

came under command of a battalion commander. The three battalions under the 234th Brigade, 4th Buffs, 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers and 1st King's Own, were made responsible for the northern, central and southern sectors respectively.

215. The enemy attack, supported by dive-bombers and destroyers, began about six o'clock on the morning of 12th November, when German troops disembarked on the extreme North-east of the island and at Pandeli Bay, to the East of Leros town. In the North-east, about five hundred troops were landed and gained the high ground running from Dellapalma Bay to Grifo, including Mt. Vedetta. The enemy were held on this line throughout the day, but by two o'clock on the morning of 13th November, they had overrun Mt. Clidi and extended their bridgehead from Mt. Clidi to Ste. Madonne.

216. The landing at Pandeli was made by a much smaller force, about one hundred and twenty men in all. Some progress was made at first, but the landing was successfully counter-attacked by a company of Royal Irish Fusiliers, and was pinned down on the lower slopes of Mt. Appetici. It was here and to the immediate North, on the narrow Gurna-Alinda neck of land, that the move to split the defence up into isolated sectors developed. The Pandeli landing was reinforced during the night of 12th-13th November and a further night landing was made on the northern shore of Gurna Bay.

217. Meanwhile, during the afternoon of 12th November, the equivalent of a battalion of enemy parachutists had been dropped in the North-east and on Gachi Ridge, and although at 1600 hours our troops were still holding the high ground overlooking the ridge, the enemy had gained control of the Gurna-Alinda neck, thus cutting land communications between the southern and central and the northern sectors of the island.

218. On 13th November there was no significant change in the North-east, although some enemy infiltration took place to the South-east of Quirico. High winds and heavy seas probably prevented any further enemy reinforcements being landed during the day. No activity of any kind was reported from the southern sector, but in the centre the enemy, having strongly reinforced his troops in the Appetici area the previous night, unexpectedly captured Appetici at midday and thus exposed our right flank and strengthened his hold on the Gurna-Alinda neck.

219. That night a counter-attack by the reserve company of the King's Own, supported by heavy bombardment from His Majesty's ships Echo and Belvoir, was launched against the enemy at Appetici, but it failed to achieve its object, and the enemy, striking South in strength with mortar and machine-gun support towards Meraviglia, made considerable progress and had almost reached our main headquarters on Meraviglia by seven o'clock on the morning of 14th November.

220. The situation in the northern and southern sectors was more encouraging; the Buffs recaptured Mt. Clidi during the night of 13th-14th November and continued to advance, whilst a general advance in the southern sector made, in conjunction with the advance from

the North, a converging attack on the enemy in the Gurna-Alinda neck. Good progress was made, and shortly after midday it was reported that the enemy was almost entirely surrounded in the Quaranta area. The Buffs were to his North and North-west, one company of Royal West Kents, brought from Samos and operating under command of Fortress Headquarters, was also to his North-west, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers and King's Own had gained a strong footing on Gachi Ridge, although they were not in complete control. Over two hundred prisoners were taken in this action and fairly heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy.

221. Our attack continued throughout the 14th November in spite of heavy enemy air activity, and at eight o'clock the next morning a further strong attack was launched against the enemy still holding out on Gachi Ridge. Further personnel of the Royal West Kents, who had been landed from Samos the previous night, were able to give added weight to the attack, but shortly after midday on the 15th, it was reported that little headway was being made in the face of intense and continuous bombing and aerial machine-gunning by the enemy.

222. Communications were by now disrupted, making control and movement difficult, and, what was worse, our troops were showing obvious signs of fatigue. By the end of the day the Gachi objective had not been reached, and there is little doubt that the failure of the attack was due to the enemy air onslaught, which the Royal Air Force, operating under a heavy handicap, was unable effectively to counter. Some four hundred sorties were made by the enemy against our troops during the day.

223. During that night the enemy reinforced his positions and at first light launched a heavy attack on Meraviglia. By 0815 hours on the 16th November, it was reported that the situation was serious and that the Meraviglia position was being neutralised by dive-bombing attacks and machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, in spite of their extreme fatigue, our troops fought back desperately, and were able to report an improvement in the situation by 1130 hours; Meraviglia was still in our hands, communications had been partially restored and reorganisation was in progress. A further message, originated at 1200 hours, confirmed this and added that the Fortress Reserve Company had been re-formed.

224. By this time, however, the enemy had succeeded in building up a substantial reserve and had extended his bridgehead at Pandeli Bay. Another message received during the afternoon said that the position had deteriorated and was becoming desperate, but there was still a hope of bringing the battle to a successful conclusion if the valley running from Alinda Bay to Pandeli Bay could be bombarded, since a heavy attack from that area on the fortress position was certain during the night.

225. Shortly after 1830 hours, all communications with the island faded out, and, in view of this, further troops which had been embarked at Samos for Leros were disembarked. It was later learned that the garrison had surrendered at 2000 hours.

226. Meanwhile, on Samos, to which a small mission had been sent via Turkey on the night of 9th September, the Italian garrison, under