

first tanks to land, arrived and were ordered forward to assist the carriers and motor cyclists. The tanks moved up the road and engaged and silenced the enemy machine gun and rifle positions on the col.

All fire from the position appeared to be silenced, but the extremely rocky ground prevented the tanks from leaving the road and getting right into the position. They therefore went on down the road for another mile, where they were joined by two more Tetrarchs. They were now within three miles of the centre of Antsirane and continued their advance along the road and destroyed a lorry load of Senegalese infantry. Immediately afterwards they came under fire from 75 mm. guns firing down the road and from their right flank. At this point they were unable to leave the road, and four tanks were very quickly disabled. The squadron commander, Major J. E. S. Simon, Royal Tank Regiment, sent his last remaining tank back to Brigade to report, and then brought the survivors from the disabled tanks into dismounted action. They found it impossible to advance, but beat off several enemy attacks until, at 1545 hrs., when only three of the party were left unwounded, and even revolver ammunition was expended, they were taken prisoner. The fifth tank met and destroyed another lorry load of infantry on its way back.

Meanwhile at the Col de Bonne Nouvelle, after the tanks had gone, the enemy defences came to life and held up our infantry. At 1415 hrs. seven more tanks under Captain P. L. Palmer, 10 Royal Hussars, arrived in the area, and the position was finally captured and mopped up by 1500 hrs. Thus, from about 1200 to 1500 hrs., there were two battles taking place on the road. The French were attacking our tank crews a few hundred yards in front of their main position, and at the same time, about 3,000 yards further back, our infantry were attacking the French outpost position.

It was subsequently learned that the Col de Bonne Nouvelle was the last of several prepared positions facing West which had not at first been manned. The French on hearing, from the officer sent back with the letter, that our main threat was along the Ambararata road, had hurried forward lorried infantry to occupy this position. Our attack was made before this occupation had been completed, and the action of our leading tanks prevented further reinforcements.

20. At 1515 hrs. the advance from Col de Bonne Nouvelle was resumed. Captain Palmer's tanks led and were followed by 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers. The tanks had been ordered to locate the enemy which had stopped Major Simon's tanks. Captain Palmer ordered his tanks to swing off the road to the right and to move through the scrub and mealie plantation to a hull-down position. He then deliberately moved his own tank into the open to draw fire. It was hit and Captain Palmer was killed assisting his wounded driver to cover. The remaining tanks resumed the advance, but came under heavy 75 mm. fire and withdrew at 1800 hrs. in the failing light.

The carriers of 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers followed by the companies of 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers were advancing

along both sides of the road, and came under fire from the main position about 1700 hrs. On the right they got within a few yards of the enemy anti-tank ditch, some two hundred yards in front of the enemy trenches. As dark fell at 1830 hrs., 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers was in contact with the enemy on a wide front and under heavy fire. This battalion continued energetic patrolling during the night, while the remaining battalions of 29 Independent Brigade under orders of Brigade HQ, moved into perimeter areas, with Brigade HQ established for the night at Conlieux (Robinson's Hotel).

The situation report (see also para. 24) brought back to me by my G.S.O.1 Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Moulton, R.M., and my own contacts revealed the following:—

29 Independent Brigade had now advanced 18 miles in tropical heat and in wet clothes along a bad and extremely dusty road. The troops had been actively employed since 0130 hrs. when they had manned the landing craft. Transport was still very short, marching infantry had carried all their weapons and pulled handcarts with their ammunition and stores. Some of the later sub-units to land were still marching up the road and continued to do so all night. All along the road the bush and long grass was burning and for the last few miles there was some inaccurate sniping.

The troops though tired, had their tails well up. 29 Independent Brigade was in contact with the main enemy facing North across the isthmus leading to Antsirane and the brigade commander intended to issue orders for a dawn attack on 6th May, D2, on a three battalion front. Lack of intelligence of enemy positions, combined with the successful advance to date, led us all to expect a good scrap, which would end when we ate our breakfasts in Antsirane on 6th May. The limited transport of 29 Independent Brigade; "R" Group 17 Infantry Brigade and two companies 2 Northampton minus any transport were on the way; and the air was ours. The field ambulance was moving up and two motor ambulances were ashore.

In confident expectation of success, my main worry was what would happen should the enemy battalion at Joffreville come down on our flank, or across our lines of communication? Neither of these events happened as expected. On 6th May, at 0700 hrs., we were further away from Antsirane than the areas reached by our leading elements overnight; and later the battalion from Joffreville was surprised and captured almost intact, as it marched from the South into the rear of our battalion areas.

#### PROGRESS OF THE LANDING ON 5TH MAY—DI.

##### *Completion of 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando.*

21. After detailing a flotilla of nine Assault Landing Craft and two Motor Landing Craft for the very important landing at Red beaches, the available landing craft were only sufficient to land in the first trip about 580 men of 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers, 512 of 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers and a total of 14 carriers on the brigade front on Green and White beaches respectively. To these were added minimum beach parties, beach signals, engineers, and medical detachments. A further 278 men of 2 East Lancashire Regiment had landed on the second trip of