

weak 2 Highland Light Infantry, would be unlikely to produce the required results. A further assault would probably cause the destruction of 10th Indian Infantry Brigade, the only available force reserve. 3/18 Ganhwal and 4/10 Baluch were withdrawn during the night 17th/18th March to the valley. 2 Highland Light Infantry were left on Cameron Ridge until night 18th/19th March, when they also were withdrawn and 10th Indian Infantry Brigade was concentrated as Force Reserve. M. Sanchil and Brigs Peak were thereafter subjected to heavy shelling by 6-inch Hows. Flat Top Hill and Hogs Back were firmly held.

#### *Effect on 5th Indian Division.*

On the 5th Divisional front, the capture of Fort Dologorodoc was only half way to the Divisional objective. The plan was for 29th Indian Infantry Brigade to go through 9th Indian Infantry Brigade and capture M. Zeban. Until M. Sanchil was secured it was not considered wise to launch 29th Indian Infantry Brigade. The direction given was to hold the Fort throughout the 16th, while the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade assisted 4th Indian Division to secure M. Sanchil. The enemy counter-attached determinedly. These attacks were broken up by artillery and the dogged resistance of 9th Indian Infantry Brigade, helped, throughout the day by close support from the R.A.F.

#### *Attack Resumed by 5th Indian Division.*

Shortly after midday, orders were issued for the advance to be resumed during the night 16th/17th March. 5th Indian Division was to start from the Fort at approximately 2200 hours. Unavoidable delays, caused by difficulties of communications, the delay in making a mule track up to the Fort, and unexpectedly serious casualties in the administrative staff of 1 Worcesters, compelled zero hour to be postponed until 0030 hours 17th March. This delay, though unavoidable, caused great anxiety, as it was expected that the thrust by 5th Indian Division would relieve the severe pressure on the tired and much reduced battalions of 11th Indian Infantry Brigade.

#### *Progress of 29th Indian Infantry Brigade.*

In their advance from the Fort 29th Indian Infantry Brigade encountered strong opposition, and were unable to reach their objective, 1 Worcesters becoming pinned half-way up Falestoh Col. The enemy's fire was severe. Communications were broken. Supply became difficult, and during the 17th both food and ammunition were dropped on 1 Worcesters by the R.A.F., using one Wellesley and one Vincent. Eventually it was found impossible to get on, and 29th Indian Infantry Brigade consolidated positions already held between six and eight hundred yards beyond the Fort. By 1530 hours on 17th March, the Commander of 29th Indian Infantry Brigade appreciated that administrative difficulties and the great heat of the day had broken the impetus of his attack. 10th Indian Infantry Brigade having been committed on M. Sanchil, there was nothing left with which to make a further advance without a period of reorganisation. Carriers of 10th Indian Infantry Brigade and some "I" tanks were in the Happy Valley to secure the right flank of 5th Indian Division and prevent any debouchment by the enemy

from the Acqua Gap. There then ensued a period of holding what had been gained, with daily counter-attacks by the enemy, who fought most determinedly to recapture Fort Dologorodoc.

#### *Arresa Area.*

Before the main attack on Keren on 15th March, subsidiary operations had been started by No. 2 M.M.G. Group, reinforced by Skinner's Horse and two Mounted Infantry Companies S.D.F. against Arresa. Although operations here were unable to make ground, they did succeed in delaying the move of enemy forces.

#### *Co-operation by 7th Indian Infantry Brigade.*

The operations of 7th Indian Infantry Brigade were co-ordinated with 5th Indian Division attack on the 15th. These operations were successful in containing a large part of the enemy's forces although they were unable to make very much ground. The enemy was holding M. Engiahat, a large square hill of the same type as those around Keren. The road from the north winds through narrow passes and along the edge of river beds, where in places it hangs above the river on a ledge 50 or 60 feet above the river bed. Commander 7th Indian Infantry Brigade had hoped to be able to send a column across-country east of M. Engiahat to cut the Keren-Asmara road east of Keren. At this time a practicable route had not been found. The enemy were still holding positions east of Engiahat which blocked any advance in this direction. The effort of 7th Indian Infantry Brigade was of assistance to the main battle in that it did contain forces which the enemy commander badly needed at Fort Dologorodoc.

#### *Death of Gen. Lorenzini.*

On 19th March General Lorenzini was killed. This officer was held in high repute by his own troops. He was personally gallant and had had much experience of fighting in the Middle East. His death was a severe blow to the enemy.

#### *Offensive resumed 25th March.*

After a week, during which the enemy launched no less than eight counter-attacks against Fort Dologorodoc, the Commander, 5th Indian Division, was in a position to resume the offensive. His object was to open the road to Keren for the passage of mechanised forces.

#### *The enemy positions covering the road.*

M. Sanchil throws off a spur to the north-east. Along the east side of M. Sanchil, round this spur, and then in a westerly direction, runs the railway. At the level of the railway the spur flattens out and its surface is much broken. This area was aptly named "Railway Bumps". The Railway Bumps spur ends at a junction of two dry stream beds. The main one is the khor which comes down the Dongolaas gorge parallel with the road. The subsidiary comes in from a north-westerly direction and where it joints the main khor, its banks are steep, the right bank being the Railway Bumps, the left bank Railway Ridge. Machine-guns in position on Railway Bumps and Railway Ridge commanded the Dongolaas gorge, the east side of M. Sanchil, the west side of Fort Dologorodoc and the road-block.