunction with the main operations. One of my Commanders was therefore ordered to prepare a scheme for operations against Gaza on as large a scale as the force at his disposal would permit. I also asked the Senior Naval Officer, Egypt, Rear-Admiral T. Jackson, C.B., M.V.O., to afford me naval co-operation by bombarding the Gaza defences and the enemy's railway stations and depôts north of Gaza. Rear-Admiral Jackson afforded me cordial assistance, and during the period of preparation Naval Officers worked in the closest co-operation with my staff at General Headquarters and the staff of the G.O.C. troops operating in that region.

4. The difficulties to be overcome in the operations against Beersheba and the Sheria-Hareira line were considerable, and careful preparations and training were necessary. The chief difficulties were those of water and transport, and arrangements had to be made to ensure that the troops could be kept supplied with water while operating at considerable distances from their original water base for a period which might amount to a week or more; for, though it was known that an ample supply of water existed at Beersheba, it was uncertain how quickly it could be developed or to what extent the enemy would have damaged the wells before we succeeded in occupying the town. Except at Beersheba, no large supply of water would be found till Sheria and Hareira had been captured.

The transport problem was no less difficult; there were no good roads south of the line Gaza-Beersheba, and no reliance could therefore be placed on the use of motor transport. Owing to the steep banks of many of the wadis which intersected the area of operations, the routes passable by wheeled transport were limited, and the going was heavy and difficult in many places. Practically the whole of the transport available in the force, including 30,000 pack camels, had to be allotted to one portion of the eastern force to enable it to be kept supplied with food, water and ammuni-

tion, at a distance of fifteen to twenty miles in advance of railhead. Arrangements were also made for railhead to be pushed forward as rapidly as possible towards Karm and for a line to be laid from Gamli towards Beersheba for the transport of ammunition.

A railway line was also laid from Deir el Belah to the Wadi Ghuzze, close behind the sector held by another portion of the eastern force.

Considerable strain was thrown on the military railway from Kantara to the front during the period of preparation. In addition to the normal requirements of the force, a number of siege and heavy batteries, besides other artillery and units, had to be moved to the front, and large depôts of supplies, ammunition and other stores accumulated at the various railheads. Preparations had also to be made and the necessary material accumulated to push forward the lines from Deir el Belah and Shellal.

5. During the period from July to October the enemy's force on the Palestine front had been increased. It was evident, from the arrival of these reinforcements and the construction of railway extensions from El Tine on the Ramleh-Beersheba railway to Deir Sineid and Beit Hanun north of Gaza, and from Deir Sineid to Huj, and from reports of the transport of large supplies of ammunition and other stores to the Palestine front, that the enemy was determined to make every effort to maintain his position on the Gaza-Beersheba line. He had considerably strengthened his defences on this line, and the strong localities mentioned in paragraph 2 had, by the end of October, been joined up to form a practically continuous line from the sea to a point south of Sheria, except for a gap between Ali Muntar and the Sihan Group. The defensive works round Beersheba remained a detached system, but had been improved and extended.

6. The date of the attack on Beersheba, which was to commence the operations, was fixed as October 31st. Work had been begun on the railway from Shellal towards Karm and on the line from Gamli to El Bugar. The development of water at Ecani, Khalasa and Asluj proceeded satisfactorily. These last two places were to be the starting point for the mounted force detailed to make a wide flanking movement and attack Beersheba from the east and north-east.

On the morning of October 27th the Turks made a strong reconnaissance towards Karm from the direction of Kauwukah, two regiments of cavalry and two or three thousand infantry, with guns, being employed. They attacked a line of outposts near El Girheir, held by some Yeomanry, covering railway construction. One small post was rushed and cut up, but not before inflicting heavy loss on the enemy; another post, though surrounded, held out all day, and also caused the enemy heavy loss. The gallant resistance made by the Yeomanry enabled the 53rd (Welsh) Division to come up in time, and on their advance the Turks withdrew.

The bombardment of the Gaza defences commenced on October 27th, and on October 30th warships of the Royal Navy, assisted by a French battleship, began co-operating in this bombardment.

7. On the evening of October 30th the portion of the eastern force, which was to make the attack on Beersheba, was concentrated in