

12. The general plan of attack was as follows:—

The Support Group of the 7th Armoured Division was to observe the group of enemy camps round Sofafi and prevent the enemy from these camps intervening in the battle. The remainder of the Armoured Division and the 4th Indian Division were to pass through the gap between the Sofafi camps and Nibeiwa camp. A brigade of the 4th Indian Division with the 7th Battalion R.T.R. (Infantry tanks) was then to attack Nibeiwa camp from the West, while the Armoured Division covered the attack and prevented any intervention from the enemy to the North.

After the capture of Nibeiwa camp, another brigade of the 4th Indian Division, again supported by 7th R.T.R., was to attack the Tummar groups of camps from the West. It was intended that their capture should conclude the first day's operation. Meanwhile, the Matruh Garrison force was to observe and contain the enemy camp at Maktila.

If the attacks on Nibeiwa and Tummar were successful, it was intended to attack and capture Sidi Barrani on the following day, and thereafter exploit success as far Westward as possible.

13. Although our forces were numerically inferior to those of the enemy, their morale, training and equipment was believed to be sufficiently high to compensate for this. The enemy had so far shown little enterprise or power of manoeuvre.

The plan involved a preliminary movement of some 70 miles for the majority of the troops over open desert. This was to be covered in two marches on successive nights (the whole force being mechanised or motorised), the attack taking place on the early morning following the second night march. It would thus be necessary for the whole force to spend one day in the open desert, within about 30 miles of the enemy, and it was feared that, if the enemy observed this movement, heavy air attacks would be made by his numerically superior air force. This risk, however, had to be taken, and it was hoped to counter it by concealment and dispersion and by the protection of our fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns. In fact, the enemy made no attack whatever.

#### 5. *The Battle of Sidi Barrani.*

14. Operations began on the night of the 7th/8th December, during which the whole force moved forward over the desert. The movement was made without difficulty, owing to good training and discipline, and the troops reached their appointed positions up to time.

During the 8th December the force remained in the desert, expecting attack by the enemy air force which never took place. Next night the force moved forward again and took up its positions for the next day's attack. This movement also was made without a hitch.

15. The attack on Nibeiwa was begun at 0700 hours on the 9th December by 11th Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Savory—consisting of 2nd Cameron Highlanders, 1/6th Rajputana Rifles and 4/7th Rajput Regiment) and the 7th battalion R.T.R. The enemy force holding this camp was believed to consist of some 3,000 men with a considerable number of

guns and tanks, under General Maletti. During a short bombardment the 7th R.T.R. moved forward and entered the perimeter at 0735 hours. They soon destroyed the enemy tanks and then met an extremely hot fire from artillery and weapons of all descriptions. This the heavy armour of the Infantry tanks resisted, to the surprise and demoralisation of the enemy. The leading infantry battalion, 2nd Cameron Highlanders, advanced in M.T. behind the tanks to within 700 yards of the perimeter, where they debussed and entered the camp. By 0830 hours the camp was completely in our hands. General Maletti was killed.

16. At 0830 hours the Commander of the 4th Indian Division ordered the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Lloyd—consisting of 1st Royal Fusiliers, 3/1st Punjab Regiment and 4/6th Rajputana Rifles) to move to the West of the Tummar camps in readiness for an attack on them. The 16th British Infantry Brigade (Brigadier Lomax—consisting of 2nd Queens, 2nd Leicesters and 1st Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders) was moved up to a position just west of Nibeiwa. The artillery and 7th R.T.R., having refilled at Nibeiwa, also moved into position for the attacks on Tummar camps. The third brigade of the Indian Division, the 7th Brigade, was held in reserve. It took charge of prisoners and protected the line of communications, but took no part in the actual fighting.

At 1330 hours the artillery concentration on the Tummar camps began and at 1350 hours the 7th R.T.R., now reduced to 22 tanks, entered Tummar West from the North. The leading infantry, 1st Royal Fusiliers, followed in lorries 20 minutes after the tanks, and debussed within 500 yards of the camp. Events inside the camp followed much the same sequence as at Nibeiwa, except that there were few enemy tanks in this camp. After the occupation of Tummar West the Commander 4th Indian Division ordered an attack to be launched against Tummar East. Just as the advance began with the 7th R.T.R. leading, followed by one battalion, 4/6th Rajputana Rifles, an enemy counter-attack was met but quickly repulsed. By dark the greater part of Tummar East was in our hands.

17. At 1615 hours, in view of the successful progress of operations, the Commander of the 4th Indian Division ordered the 16th Infantry Brigade to push forward as far as possible before darkness towards Sidi Barrani. Two regiments of artillery were to join the brigade during the night, while the 7th R.T.R. were to refit as far as possible and be ready for operations next day.

18. Meanwhile 7th Armoured Division had successfully fulfilled its rôle of protecting the left flank of the 4th Indian Division and cutting the Sidi Barrani-Buq Buq road. By 1000 hours 4th Armoured Brigade, moving West of the enemy camps, had got astride the Sidi Barrani-Buq Buq road. The 7th Armoured Brigade remained in reserve. During this advance the 4th Armoured Brigade captured a number of prisoners and vehicles and inflicted considerable losses on the enemy.

19. At dawn on the 10th December the 16th Infantry Brigade advanced in lorries towards Sidi Barrani with the object of getting astride the roads leading Westwards and cutting off the