

sponding salient in the enemy's line also; it was full of strongly held positions, in particular a very well-defended collection of strongpoints just north of Tel el Eisa known as "Thompson's Post". The intention was now to clear up all this area, break out along the axis of the road and send the New Zealand Division, reinforced and regrouped as I have described, to capture Sidi Abd el Rahman. This would get us right through the enemy's prepared positions and turn his northern flank. Before this plan could be set in motion, however, information was received on the morning of the 29th that caused us to alter completely the direction of the attack.

The enemy had realized the probability, and the danger, of the plan which we had decided to employ. In order to meet it he moved up to the Sidi Abd el Rahman area 90 Light Division, leaving the covering of the original gap, where we were now on the defensive, to the Trieste Division. This made it unlikely that we should be able to obtain a decisive break-through on the line of the road, but I considered that the situation could be turned to our advantage by encouraging the enemy's belief that we intended to force our way through to Sidi Abd el Rahman. We would continue the attack by the Australians, thus diverting his attention to the sector of the main road; when all his reserves were engaged there General Montgomery would employ the reserve he had created in a drive due westwards out of our salient to breach the hastily reorganized defences and pass our armour through well into the enemy's rear. This would finally disrupt his defences and the battle would become mobile.

On the night of 30th October, therefore, 26 Australian Infantry Brigade, supported by a great weight of artillery, struck north-east and then east from the salient won by 20 Brigade two nights before. Again it was not possible to clear the whole area in the face of the enemy's stubborn resistance; this part of the front was particularly strong and the defences were so thick that it might almost be called one continuous minefield. However, the Australians reached and crossed the road and drove towards the sea, reducing the corridor to the now encircled enemy to a very narrow strip along the coast. In the pocket thus formed there were two Italian and two German battalions. They were joined next day by a group of about twenty German tanks from 21 Panzer Division which broke through down the road; this was in many ways a good sign, for it meant that that division was being drawn into the area where we wanted it. Indeed the Germans were now devoting their full efforts to counter-attacks on the Australians. The proposed break-through would place us between this northern group and the remnants of 15 Panzer Division, which was still observing the western end of our original salient, and would therefore split the enemy reserves in two.

I had hoped we should be able to attack westwards the same night, 31st October; but the men were greatly fatigued, time was needed for reconnaissance, and the artillery had to be reorganized after the Australian attack. It was accordingly postponed for twenty-four hours but, to compensate for the delay, the depth of the attack was increased from four to six thousand yards. It was to be an operation very similar to that of 23rd October. Advancing due west on a front of four thousand yards

151 and 152 Infantry Brigades (50 and 51 Divisions), supported by 23 Armoured Brigade, were to drive a lane through the enemy's new positions, clearing the minefields as they went. At the same time 28 (Maori) Battalion and 133 Infantry Brigade (44 Division) were to capture certain important enemy localities on the flanks of the advance. 9 Armoured Brigade, following close behind the infantry, was then to advance a further two thousand yards beyond their objective and penetrate a strong screen of guns known to be in position along the Rahman track. The forces mentioned were under command of 30 Corps and their action was to be co-ordinated by the New Zealand Division. 10 Corps was then to follow up with 1 Armoured Division (2 and 8 Armoured Brigades) leading; it was important that all three armoured brigades should reach the open country before first light and General Montgomery issued firm instructions that should 30 Corps not reach their objectives the armoured divisions of 10 Corps were to fight their way through. When the way was clear 10 Corps was to launch two armoured car regiments from the tip of the salient to raid the enemy's rear. 5 and 6 New Zealand Infantry Brigades were to concentrate in the salient ready to exploit success if called on.

The attack was to be supported by a very strong concentration of artillery fire. As in the opening attack all guns were to be employed beforehand in silencing enemy batteries. Then, while a hundred and ninety-two guns put down a creeping barrage over the four thousand yards of front, a further hundred and sixty-eight were to shell known and likely enemy positions in the path of the advance and on either side of it. All available guns were then to be concentrated in support of 9 Armoured Brigade's attack on the Rahman track. The strength of this artillery support was, however, to some extent offset by an inevitable lack of exact knowledge of enemy dispositions. Timing was also a problem. The moon was now on the wane, and zero hour had therefore to be made three hours later than on the opening night of the battle.

When the attack went in at 0105 hours on 2nd November the enemy were able to offer rather more opposition than had been expected, having regard to the gruelling artillery and air bombardment to which they had been subjected. It was not until 0600 hours that 151 Brigade reached its objective. 152 Brigade on the left reached its objective half an hour earlier, but still two hours later than had been planned. Meanwhile 9 Armoured Brigade had been delayed by mines and still more by artillery fire from the flanks which had caused appreciable casualties. As a result the brigade crossed its start line half an hour behind schedule. The delay proved very costly for at dawn it found itself on the muzzles of the powerful screen of anti-tank guns on the Rahman track, instead of beyond it as had been planned. It was here that occurred what has been called the battle of Tell el Aqqaqir,* which was the largest clash of armoured formations in the whole battle. The Tell itself is a small rise in the ground just beyond the Sidi Abd el Rahman track.

All three regiments of 9 Armoured Brigade displayed the greatest gallantry in the two hours

* There was a previous battle of Tell el Aqqaqir on 26th February, 1916, in the campaign against the Senussi, but this is another place of the same name, fifteen miles south-east of Sidi Barrani.