

The objectives were, on the right, Outpost Hill and Middlesex Hill (to be attacked at 11.30 p.m. on the 6th), and on the left the line Belah Trench-Turtle Hill (to be attacked at dawn on the 7th).

During the 6th a certain amount of movement on the roads north of Gaza was observed by our airmen and fired on by our heavy artillery, but nothing indicating a general retirement from Gaza.

The attack on Outpost Hill and Middlesex Hill met with little opposition, and as soon, after they had been taken, as patrols could be pushed forward, the enemy was found to be gone. East Anglian troops on the left also found at dawn that the enemy had retired during the night, and early in the morning the main force occupied the northern and eastern defences of Gaza. Rearguards were still occupying Beit Hanun and the Atawineh and Tank systems, from whence Turkish artillery continued to fire on Gaza and Ali Muntar till dusk.

As soon as it was seen that the Turks had evacuated Gaza a part of the force pushed along the coast to the mouth of the Wadi Hesi, so as to turn the Wadi Hesi line and prevent the enemy making any stand there. Cavalry had already pushed on round the north of Gaza, and became engaged with an enemy rearguard at Beit Hanun, which maintained its position till nightfall. The force advancing along the coast reached the Wadi Hesi by evening, and succeeded in establishing itself on the north bank in the face of considerable opposition, a Turkish rearguard making several determined counter-attacks.

On our extreme right the situation remained practically unchanged during the 7th; the enemy made no further attempt to counter-attack, but maintained his positions opposite our right flank guard.

In the centre the Hareira Tepe Redoubt was captured at dawn; some prisoners and guns were taken. The London troops, after a severe engagement at Tel el Sheria, which they captured by a bayonet charge at 4 a.m. on the 7th, subsequently repulsing several counter-attacks, pushed forward their line about a mile to the north of Tel el Sheria; the mounted troops on the right moved towards Jemmamah and Huj, but met with considerable opposition from hostile rearguards.

13. During the 8th the advance was continued, and interest was chiefly centred in an attempt to cut off, if possible, the Turkish rearguard which had held the Tank and Atawineh systems. The enemy had, however, retreated during the night 7th-8th, and though considerable captures of prisoners, guns, ammunition and other stores were made during the day, chiefly in the vicinity of Huj, no large formed body of the enemy was cut off. The Turkish rearguards fought stubbornly and offered considerable opposition. Near Huj a fine charge by some squadrons of the Worcester and Warwick Yeomanry captured 12 guns, and broke the resistance of a hostile rearguard. It soon became obvious from the reports of the Royal Flying Corps, who throughout the 7th and 8th attacked the retreating columns with bombs and machine-gun fire, and from other evidence, that the enemy was retiring in considerable disorganisation, and could offer no very serious resistance if pressed with determination.

Instructions were accordingly issued on the morning of the 9th to the mounted troops, directing them on the line El Tine-Beit Duras, with orders to press the enemy relentlessly. They were to be supported by a portion of the force, which was ordered to push forward to Julis and Mejdal.

The enemy opposite our right flank guard had commenced to retreat towards Hebron on the morning of the 8th. He was pursued for a short distance by the Yeomanry, and some prisoners and camels were captured, but the Yeomanry were then recalled to rejoin the main body of the mounted troops for the more important task of the pursuit of the enemy's main body.

By the 9th, therefore, operations had reached the stage of a direct pursuit by as many troops as could be supplied so far in front of railhead. The problem, in fact, became one of supply rather than manœuvre. The question of water and forage was a very difficult one. Even where water was found in sufficient quantities, it was usually in wells and not on the surface, and consequently if the machinery for working the wells was damaged, or a sufficient supply of troughs was not available, the process of watering a large quantity of animals was slow and difficult.

14. On the evening of November 9th there were indications that the enemy was organising a counter-attack towards Arak el Menshiye by all available units of the force which had retired towards Hebron, with the object of taking pressure off the main force, which was retiring along the coastal plain. It was obvious that the Hebron force, which was believed to be short of transport and ammunition, to have lost heavily and to be in a generally disorganised state, could make no effective diversion, and that this threat could practically be disregarded. Other information showed the seriousness of the enemy's losses and the disorganisation of his forces.

Orders were accordingly issued to press the pursuit and to reach Junction Station as early as possible, thus cutting off the Jerusalem Army, while the Imperial Camel Corps was ordered to move to the neighbourhood of Tel el Nejile, where it would be on the flank of any counter-stroke from the hills.

Operations on the 10th and 11th showed a stiffening of the enemy's resistance on the general line of the Wadi Sukereir, with centre about El Kustineh; the Hebron group, after an ineffective demonstration in the direction of Arak el Menshiye on the 10th, retired north-east and prolonged the enemy's line towards Beit Jibrin. Royal Flying Corps reports indicated the total hostile forces opposed to us on this line at about 15,000; and this increased resistance, coupled with the capture of prisoners from almost every unit of the Turkish force, tended to show that we were no longer opposed to rearguards, but that all the remainder of the Turkish Army which could be induced to fight was making a last effort to arrest our pursuit south of the important Junction Station.

In these circumstances our progress on the 10th and 11th was slow; the troops suffered considerably from thirst (a hot exhausting wind blew during these two days), and our supply difficulties were great; but by the evening of the 11th favourable positions had been reached for a combined attack.