

2. In order to provide more effectively for the security of Jerusalem and Jaffa, it was essential that the line should be advanced. I therefore ordered the XXth Corps to advance to the line Beitin-Nalin. This involved an advance on a 12-mile front to a depth of 6 miles immediately north of Jerusalem. The XXIst Corps on the left I ordered to advance to the line Kibbiéh-Rantieh-Mulebbis-Sheikh El Balutah-El Jelil. When this advance had been carried out the distance between the enemy and Jaffa would be increased to 8 miles.

3. Before either of these advances could take place a considerable amount of labour was necessary on the construction of roads and the improvement of communications. Supplies and ammunition had to be brought up, a task which was rendered more difficult by the weather. Heavy rains interfered with the progress of railway construction, and in some places washed away the existing line, while the roads became deep in mud, rendering the use of mechanical transport and camels impossible, and that of horse transport slow and difficult.

4. The operation on the left was the first to be carried out. The chief obstacle lay in the crossing of the Nahr El Auja. This river is only fordable in places, and all approaches to it are overlooked from Sheikh Muannis and Khurbet Hadrah. At these places two spurs running from north to south terminate abruptly in steep slopes some 500 yards from the river.

Before the XXIst Corps could reach its final objectives, it was necessary that the guns should move forward with the infantry. Consequently Sheikh Muannis, Khurbet Hadrah and the high ground overlooking the river had to be captured as a preliminary to the general advance in order that bridges might be built.

The chief difficulty lay in concealing the collection and preparation of rafts and bridging material. All preparations were completed, however, without attracting the enemy's attention, and on the night of December 20th-21st the 52nd Division crossed the river in three columns. The enemy was taken completely by surprise. The left column, fording the river near its mouth, at this point 4 feet deep, captured Tell Er Rekkeit, 4,000 yards north of the river's mouth; the centre and right columns, crossing on rafts, rushed Sheikh Muannis and Khurbet Hadrah at the point of the bayonet. By dawn a line from Khurbet Hadrah to Tell Er Rekkeit had been consolidated, and the enemy deprived of all observation from the north over the valley of the Nahr El Auja.

The successful crossing of the Nahr El Auja reflects great credit on the 52nd (Lowland) Division. It involved considerable preparation, the details of which were thought out with care and precision. The sodden state of the ground, and, on the night of the crossing, the swollen state of the river, added to the difficulties, yet by dawn the whole of the infantry had crossed. The fact that the enemy were taken by surprise, and that all resistance was overcome with the bayonet without a shot being fired, bears testimony to the discipline of this division. Eleven officers, including two battalion commanders, and 305 other ranks, and ten machine guns were captured in this operation.

December 21st was spent in building bridges. Considerable hostile shell fire was experienced during the day, chiefly from the right flank.

From Mulebbis the enemy could observe the valley of the Auja. Despite this the bridges were completed, and by dusk the whole of the Divisional Artillery of the 52nd Division had crossed to the right bank, ready to support the advance to the final objectives.

On the morning of December 22nd, the 54th Division on the right drove the enemy from the orchards which surround Mulebbis, and captured the villages of Rantieh and Fejja. On the left the 52nd Division reached all their objectives and consolidated the line Tel el Mukhmar-Arsuf, the latter place, although two miles beyond the allotted objective, being occupied to deny direct observation on Jaffa Harbour to the enemy.

During the day the Royal Flying Corps attacked the enemy with bombs and machine-gun fire as he withdrew, inflicting numerous casualties.

Throughout these operations the XXIst Corps received most effective support from the Royal Navy.

This operation, by increasing the distance between the enemy and Jaffa from three to eight miles, rendered Jaffa and its harbour secure, and gained elbow room for the troops covering Ludd and Ramleh and the main Jaffa-Jerusalem road.

5. In the meantime, on XXth Corps front, only minor operations had taken place, resulting in the capture of various points of local tactical importance.

The preparations for the advance to the Beitin-Nalin line were hindered by the weather, heavy rain falling during the week before Christmas. As they were nearing completion, various movements and concentrations of troops on the part of the enemy indicated that he intended to attack, with the object of recovering Jerusalem.

This proved to be the case. On the night of December 26/27th, the enemy attacked with great determination astride the Jerusalem-Nablus road. A counter-attack against the right of his attack was carried out immediately by two divisions. As the result of three days' fighting, not only did the enemy's attempt to recapture Jerusalem fail, but by the end of the third day he found himself seven miles further from Jerusalem than when his attack started.

The enemy's attack was launched at 11.30 p.m. on December 26th, the advanced posts of the 60th Division, east of the Jerusalem road, being driven in. By 1.30 a.m. on December 27th the 60th Division was engaged along its whole front.

Between 1.30 a.m. and 8 a.m. the outposts of the 60th Division on the ridge north of Beit Hanninah repelled four determined attacks, but the heaviest fighting took place to the east of the Jerusalem-Nablus road. Repeated attacks were made against Tel el Ful; a conspicuous hill from which Jerusalem and the intervening ground can be overlooked. The attacks were made by picked bodies of troops, and were pressed with great determination. At only one point did the enemy succeed in reaching the main line of defence. He was driven out at once by the local reserves. In all these attacks he lost heavily.

In the meantime the enemy had delivered attacks against various points held by the 53rd Division east of Jerusalem. On the extreme right at Kh. Deir Ibn Obeid a company of