

Southern detachment block and, completely surprised, surrendered. Meanwhile to the North a further enemy column was surrounded and captured by 4th Armoured Brigade.

48. From an early hour on the 6th February the enemy main columns began to appear, and severe fighting occurred throughout the day as successive enemy groups, including a large number of tanks, attempted unsuccessfully to break through the 4th Armoured Brigade, later reinforced by 7th Armoured Brigade (1st R.T.R.) as more and more enemy tanks continued to appear—84 were put out of action during the day's fighting. By nightfall the situation was unchanged. The enemy's position was desperate, with a confused mass of vehicles almost 20 miles in length pinned to the roads between our Armoured Brigades in the South and the Northern detachment in the Soluch area, now beginning to turn South-West. Certain enemy groups had, however, managed to evade the 4th Armoured Brigade by moving through the sand dune area between the main road and the sea. One group in particular, consisting of tanks strongly supported by infantry, repeatedly attacked the Southern detachment, now reinforced by a third R.H.A. battery, during the night 6th/7th February and early morning 7th February. In all nine attacks were delivered against 2nd Rifle Brigade, and although on one occasion tanks penetrated to the Reserve Company areas, all were repulsed. These enemy attacks were pressed home with considerable vigour, but lacked co-ordination. 1st R.T.R. (7th Armoured Brigade) had been put under command of the Southern detachment early on the 7th February, but did not arrive in time to take part in this fight.

Shortly after dawn on the 7th February a final attempt was made by 30 enemy tanks to break through. When this, too, failed, General Berganzoli surrendered unconditionally.

49. Previously, on the 6th February, the Corps Commander had by wireless directed 6th Australian Division to send a detachment, made mobile from divisional resources, along the coast road to Ghemines, in order to complete the encirclement of the enemy. This detachment, comprising the equivalent of a Brigade Group, pressed on with great resolution and received the surrender of Benghazi, but did not reach Ghemines until about noon on the 7th February, by which time all fighting had ceased.

50. The surrender completed the destruction of the Italian Tenth Army, whose commander, General Tellera, was killed during the action. Enemy losses in this final phase were approximately 20,000 personnel, of whom the large majority were captured, 120 tanks and 190 guns.

PART IV.—SUMMARY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

51. During the two months from the 7th December to the 7th February, the Army of the Nile had advanced 500 miles. They had beaten and destroyed an Italian army of four Corps comprising nine divisions and part of a tenth, and had captured 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks and 1,290 guns, besides vast quantities of other war material.

In these operations we never employed a larger force than two divisions, of which one was armoured. Actually three divisions took part, since the 6th Australian Division relieved

the 4th Indian Division after the Sidi Barrani battle. The 7th Armoured Division took part in the operations throughout, at the end of which it was practically reduced to a skeleton.

Our casualties were extremely light and amounted to 500 killed, 1,373 wounded, 55 missing only.

52. The outstanding success of these operations was very largely due to the most capable commanders of the formations engaged: Lieut.-General Sir Maitland Wilson, G.O.C.-in-C. Egypt; Lieut.-General R. N. O'Connor, commanding Western Desert Corps; Major-General M. O'M. Creagh, commanding 7th Armoured Division; Major-General N. M. Beresford-Peirse, commanding 4th Indian Division; and Major-General I. G. Mackay, commanding 6th Australian Division.

53. All combatant troops engaged displayed high fighting qualities and resolute skill in manoeuvre. The 7th Armoured Division, during three months' continuous fighting in the van of the battle, showed great tactical efficiency and powers of endurance; the untiring work of the technical personnel which enabled so many vehicles to be kept in action for so long a period was admirable.

Special mention must be made of one unit, the 11th Hussars. As the only armoured car regiment in the force it was continually in the Western Desert for a period of about nine months, from the entry of Italy into the war till the fall of Benghazi. During this period it always supplied the most advanced elements in close contact with the enemy. Seldom can a unit have had a more prolonged spell of work in the front line or performed it with greater skill and boldness.

7th Royal Tank Regiment, equipped with infantry tanks, assaulted five strongly defended positions (Nibeiwa, Tummar, Sidi Barrani, Bardia, Tobruk) in a little over one month, and advanced more than 200 miles during this period. The resolution shown in these assaults and the technical skill and hard work by which so many tanks were kept in action over so long a range deserve great credit.

The Royal Engineer units and Royal Corps of Signals did much hard and admirable work.

54. The work of the ancillary corps, Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Royal Army Medical Corps, Pioneer Corps, deserves all praise. Conditions in the desert were difficult and onerous. Drivers of lorries or ambulances had to cover long distances over bad tracks, sometimes in dust storms; mechanics in the field and at the Base worked long hours on repair and maintenance; pioneers unloaded stores under air bombing or artillery fire.

55. The Army owes much to the Royal Navy, under Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, for its support through the operation, both in pre-arranged bombardments of enemy positions previous to the attacks on Sidi Barrani, Bardia and Tobruk, and in answering emergency calls during the actual attacks. The effect of these accurate bombardments on enemy morale alone was very considerable, and did much to simplify the task of the Army. Lastly, the maintenance problems in this quick-moving operation over a distance of 500 miles would have been insurmountable without the Navy's assistance in keeping open the sea supply lines and