

sent to some low jebels to the south from where it could watch the right flank. The remainder of 'A' Squadron was disposed in two troop localities a few hundred yards apart, northeast and southwest of Regimental Headquarters. Everywhere the field of view and fire was restricted by the open scrub in which the Regiment was disposed in a five-mile semicircle at the centre of which were the 25 pdrs.

Then things began to happen. The troop of 'A' Squadron northeast of Regimental Headquarters was attacked by three to four hundred Eritrean infantry and opened up with all its weapons. This was too much for the enemy who broke and fled into the bush, thus ending the first excitement. Interest then switched to the other troop, northwest of Regimental Headquarters. Between a hundred and two hundred horsed cavalry appeared at a gallop, making straight for the troop and Regimental Headquarters. Both troops and Regimental Headquarters at once engaged them with every available weapon. Ian Hossack was sent with two LMG trucks from Regimental Headquarters to interpose himself between the battery and this new danger in case it swerved in their direction. 'B' and 'C' Squadrons were ordered by wireless to mount their reserve troops and send them to reinforce Regimental Headquarters.

The Battery Sergeant Major and two gunners with a Bren gun arrived on foot from the battery to join in the fray. A section of the Bofors came flat out and did likewise, and the battery opened up with its 25 pdrs, at least one of its shells landing in the middle of Regimental Headquarters! Fortunately it did not burst. The mounted attack also broke, but not until it was within a hundred yards. The survivors swung off to the west and disappeared into the scrub where they caused consternation in Gazelle Headquarters. They left between 20 and 30 dead and wounded men and horses on the ground. Amongst these was an Italian officer shot by Ian Hossack. The Regiment also captured the enemy Standard. Bill Cullinan was then sent with a troop, mounted, to pursue and harry the fleeing cavalry. Owing to the scrub and nullahs he was unable to catch them. After that things seemed dull; breakfast was served.

A point of interest about the cavalry was that they had no lances or sabres, and attacked with hand-grenades which they hurled ahead at the gallop. A further point is that the Press must have got in touch with the wagon lines or cook house, because they produced a story describing this cavalry attack as having been made on the battery, whilst the privilege was that of Regimental Headquarters and 'A' Squadron. On two occasions during the morning, wounded Eritrean infantrymen used the treacherous trick of holding up their hands with grenades concealed in them. They got short shrift. Finally, it may seem strange that a patrol should have passed through the area whence the attacks came without seeing the enemy. The scrub so restricted their view, and there was so much broken ground for cover, that it was very easy to miss large bodies of troops if they kept quiet. Neither the Regiment nor the Gunners suffered any casualties.

The rest of the day was spent in reconnaissance and preparations for an attack by the 4/11 Sikhs. Italian bombers came over in the afternoon and bombed no-man's-land in front of the forward posts, but without damage to either side. At night a series of small NCO patrols were sent forward to tap the enemy defence along the

whole front. Several drew fire so there was no doubt that the enemy was there. The next day the 4/11 Sikhs attacked and captured half of a commanding hill on the enemy's southern front. However the Italians held tenaciously to the remainder and would not be dislodged. In the evening Denzil Holder was badly wounded on the left side and left eye by a stray shell which burst close beside him. He was evacuated and unfortunately later, lost the damaged eye. Holder was a sad loss to the Regiment, felt by all ranks. His place was taken in 'C' Squadron by Bob Prentice, and Warrant Officer Bhagat Singh acted as Technical Officer.

The 11th Indian Infantry Brigade was now arriving, having come by forced marches from Kassala. Plans were made for a further attack on 20 January. The enemy, however, cleared out in the night. This time the patrols gave timely information and the Regiment were close on their heels. L/Dfr Abdul Hakim of 'B' Squadron did particularly good work on these night patrols. The enemy position was extensively mined as was the pass through the hills east of the Cheru. The enemy had also blown up the road in several places and placed a series of boulder obstructions in the bed of the nullah which ran parallel to the road. The mines and obstructions were removed without casualties and a track was prepared, but the work occupied Gazelle for the whole of the 24th. As a side line the Regiment collected several cases of tea and sacks of sugar and a selection of canned tomatoes, spinach and tinned milk which made a welcome addition to the rations. These were found in the supply dump at Cheru. Much equipment and bedding and a number of wounded Eritreans were found which showed that the Italians had left in a hurry. This was caused by the advance of the 3 Baluch (from 5 Indian Division), across country towards the track Cheru-Biscia.

On 25 January the Regiment again led the advance with orders to branch off on a track shown on a handkerchief map to deal with an enemy force reported ten miles southeast of Cheru. There proved to be no such track, but the telegraph line followed the direction indicated, and this was used as the axis of advance. An hour's very rough going showed that the country was better suited to goats than motorised cavalry. It grew steadily worse and the situation was reported to Gazelle which had continued along the track Cheru-Biscia. The report had barely been sent when the Commander Gazelle himself arrived. He agreed at once about the country and ordered the Regiment to rejoin Gazelle, leaving a patrol of one troop to watch the area and rejoin at dark. The Regiment retraced its steps and hurried along the Biscia track, catching up with Gazelle about midday. A lot of aircraft were seen during the advance and some vicious dive bombing was going on ahead. This turned out to be the Rhodesians who were attacking the SDF held up by the enemy on a line of hills just beyond Biscia! The Regiment was ordered to move wide and turn the enemy position from the north. The country seemed to be the usual scrub and nullahs, and the Regiment moved off in formation with 'A' Squadron leading.

Very soon it was in difficulties with steep nullahs. Three trucks stood on their noses in about as many minutes. 'A' Squadron reported worse ahead, and the reconnaissance showed that the nullahs became worse further north. The CO therefore stopped the advance and asked if the Regiment could pass through the SDF and