

FOURTH INDIAN DIVISION

The following unofficial notes are circulated for guidance in connection with the Prime Minister's message to the Viceroy (M.O.I. Issue No.12):-

The 4th Indian Division first went into action on December 9, 1940 in Egypt and they have been in the thick of the fighting in the Middle East ever since. Up to the middle of February of this year the Division had suffered some 15,000 casualties. But they had in that period captured 100,000 Italian and German prisoners and accounted for many enemy tanks and aircraft. After taking part in General Wavell's advance into Cyrenaica where they captured Tummar East and Tummar West and shared in the attack on Sidi Barrani, the Division was withdrawn from the Western Desert - on December 12 - and hurried across Egypt to join in the attack on Italian East Africa which began on January 19, 1941.

In Eritrea

Fighting their way through Kassala and Agordat the Division came to Keren the great Italian mountain fortress. The leading brigade went into action on February 4 and fought until the position - regarded by the Italians as impregnable - was captured on March 27. The great bastions of Cameron Ridge, Brig's Peak, and Sanchil were among the strong points taken by the Division. At that time its Infantry Battalions were the 3/1 3/14 & 4/16 Punjab Regiment, the 1/6 and 4/6 Rajputana Rifles, the 4/11 Sikhs, 1st Royal Fusiliers, 1st Royal Sussex, and 2nd Cameron Highlanders. Major-General Beresford-Peirse was in command.

Back to Egypt. On to Syria.

As soon as Keren fell the Division was pulled out of the line and rushed back to the Western Desert. After six weeks here part of the Division was sent, by way of the Sinai Peninsula, Palestine and Transjordan to the Syrian border and in the middle of June the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade (part of the 4th Indian Division) and a Fighting French column struck northwards to Damascus and after hard fighting captured Mezze, which decided the fate of Damascus.

The Western Desert Again.

On November 17 1941, the Division was again in action with General Auchinleck's army, and commanded by General Messervy. It captured Sidi Omar, and pressed on to Sidi Resegn, Tobruk and Gazala, fighting hard all the way, and taking Derna, Cyrene and Barce. On Christmas Day it was at Benghazi. It was still there at the end of January when Rommel hit back from El Agheila.

A Memorable Action.

On January 28 the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade was cut off and surrounded. The Brigadier decided to break through and to take the enemy by surprise. So he gave the order to turn to the South and West - not East which was the natural line of retreat. The Brigade split into three columns and moved off at night through driving rain. They passed German tank formations without being detected. The Brigade had an engagement with another force. Enemy planes flew low over the columns and delivered short bursts but they drew no retaliatory fire and they went away puzzled. Then the Brigade captured an enemy petrol convoy, filled up its nearly empty tanks and at last made contact with the main British forces, bringing in many prisoners, after a journey of nearly 200 miles through country held by the enemy. As General Auchinleck truly said in a message of congratulation to the Brigadier, "You got through because you were bold. Always be bold." One Brigade, the 11th, was cut off in Tobruk and most of it was captured.

/After a fighting

After a fighting withdrawal to Egypt the 4th Indian Division was re-equipped under Major General Tucker, who had taken over command. But in mid-September the Division was back at the front with the 30th Corps.

El Alamein and After.

In the great battle which began on October 23 and ended in the break through on November 4, the Division attacked on the Ruweisat Ridge and following in the wake of the pursuit reached Mareth on March 15. On March 25 the Division forced the Hollouf Pass and in 60 hours cleared the difficult country between the Pass and Foun Tatahouine. These successes, accentuating the danger to the enemy of our advance on El Harma turned the whole Mareth position.

Besides the units already mentioned battalions of Gurkhas, Mahrattas, Baluchis and Garhwalis have served or are serving with the division.

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