

October 31st, and had advanced a distance of seventy-five miles, measured in a straight line from Asluj to Jaffa. The troops, after their heavy fighting at Gaza, had advanced in nine days a distance of about forty miles, with two severe engagements and continual advanced guard fighting. The 52nd (Lowland) Division had covered sixty-nine miles in this period.

The railway was being pushed forward as rapidly as possible, and every opportunity was taken of landing stores at points along the coast. The landing of stores was dependent on a continuance of favourable weather, and might at any moment be stopped for several days together.

A pause was therefore necessary to await the progress of railway construction, but before our position in the plain could be considered secure it was essential to obtain a hold of the one good road which traverses the Judæan range from north to south, from Nablus to Jerusalem.

18. The west side of the Judæan range consists of a series of spurs running east and west, and separated from one another by narrow valleys. These spurs are steep, bare and stony for the most part, and in places precipitous. Between the foot of the spurs of the main range and the coastal plain is the low range known as the Shephelah.

On our intended line of advance only one good road, the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road, traversed the hills from east to west. For nearly four miles, between Bab el Wad (2½ miles east of Latron) and Saris, this road passes through a narrow defile, and it had been damaged by the Turks in several places. The other roads were mere tracks on the side of the hill or up the stony beds of wadis, and were impracticable for wheeled transport without improvement. Throughout these hills the water supply was scanty without development.

On November 17th the Yeomanry had commenced to move from Ramleh through the hills direct on Bireh by Annafeh, Berfilva and Beit ur el Tahta (Lower Bethhoron). By the evening of November 18th one portion of the Yeomanry had reached the last-named place, while another portion had occupied Shilta. The route had been found impossible for wheels beyond Annabeh.

On the 19th the Infantry commenced its advance. One portion was to advance up the main road as far as Kuryet el Enab, with its right flank protected by Australian mounted troops. From that place, in order to avoid any fighting in the close vicinity of the Holy City, it was to strike north towards Bireh by a track leading through Biddu. The remainder of the infantry was to advance through Berfilva to Beit Likia and Beit Dukka, and thence support the movement of the other portion.

After capturing Latron and Amnas on the morning of the 19th, the remainder of the day was spent in clearing the defile up to Saris, which was defended by hostile rearguards.

On the 20th Kuryet el Enab was captured with the bayonet in the face of organised opposition, while Beit Dukka was also captured. On the same day the Yeomanry got to within four miles of the Nablus-Jerusalem road, but were stopped by strong opposition about Beitunia.

On the 21st a body of infantry moved north-east by a track from Kuryet el Enab through Biddu and Kulundia towards Bireh. The

track was found impassable for wheels, and was under hostile shell-fire. Progress was slow, but by evening the ridge on which stands Neby Samwil was secured. A further body of troops was left at Kuryet el Enab to cover the flank and demonstrate along the main Jerusalem road. It drove hostile parties from Kustul, 2½ miles east of Kuryet el Enab, and secured this ridge.

By the afternoon of the 21st advanced parties of Yeomanry were within two miles of the road and an attack was being delivered on Beitunia by other mounted troops.

19. The positions reached on the evening of the 21st practically marked the limit of progress in this first attempt to gain the Nablus-Jerusalem road. The Yeomanry were heavily counter-attacked, and fell back, after bitter fighting, on Beit ur el Foka (Upper Bethhoron). During the 22nd the enemy made two counter-attacks on the Neby Samwil ridge which were repulsed. Determined and gallant attacks were made on the 23rd and on the 24th on the strong positions to the west of the road held by the enemy, who had brought up reinforcements and numerous machine guns, and could support his infantry by artillery fire from guns placed in positions along the main road. Our artillery, from lack of roads, could not be brought up to give adequate support to our infantry. Both attacks failed, and it was evident that a period of preparation and organisation would be necessary before an attack could be delivered in sufficient strength to drive the enemy from his positions west of the road.

Orders were accordingly issued to consolidate the positions gained and prepare for relief.

Though these troops had failed to reach their final objectives, they had achieved invaluable results. The narrow passes from the plain to the plateau of the Judæan range have seldom been forced, and have been fatal to many invading armies. Had the attempt not been made at once, or had it been pressed with less determination, the enemy would have had time to reorganise his defence in the passes lower down, and the conquest of the plateau would then have been slow, costly and precarious. As it was, positions had been won from which the final attack could be prepared and delivered with good prospects of success.

20. By December 4th all reliefs were complete, and a line was held from Kustul by the Neby Samwil ridge, Beit Izza, and Beit Dukka, to Beit ur el Tahta.

During this period attacks by the enemy along the whole line led to severe local fighting. On November 25th our advanced posts north of the river Auja were driven back across the river. From the 27th to the 30th the enemy delivered a series of attacks directed especially against the high ground north and north east of Jaffa, the left flank of our position in the hills from Beit ur el Foka to El Burj, and the Neby Samwil ridge. An attack on the night of the 29th succeeded in penetrating our outpost line north-east of Jaffa, but next morning the whole hostile detachment, numbering 150, was surrounded and captured by Australian Light Horse. On the 30th a similar fate befell a battalion which attacked near El Burj; a counter-attack by Australian Light Horse took 200 prisoners and practically destroyed the attacking battalion. There was particularly heavy fighting