

was about 0630 hours. The sun rose straight over the opposite ridge, shining down the valley, blinding artillery O.P.s. and the attacking troops. It was not until 0700 hours that the sun was sufficiently high to see clearly eastwards. The Italians "stood to" at dawn and usually went back behind the slopes for breakfast shortly after. The artillery concentrations would make it hard for them to get their men up again. Zero at 0700 hours would allow the attacking troops to have breakfast and start the day reasonably administered. During the early hours of the morning 9th and 29th Indian Infantry Brigades had concentrated behind the lower slopes of Cameron Ridge. The assault on Fort Dologorodoc was to be carried out by 2 Highland Light Infantry, which was to approach its objective from a south-westerly direction. This attack was not to go in until M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak had been secured. It was calculated that these hills would be in our hands by 0900 hours. The exact time of the attack depended on when the artillery supporting 4th Indian Division could be spared to support 5th Indian Division. By 0945 hours the situation on the 4th Indian Division front appeared to be sufficiently satisfactory for the order to be given to 5th Indian Division to attack. At this time it was not confirmed that Brigs Peak and M. Sanchil had been captured, but progress appeared to be satisfactory, and there was every prospect that both M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak would be secured shortly.

The attack of 2 Highland Light Infantry was stopped within 200 yards of the starting line by severe flank fire by machine-guns in enfilade, located on the lower eastern slopes of M. Sanchil. By 1300 hours it was clear that 2 Highland Light Infantry could make no further progress from this direction, and it was decided that they should be side-stepped to their right to approach Fort Dologorodoc from the south instead of the south-west. This new attack was timed for 1530 hours.

Capture of Fort Dologorodoc.

The weather on 15th and 16th March was extremely hot, with cloud and a heavy, oppressive atmosphere. The heat and radiation from the rocks for troops awaiting in the bottom of the valley was very trying. The lack of success of 2 Highland Light Infantry was as much attributable to physical exhaustion as to enemy action, although this was severe. It was also clear that Fort Dologorodoc was far too big an objective for one battalion. Commander 9th Indian Infantry Brigade planned to assault Fort Dologorodoc at dusk from the south with two battalions: right—3/12 Frontier Force Regiment; left—3/5 Mahrattas. These two attacks were successful in capturing two sub-features of Fort Dologorodoc, known as Pimple and Pinnacle, by midnight. Touch with these two battalions was lost, but Commander 9th Indian Infantry Brigade ordered 2 West Yorks on to the col between Pimple and Pinnacle where they arrived shortly after midnight. Before first light the enemy from the Fort itself counter-attacked strongly, but met the whole of the 9th Indian Infantry Brigade in line. The plan had been for 2 West Yorks to go through 3/12 Frontier Force and 3/5 Mahrattas and assault the Fort under cover of a timed artillery programme. In the confusion of the

counter-attack, communications broke down, and it was impossible to stop the artillery concentration which came down on the Fort as planned. This, in fact, was most fortunate, as the enemy's counter-attacking forces found themselves between the small arms fire of 9th Indian Infantry Brigade and the artillery fire falling on their own fort behind. They broke and were pursued into the Fort by 9th Indian Infantry Brigade, 2 West Yorks reaching there at 0600 hours, immediately exploiting 800 yards beyond.

Situation on 4th Indian Division Front.

By this time the true facts of the 4th Indian Division right attack became clear. 2 Camerons had reached their objectives but had suffered such heavy casualties that they had not sufficient remaining strength to clear the enemy off M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak. The 1 Royal Fusiliers, sent forward to reinforce 2 Camerons, also reached the objective, but could not clear the enemy off, and by nightfall, confused fighting was still in progress. 1/6 Rajputana Rifles secured the Hogs Back, losing 50 per cent. of their strength, but succeeded in maintaining their grip, and repulsing the enemy counter-attacks with heavy loss. Two companies 4/6 Rajputana Rifles were sent forward to reinforce 1/6 Rajputana Rifles. 2/5 Mahratta Light Infantry gallantly carried Flat Top Hill, and succeeded in consolidating, but this battalion was also so reduced in numbers that it could not exploit to Mole Hill. It was decided that no useful purpose would now be served in doing so.

In the 4th Divisional left attack, 4/11 Sikhs captured the left bump of M. Samanna, but although making repeated attempts failed to gain the centre bump, which was held by a battalion of Alpini. On 16th March 4/6 Rajputana Rifles less two Companies attacked Brigs Peak, but was unable to make any progress beyond that already achieved. Confused fighting continued throughout the day, the enemy, who consisted of Bersaglieri and the Savoy Grenadiers, fighting determinedly, were holding positions under the rocks which were practically immune from shell fire. During the evening, a report was received that Brigs Peak was captured, and that only a few enemy remained on M. Sanchil. On receipt of this information, 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, which was being held as force reserve, was put under command 4th Indian Division and sent to Cameron Ridge in order to move over the col separating M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak; and exploit into the plain west of Keren. Unfortunately this report was premature. The leading battalions of this brigade were committed during the night to attacks on M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak. 3/18 Garhwal Rifles in particular suffered heavy loss. The Commanding Officer and all other British officers except one became casualties. The enemy still held ground from which he could direct effective machine-gun and mortar fire against advancing troops.

Withdrawal from M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak.

By the evening of 17th March it was clear that the much reduced forward elements still on M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak could not be maintained. They were suffering heavy casualties. The intervention of the only remaining battalion of 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, the