

with the view of undertaking offensive operations at an early date. I expressed my high appreciation of the honour conferred on me and the pleasure it would give me to accept this new command.

General Diaz impressed on me the vital importance of secrecy. In order to make as little apparent change as possible he suggested that the 48th Division should remain in position on the Asiago Plateau and pass temporarily under the command of General Pennella, Commanding the XIth Italian Corps. To this I agreed, with the stipulation that the 48th Division should rejoin my command at the earliest opportunity.

5. On October 13th General Diaz held a Conference of Army Commanders at Comando Supremo, at which he explained his plans for the forthcoming offensive.

The general plan for the main attack was to advance across the Piave with the Tenth, Eighth and Twelfth Italian Armies—to drive a wedge between the Fifth and Sixth Austrian Armies—forcing the Fifth Army eastwards, and threatening the communications of the Sixth Army running through the Valmarino Valley.

The Fourth Army was simultaneously to take the offensive in the Grappa sector.

The task allotted to the Tenth Army was to reach the Livenza between Portobuffole and Sacile, and thus protect the flank of the Eighth and Twelfth Armies in their move northwards.

The co-ordination of the attacks of the Tenth, Eighth and Twelfth Armies was entrusted to General Caviglia, the Commander of the Eighth Italian Army.

6. On October 11th the Headquarters of the Tenth Army, the Army which had been placed under my command, were established near Treviso.

The Tenth Army in the first instance was to consist of the XIth Italian and XIVth British Corps.

The XIth Italian Corps was already holding a sector on the Piave extending from Ponte Di Piave to Palazon. The XIVth British Corps was concentrated in the Treviso area on the 16th of October.

7. The problem that faced the Tenth Army was not an easy one.

The breadth of the Piave on the front of attack was approximately one and half miles, and consisted of numerous channels dotted with islands. The main island was the Grave di Papadopoli, which was some three miles long by one mile broad. The current varied according to the channels. In the main channel it ran at a rate exceeding ten miles an hour in time of flood, and never dropped below three and a half miles an hour at summer level.

The enemy held the Grave di Papadopoli as an advanced post.

8. On October 21st the XIVth British Corps took over the northern portion of the XIth Italian Corps front from Salletuol to Palazon.

Orders were issued that all troops visible to the enemy should wear Italian uniform, and that no British gun should fire a single shot previous to the general bombardment. By these means it was hoped to conceal the presence of British troops from the Austrians.

9. On the date of relief the Piave was in full flood, which not only made reconnaissances of the river bed impossible, but also raised the probability of changes in the main channels.

This added considerably to my anxieties as regards bridging requirements.

10. Lieutenant-General Sir J. M. Babington, K.C.M.G., C.B., Commanding the XIVth British Corps, at once suggested the advisability of occupying the island of Grave di Papadopoli previous to the general advance.

With this opinion I concurred.

11. On the night of October 23rd/24th, the 2nd/1st Battalion of the Honourable Artillery Company and the 1st Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, without any previous artillery preparation, crossed the main channel, surprised the Austrian garrison and occupied the northern half of the island.

The attacking troops were transported in small flat-bottomed boats, each holding six men, and rowed by two Italian pontiere. The movement owed its success to the careful arrangements made by the 7th Division, the untiring energy of Captain Odini, of the Italian Engineers, and of the Italian pontiere under his command and to the fine leading of Lieutenant-Colonel R. N. O'Connor, D.S.O., M.C., Commanding the 2nd/1st Honourable Artillery Company.

Both in the transport of the troops by boat and the subsequent bridging of the river, the pontiere gave us an assistance whose value it is impossible to over-estimate.

12. On the night of October 25th/26th the conquest of the island of Grave di Papadopoli was completed by a combined movement of the 7th British Division from the north and the 37th Italian Division from the south.

This very successful operation put the main channel of the Piave behind us and enabled us to begin our bridges and preparations for the main attack in comparative security, although the garrison of the island was subjected to a very heavy shelling all day on the 26th.

13. At 11.30 p.m. on the night of October 26th the bombardment of the hostile positions opened along the whole front. The fact that no single British gun had opened previous to this hour deserves special mention. Both heavy and field artillery were registered by the 6th Field Survey Company, R.E., and the fact that the bombardment and the subsequent barrage were excellent in every way reflects the greatest credit on all ranks of this company.

14. At 6.45 a.m. on October 27th the attack of the Tenth Army against the enemy defences east of the Piave opened.

On the right the XIth Italian Corps under General Paolini, attacked with the 23rd Bersagliere Division under General Fara on its right, and the 37th Italian Division under General Castagnola on its left.

On the left the XIVth British Corps attacked with the 7th British Division under Major-General T. H. Shoubridge, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., on its right and the 23rd British Division under Major-General H. F. Thuillier, C.B., C.M.G., on its left.

15. The enemy offered considerable resistance in his front line, but the defenders were overwhelmed after a hard fight, and the advance was pushed forward by all units with the utmost determination. I would especially commend the action of the 22nd Battalion Manchester Regiment and the 11th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers in this assault.

Unfortunately we lost a number of gallant men by drowning; the difficulty of keeping a footing in a strong current being very great when loaded with rifle and ammunition.