

with skill and determination. At this time his troops were rather better at moving on the hill than were ours, and a certain amount of the lessons of Frontier Warfare had to be unlearnt due to the influence of artillery, mortars, L.M.Gs. and aircraft on mountain warfare. During the night 7/8th February, 5th Indian Infantry Brigade moved into the Happy Valley, and on the early morning of 8th February, 4/6 Rajputana Rifles attacked the Acqua Col. This was found to be wired and strongly held, and they were unable to reach their objective, eventually consolidating on a ridge below the col. 5th Indian Infantry Brigade remained in this valley some days, being subjected to fairly heavy attacks from the enemy airforce. Pressure against 11th Indian Infantry Brigade on Cameron Ridge and Rajputana Ridge features was severe, and a second attempt to secure Brigs Peak, which would relieve pressure on 11th Indian Infantry Brigade and give us artillery observation of Keren, was decided upon. This attack was carried out by 3/1 Punjab Regiment at 1500 hours in the afternoon of 10th February supported by a heavy concentration of artillery fire on Brigs Peak and M. Sanchil. The attack was successful and Brigs Peak was captured. Part of M. Sanchil was also captured, but had to be evacuated as the battalion was seriously reduced in numbers. During these operations our casualties in officers had been heavy. Lt.-Col. Whitehead, commanding 3/1 Punjab Regiment, Lt.-Col. Purvis, 4/11 Sikhs, Lt.-Col. Edwards, 1 Royal Fusiliers, Lt.-Col. Scott, Skinner's Horse, and Major Proctor, of 3/1 Punjab Regiment, were all seriously wounded.

#### *Second Attack on Acqua Gap.*

For the second attempt to force the Acqua Col., 29th Indian Infantry Brigade, which was garrisoning Barentu, was placed under command 4th Indian Division, with the limitation that it was only to be used to exploit complete success, and was under no circumstances to be employed as a reinforcement. The reason for attacking the Acqua Gap was that, in spite of the administrative difficulties of maintaining two brigades in the Happy Valley, this attack if successful, would cut across the enemy's line of communication at a most vulnerable spot, and offered the chance of cutting-off and capturing the greater part of his forces in Keren and on the hills to the West. The period between 10th and 12th February was very trying for the troops holding Brigs Peak and Cameron Ridge. The enemy counter-attacked continuously, and during the early hours of 11th February 3/1 Punjab Regiment were driven off Brigs Peak back on to Cameron Ridge.

The second attack on the Acqua Gap was carried out by 4/11 Sikhs on the right, directed on the Sphinx (M. Zalale) and the 4/6 Rajputana Rifles directed on a feature known as Hill 1565. Although attacking with great gallantry these battalions were unable to reach their objective, and owing to the shape of the ground and the length of telephone communications necessary, adequate artillery support was not forthcoming. Commander 4th Indian Division decided to terminate the operation. 29th Indian Infantry Brigade were withdrawn from the Valley, and returned to Barentu. During the night of 13/14th

February the rest of our forces were also successfully withdrawn. Both of these brigades had to withdraw through the bottleneck described above, under observed and registered artillery fire from the enemy's guns on Fort Dologorodoc and surrounding features. In spite of this, and in spite of the activity of the enemy's artillery, the total casualties during withdrawal were two men slightly wounded.

After the second unsuccessful attack on the Acqua Gap it was clear that any further assault on the Keren position would be a major operation. Shortage of transport made it impossible to maintain both divisions in the Keren area and at the same time build up sufficient reserves of ammunition, petrol and rations. It was decided that 29th Indian Infantry Brigade should remain in Barentu. The rest of 5th Indian Division was withdrawn to the area between Sabdarat and Tessenei where it could maintain itself from the railhead at Kassala with its own first-line transport. All second-line transport was put under control of H.Q. Troops in the Sudan. While it was in this area, 5th Indian Division carried out intensive training in mountain warfare for the purposes of studying tactics and making every man as physically fit as possible. For the purposes of deception, measures were taken to induce the enemy to believe that a thrust was intended from Barentu to Arresa and thence on to the plateau directed on Adi Ugri. During this period of patrol and administrative activity it was left to 4th Indian Division to hold the heights already secured opposite Keren and to make preparations for the reception at short notice of 5th Indian Division.

#### *The Red Sea Coast.*

As early as 21st January, Commander 7th Indian Infantry Brigade had reported that the enemy was withdrawing from the Karora area and asked permission to start a minor operation against the enemy garrison there. This permission was given. The idea of a thrust down the Red Sea Coast had been previously considered and at first it had been used to divert attention from Kassala. It was difficult to get accurate estimates of what water was available, but, after consultation with the Royal Navy, it was considered feasible to direct a force of approximately one brigade group from Port Sudan via Suakin—Karora—Nakfa—Cub and on to Keren from the north.

The forces available were 7th Indian Infantry Brigade, less 4/11 Sikhs, which had previously been motorised and sent to join Gazelle Force. The battalion garrisoning Khartoum, 4/16 Punjab Regiment, was released. One battery, 25 pounders, No. 4 M.M.G. Company, S.D.F., 12 Field Company, Sappers and Miners, and 170 Light Field Ambulance were withdrawn from Keren front and sent to join 7th Infantry Brigade. Added weight was given to this force by the arrival in the Sudan of Free French Forces. These were 14 Battalion Etranger of the Foreign Legion, plus certain supporting troops, and Troisième Battalion de Marche (Tchad), known as Battalion Garby. The Foreign Legion, seasoned troops who had seen service in Norway, arrived by sea. Battalion Garby entered the Sudan by overland route from French Equatoria. These two units, under the command of Col. Monclar, were formed into a Demi-Brigade, known as the Brigade d'Orient.