

Italian forces. The 11th Indian Infantry Brigade was moved up from Nibeiwa to near the Tummar camps, while the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade completed the occupation of Tummar East.

At about 0730 hours the right battalion of the 16th Brigade; 2nd Battalion Leicester Regiment, engaged a defended Italian camp and captured it, after a short fight, with about 2,000 prisoners of the 4th Blackshirt Division. Meanwhile the remainder of the 16th Infantry Brigade continued their advance in a violent dust storm. They suffered some casualties from enemy fire but continued to push on, and were assisted by the arrival of some 10 tanks of the 7th R.T.R. which over-ran some enemy guns. The 11th Indian Infantry Brigade moved up on the right flank of the 16th Brigade.

20. At about 1330 hours the Commander of the 4th Indian Division was at 16th Infantry Brigade Headquarters and ordered an attack on Sidi Barrani, placing part of 11th Indian Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Lomax. This attack was launched at 1615 hours by the 2nd Queen's on the right and 2nd Cameron Highlanders on the left, supported by artillery fire, some tanks of the 7th R.T.R., and by an attack by 2nd R.T.R. (cruiser tanks) North of the Sidi-Barrani-Buq Buq road. The attack was completely successful, and Sidi Barrani was in our hands when darkness fell, many prisoners and guns being captured.

21. The force organised from Matruh Garrison had advanced towards Maktila camp and established itself two miles East of Maktila by the evening of the 8th December. This force was a composite one, in which the 3rd Battalion Coldstream Guards was the only complete unit. Detachments of Royal Artillery, 7th Hussars (light tanks), 1st Durham Light Infantry, 1st South Staffords, machine gunners from 1st Royal Northumberland Fusiliers and 1st Cheshires, as well as a number of dummy tanks, made up the balance. It remained in observation of Maktila camp until the afternoon of the 9th December, when, learning that Nibeiwa had been captured, Brigadier Selby gave orders to move forward and endeavour to prevent the withdrawal Westwards of the 1st Libyan Division. Owing to the comparative weakness of the force and difficult going, it was unable to prevent the withdrawal of the enemy towards Sidi Barrani, but pursued them with all possible speed on the 10th December.

The situation at nightfall on the 10th December was that Sidi Barrani had been captured and the 2nd Libyan and 4th Blackshirt Divisions destroyed. East of Barrani, however, the 1st Libyan Division from Maktila was still of some fighting value, and an enemy camp at Point 90 had not been attacked and remained intact.

22. On the evening of the 10th December General O'Connor issued instructions to the Armoured Division to send a force early the following day to prevent any enemy withdrawal from the Sofafi area; to send another force to Buq Buq to deal with any enemy in that direction; and in the event of further retreat to pursue the enemy towards Halfaya, Sidi Omar and Sollum.

6. *Exploitation after Sidi Barrani.*

23. I had always intended if possible to send the 4th Indian Division to reinforce the

Sudan during the winter 1940/41, in order to enable our forces in the Sudan to recapture Kassala and to take the offensive against the enemy. I had proposed to relieve them in the Western Desert by the 6th Australian Division as soon as this was ready and equipped. For several reasons, the principal of which was the availability of shipping, I had to decide while the battle of Sidi Barrani was still in progress whether or not to carry out this relief. There was an opportunity to do so after the operations of the 11th December and the capture of Sidi Barrani, since the supply organisation would only permit of a very limited force being used for further pursuit of the enemy. I decided therefore to withdraw the 4th Indian Division and to replace it by the 6th Australian Division as soon as this could be brought forward. The 16th Infantry Brigade, which had been attached to the 4th Indian Division, remained in the forward area available for pursuit.

I should have liked also to employ the New Zealand Brigade Group which had been in the forward area for some time and was available, but the New Zealand Division itself was not complete, one brigade being in the United Kingdom, and I knew that it was the wish of the New Zealand Government that the division should be employed as a whole if possible.

24. From the 11th December onwards the operations consisted of a pursuit by 7th Armoured Division, followed up by 16th Infantry Brigade.

The 7th Armoured Division advanced at first in two main groups, the 7th Armoured Brigade North of the escarpment towards Sollum and the 4th Armoured Brigade South of the escarpment towards Halfaya, Sidi Omar and Capuzzo. On the afternoon of the 11th December 7th Armoured Brigade made contact with a long enemy column between Buq Buq and Sollum. It promptly attacked and by dusk had secured 14,000 prisoners, 68 guns and much other material. By the 15th December all enemy troops had been driven out of Egypt, and the 7th Armoured Division had concentrated South-West of Bardia. The 4th Armoured Brigade now cut the Bardia-Tobruk road while the Support Group engaged the Western and South-Western defences of Bardia. Meanwhile, the 16th Infantry Brigade moved up to the South-East face of the Bardia perimeter, to cover our use of Sollum harbour. The greater part of the Italian army remaining in Cyrenaica had withdrawn within the defences of Bardia, which was now isolated. It was decided to capture Bardia with the 6th Australian Division as soon as ready, while 7th Armoured Division protected their left flank and prevented any movement along the Bardia-Tobruk road.

25. This ended the first phase of the operation, which may be called the Battle of Sidi Barrani. It had resulted in the destruction of the greater part of five enemy divisions. Over 38,000 prisoners, 400 guns, some 50 tanks and much other war material had been captured. Our own casualties were only 133 killed, 387 wounded and 8 missing.

26. This outstanding success may be attributed to—

- (a) Good co-operation between the three Services;
- (b) Effect of surprise;