

Division had captured Abud and the ridge between the Wadis Barbara and Abud.

In neither case was any serious opposition encountered.

When the subsequent advance began the opposition stiffened considerably on the front of both Corps.

On March 9th and 10th the XXth Corps had to drive the enemy from ridge after ridge before the final objectives were reached.

During the night of March 8/9th the brigades of the XXth Corps moved forward to their positions of assembly. On the extreme right, in the Jordan Valley, the brigade of the 60th Division entrusted with the task of capturing Kh. el Beiyudat and Abu Tellul experienced some difficulty in crossing the Wadi el Auja in the dark, and subsequently met with determined resistance. By 3 p.m., however, Kh. el Beiyudat and Abu Tellul had been captured. The occupation of a position astride the Beisan-Jericho road completed this operation. Further west the 53rd, 74th and 10th Divisions had advanced by the evening to a depth varying between 3,000 and 7,000 yards, and had reached a line running east and west through Tell Asur, thence along the ridges overlooking the wadis En Nimr and El Jib. The 53rd Division on the right had met with considerable opposition and great natural difficulties, especially on the extreme right and at Tell Asur, a conspicuous landmark among a mass of high hills. The importance attached to Tell Asur by the enemy was shown by the number of determined efforts he made to recapture it, all of which were repulsed.

On March 10th both the enemy's resistance and the difficulties of the ground increased, but during the day and the early hours of the night of March 10/11th, an advance of 3,000 yards was made on a front of 12 miles. The line reached ran from Keir Malik, along the ridge overlooking the Wadi el Kola and the Burj el Lisaneh ridge, past Kh. el Sahlat, Kh. Aliuta, Jiljilia, Abwein, and Arura to its former position at Deir es Sudan and Neby Saleh.

The enemy contested the ridges north of the Wadis en Nimr and El Jib with great obstinacy, while on the extreme left near Neby Saleh he counter-attacked the left of the 10th Division on several occasions. The descent of the slopes leading down to the Wadis el Nimr and El Jib and the ascent on the far side presented great difficulties. The downward slopes were exceptionally steep, almost precipitous in places. It was impossible for companies and platoons to move on a wide front. The slopes were swept by machine-gun and rifle fire, and the bottom of the wadis by enfilade fire. The ascent on the far side was steeply terraced. Men had alternatively to hoist and pull each other up, under fire, and finally to expel the enemy from the summits in hand-to-hand fighting.

On March 11th the operation of the XXth Corps was completed by the occupation of Kh. Abu Felah and the heights overlooking Sinjil and the comparatively low-lying country to the north-east. The result of this operation was the capture of a line with great natural facilities for defence, and of eleven officers, 160 other ranks, eleven machine guns and considerable amounts of ammunition and other booty.

The second phase of the operation by the

XXIst Corps, the preliminary phase having taken place on March 7th, was carried out on March 12th.

At first the opposition encountered was not serious, but from the time the 75th Division reached the ridge overlooking the Wadi Ballut it stiffened, the enemy contesting the ridge on the far side of the Wadi stubbornly, and when driven off making several counter-attacks to regain it. At Benat Burry, a razor-edged ridge north of Kh. Balatah, the top of the ridge is honeycombed with caves with entrances on both sides. Considerable difficulty was experienced in overcoming the enemy's resistance here. Eventually, however, a platoon of Gurkhas worked round to the rear of the ridge. A Lewis gun was brought to bear on the exits. The garrison of the caves, numbering five officers and 50 other ranks, then surrendered.

On the left of the 75th Division the 54th Division captured the villages of El Mezeireh, Kh. Dikerin and Mejdal Yaba in the foothills, and Ras El Ain and El Mirr in the plain. Seven officers, 105 other ranks and two machine guns were taken by these two divisions.

9. The Jordan Valley had now been sufficiently cleared of the enemy to enable operations to be carried out against the Turkish line of communication to the Hedjaz, in conjunction with the Arab forces under Sherif Feisal, which were operating in the country to the south-east of the Dead Sea and were under my control.

Sherif Feisal's forces were based on Akaba. In January, 1918, he had captured the high ground about Uheida, within 7 miles of Maan, his main objective. At the same time a force under Sherif Abdul Magin had occupied the whole of the Hish Forest up to and including Shobek, 20 miles north by west of Maan, destroying 35 kilometres of the enemy's light railway which left the main line at Kalaat Aneiza and was used to transport wood as fuel for locomotives. After the capture of Shobek a force under Sherif Nazir raided Jauf Ed Derwish, a station on the main line 30 miles north of Maan. This they held for three days, burning the station buildings and destroying two locomotives and some rolling stock. In this successful raid the Turkish losses amounted to over 100 killed, over 200 prisoners, a mountain gun and two machine guns. Further north a separate force of Arab tribesmen under Sherif Nazir captured Tafle, 15 miles south-east of the south end of the Dead Sea, on January 16th. The garrison, which consisted of 100 Turks and the officials of the place, surrendered after a short resistance. Ten days later a Turkish force, consisting of three battalions, with two mountain guns and 27 machine guns, advanced from Karak to recapture Tafle. An engagement took place on January 26th in which the enemy suffered a crushing defeat. His losses amounted to over 450 in killed and 250 in prisoners. In addition, the whole of his artillery and machine guns fell into the hands of the Arabs. In March the Turks concentrated a considerable force, including a battalion of German infantry, and, advancing from Katrani and Jauf Ed Derwish, re-occupied Tafle, the Arab tribesmen, in face of superior numbers, withdrawing to positions north of Shobek.

The situation to the east of the Jordan thus presented a favourable opportunity for a raid on the enemy's communications with the Hedjaz.