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**THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN  
23 October - 6 November 1942**

**Type of operation described: A COMBINED OPERA-  
TION OF ARMY AND AIR FORCE IN DESERT WARFARE**

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	<u>PAGE</u>
Index .....	1
Bibliography .....	2
Introduction .....	3
General Background .....	5
Final Preparation .....	9
The Battle Of El Alamein .....	12
Second Phase Of The Battle .....	16
The Pursuit Or Final Phase .....	18
Analysis and Criticism .....	19
Lessons .....	21

- Map A The Middle East
- Map B British And Axis Positions 23 October
- Map C 30th Corps Plan
- Map D The Break In And Dog Fight
- Map E The Break-Out



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- (3) The southern supply route of the (United Nations) to Russia would be closed;
- (4) The Axis would gain control of the vital oil fields of the Caucasus, of Iraq and of Iran;
- (5) "The air ferry route across central Africa to the Middle East, and thence beyond to India and China, would be lost;"
- (6) "The shorter Mediterranean supply route to India and China would be closed at the Suez Canal bottle neck; and
- (7) "The United Nations would no longer control the most likely points from which to strike ~~at~~, or to threaten Hitler's rear." Map A. (2)

Other factors to be considered in a study of <sup>the</sup> El Alamein <sup>operation</sup> are: <sup>an</sup> appreciation of the supply problems for the opposing forces, and the nature of the terrain. North-east Africa is the driest area in the world; and <sup>a</sup> continuous desert runs westward from Cairo to the hills of Tunisia. The coast of north-east Africa is flat from Alexandria to the border of Cyrenaica. Parallel to the coast lies a strip of land <sup>which</sup> twenty-five miles inland, <sup>that</sup> is a quagmire in the rainy season and dust bowl the remainder of the year. Days are extremely hot, followed by nights of intense cold.

Two terrain features of importance at either end of the coastal plateau are: the Qattara depression in the east, and the Wadi El Feregh in the west. As we are dealing with the Battle of El Alamein, it is only necessary that we be familiar with the <sup>u</sup> Qattara depression. The <sup>u</sup> Qattara depression is a dried up bed of a former inland sea. It is 175 miles long, 30 miles wide, and in places ~~is 100 feet deep~~.

(2) A-1, p. 2.

THE COMBINED OPERATIONS OF THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE IN DESERT  
WARFARE AT THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN  
23 OCTOBER - 6 NOVEMBER 1942

INTRODUCTION

My monograph describes the combined operations of the British 8th Army, and Allied Air Force in their victory in the Western Desert at El Alamein, during the period 23 October to the 6 November 1942.

Before the reader can appreciate the significance of this victory, it is necessary that he be acquainted with the events leading up to the campaign, and to the important part that El Alamein played in the Middle East.

The summer of 1942 was the most critical period of the war for the Allies. The Japanese were close to India, the German armies were deep in Russia, and in the Western Desert, the combined German and Italian armies were sixty miles from Alexandria. (1)

The Middle East, at this stage, ~~of the war~~, was the most important point of the global war, in that its location was the link between three continents. ~~The~~ <sup>the</sup> nation who controlled the Middle East, also ~~belonged the~~ <sup>had</sup> control of the avenues of approach to the main theatres of operations. The loss of this vital area to the <sup>all</sup> (United Nations) would not only cost them the vital central position in the global war, but would give the Axis powers the following advantages:

- (1) "Germany and Japan would have a direct route for the junction of their military forces, in closing a ring of strangulation about Russia and China;" (H-1)
- (2) "Turkey would be isolated and compelled to co-operate with the Axis:"



level. On the northern side the escarpments rise to a point of 650 feet. The bed of the depression is salt marshes and quicksand. Its passage is impossible for even a loaded camel. (3) Because of its position the depression channels any invasion of Egypt.

As for the supply problem that faced the opposing forces, it appeared that everything favored the Axis. From the Italian mainland to Benghazi was a 500 mile trip; whereas the British maintained a supply line of 12,000 miles. However, as we shall see later, the work of the Allied Air Arm and the British Navy, more than swung the balance in favor of the British, by constantly attacking the supply route of the Axis.

#### GENERAL BACKGROUND

The picture that presented itself to the British 8th Army prior to the Battle of El Alamein was a gloomy one.

Rommel's offensive of June and July had carried the Axis force from Tobruck to the El Alamein line. In fact, the 4th Indian Division positions were over-run on <sup>(where)</sup> the 2 July. Rommel announced that the Alamein front was "broken"; and that he was "pursuing the beaten 8th Army into the Nile Valley". (4) Rommel's statement was a little premature, for a British counterattack restored the lines. <sup>(where)</sup> Rommel, at this point, had demonstrated one of his weaknesses as a tactician; that is to over exploit immediate success without sufficient thought of the future. His army had penetrated beyond the point where he was able to keep them supplied with the where-with-all to maintain their positions. (5)

Nevertheless, his handling of the offensive had been skillful and resourceful. ~~diver, daily in need of~~

tion to turn attention away from the lack of success on the

(3) A-1, p. 6; (4) A-3, p. 9; (5) A-12, p. 843.

Russian front, brought Rommel to Berlin and made him a Field Marshal. The Axis press and radio played him up as a Nazi superman, to an extent that even the Allied countries began to consider him a military genius. (6)

The confidence of the Axis commander was expressed as late as 3 October, when Rommel in a press conference boasted, "We hold the gateway to Egypt with full intention to act. We did not go there with the intention of being flung back sooner or later. You may rely on our holding fast to what we have won." (7) Many of the Nazi prisoners later stated that — Rommel's absence until the 26 October was the real reason for the Axis defeat.

On the British side, the situation is best described by Churchill. The 8th Army is "brave but baffled." (8) Auchinleck, after an auspicious start and brilliant victories had lost the initiative, and the 8th Army was back on its heels. The Alamein position which the 8th Army held had been constructed in 1941. Its strength laid in the fact that both flanks were anchored; on the north by the sea, and on the south, by the <sup>(inland)</sup> Qattara depression. This alone robbed Rommel of one of his favorite <sup>maneuvers</sup> moves — a wide envelopment <sup>of</sup> the flank.

In July both armies faced each other at El Alamein like a couple of punch drunk fighters; one trying for the knock-out, and the other hoping for the miracle that would save him from defeat. (9)

After several feeler attacks in July by the Axis, none of which were successful, it became apparent that before a ~~decisive battle could be made, both sides must have reinforcements.~~ For three months the lines remained static with each

(6) A-3, p. 9; (7) A-1, p. 66; (8) A-5, p. 2; (9) A-2, p. 48.



side building up its strength for the coming struggle.

One of the events that occurred during this period was a complete change in the British High Command. The command of the Middle East Forces was assumed by His Excellency Field Marshal The Viscount Alexander of Tunis; and the 8th Army by Field Marshal Sir B. L. Montgomery. Montgomery was a last minute replacement for Lieutenant General Gott who had been shot down and killed, by Axis planes, on his way to assume command. If Montgomery was a second choice, it still was a great one. Perhaps no other leader ever stamped his leadership on an Army as Montgomery did on the 8th. Upon his assumption of command a new spirit was born. No longer was the attitude of the Army one of fighting and retreating but one of quiet preparation, and an anticipation of the coming fight. At his first staff meeting he outlined the following policies:

- (1) A new atmosphere was to be created.
- (2) All persons in command who doubted this were to be relieved.
- (3) All existing plans for further withdrawal were to be burned.
- (4) He would start planning for the coming offensive.
- (5) Divisions would fight as Divisions and be allowed to develop their strength. No longer would they be frittered away in piece-meal attacks.
- (6) The R.A.F. Headquarters, and his own staff, were to join together and work as a team.

Quite a change from the Staff atmosphere <sup>(?)</sup> that had existed prior <sup>(?)</sup> to Montgomery's assumption of command. (10) Immediate steps were taken to train not only the units, but the individual soldier <sup>(?)</sup> ~~to take part in the fighting team.~~

(10) A-4, p. 138.

Reinforcements, as soon as they came in, were put through vigorous training in desert tactics. (11)

Early in August the R.A.F. heavily reinforced by the U. S. Air Force and the Royal Navy, started a campaign against Axis shipping that resulted in a loss of fifty per cent of all shipping coming into North African Ports. (12) Rommel, sensing the fact the time was favoring the British from a supply point, decided to attack late in August. (13) On the 30 August he launched his attack. In the north it was little more than a raid; but in the south, Rommel sent the bulk of his forces in an effort to turn the southern flank <sup>where</sup> and open up the road to Alexandria. This action was later known as the Battle of Alam Halfa. <sup>(2)</sup> Here Montgomery displayed a new type of tactics that caught Rommel by surprise. No longer was the British armored committed piece-meal but were made part of the stabilized defense. From hull down position they met the brunt of Rommel's force on ground of their own choosing. On the 2 September after some initial success, the Axis was reluctant to resume its offensive tactics, because it was unable to draw the British out in the open from their prepared positions. (14) By the 7 September the Axis had withdrawn to positions they held until the opening of the Battle of El Alamein, on the 23 October.

Instrumental in this defeat was the work of the Allied Air Force in destroying Rommel's supply lines; not only did they cut his vehicular supply route, but also his port of supply, Tobruck. (15) <sup>(not listed)</sup> The results of this Battle were like a shot in the arm to the 8th Army. <sup>In addition to</sup> ~~As well as~~ the victory, it produced the following results:

(1) ~~It gave troops confidence in themselves, and~~

(11) A-11; (12) A-2, p. 43; (13) A-2, p. 43; (14) A-5, p. 7.



as in their leaders, for the battle was fought exactly as Montgomery predicted. The forces under him merely carried out his orders and the battle won itself."

(2) "Rommel's army was weakened in morale, strength and material, so that success at El Alamein was the easier."

(3) "The Army and R.A.F. Staffs got excellent experience in wielding the huge air force available to the 8th Army." (16)

Above all it placed Rommel on the defensive and left the initiative in the hands of the British in the final preparations for the coming battle at El Alamein.

#### FINAL PREPARATIONS

After the Battle of Alam Halfa<sup>2</sup>, Montgomery spent all of his time and resources in final preparations for the coming attack. It is an interesting side light, that the 8th Army became so deception-minded that they even carried their ruses into a reception dinner for Prime Minister Churchill. On a tour of the front at this time, Churchill was invited to the Officer's Mess for dinner. Finding no brandy available to serve, Montgomery's Staff procured some of poor quality from local merchants, then placed it in bottles labeled with the name of a famous French brand.

In the organization of his positions Montgomery's men employed every possible means of camouflage and deception at their command. Borrowing a page from Allenby's Gaza deception in 1917, the British formed a truck-park in rear of the point in the line where they expected to launch their main armor offensive. Each night, under the cover of darkness, an equal number of trucks were replaced by armored vehicles. Daily reconnaissance by the Axis air force failed to detect the movement. (17) The infantry positions and gun positions

~~(17) The infantry positions and gun positions~~

*Handwritten note:*  
Churchill's visit  
to the front  
at El Alamein

were dug and camouflaged at night. A dummy fuel line was constructed toward the southern sector and dummy tanks were constructed in the area. Engineers were set to work determining the <sup>apt.</sup> start of the mine fields. All units were given extensive training in night operations. (18)

By the middle of October preparations were nearing completion and Montgomery organized the final steps in his plans. His troops were placed in the line as he expected to fight them. In the north, was the 30th Corps composed of the 9th Australian Division, the 51st United Kingdom, 2d New Zealand, 1st South African and the 4th Indian Divisions. All possessed organic armor to some degree. To their rear, held in reserve, was the 10th Corps composed of the 1st and 10th Armored Divisions. In the south, below Ruweisat Ridge, which divided the northern coastal plane from the desert country, was the 13th Corps. The 13th Corps was composed of the Greek Brigade, the 50th United Kingdom, the 44th United Kingdom and the Free French (Map B). Facing the 8th Army from north to south, the Axis force took position as follows:

The Bersaglieri, the 164th German, the Trento and the Bologna Divisions. To their rear were the 15th Panzer, Trieste and Lettorio Armored Divisions. South of Ghazal was the 90th Light Division. South of Ruweisat Ridge were the Brescia, Folgore and Pavia Divisions. Interspersed along the line were German Paratroop Battalions to bolster the Italians. To their rear were the 21st Panzer and the Ariete Armored Divisions.

(Map B) Rommel's tendency not to look to the future, or perhaps Hitler's orders, \* caused him to throw his entire strength in the line at El Alamein rather than

(18) A-11. \* Author's note.



to organize his defense in depth. (19) <sup>Montgomery</sup> planned to begin the battle under the following plan:

The main attack was to be made in the north by the 30th Corps, on a four division front, with a task of forcing two corridors through the enemy's mine fields. Once the mine fields were forced, the 10th Corps <sup>were</sup> were to dash through the corridor and exploit the success.

The 13th Corps' primary mission was to mislead the enemy into believing the main thrust was to be in the south and prevent the Axis armor by engagement from joining that of the Axis in the north. (20) Map C

Here a (point of) question arises. Most experts believe that General Von Stumme planned his defense on the theory that the main attack was to be in the center. This was to be lightly opposed and once the British Armor had made a penetration, the Axis Armor was to execute a pincer movement from the north and south and destroy the British. General Von Stumme was in command of the Axis forces during Rommel's absence. (21) <sup>On</sup> On the other hand Field Marshal Alexander contends that the Axis <sup>line was</sup> ~~forces~~ were well defended in the center, but lightly held in the south. (22) The strength of this plan lay in the fact that although the principle defenses were in the north, a success at this point would be more important for the following reasons:

British communications were shorter and on better ground, and if the British <sup>forced</sup> forced the enemy <sup>line</sup> it would deny him his lines of supply. The Axis defense might be compared to a door with its hinge at the north; If the hinge was destroyed the door would be thrown wide open. (23)

On the 10 October the final step was taken in the Battle of El Alamein. The R.A.F. conducted a three day preparatory

(19) A-12, p. 54; (20) A-11, p. 10; (21) A-3, p. 14; (22) A-12, p. 55; (23) A-12, p. 55.

air offensive with the following objectives:

1. <sup>Force</sup> pinning enemy air to a defensive role and denying him air reconnaissance.
2. Destruction of supply and communication facilities.
3. Breaking the enemy's morale by keeping him awake for three days and nights by constant bombing. (24)

Over 700 sorties were flown during this period and so well did they succeed that troops advancing over captured ground found 550 enemy air ships destroyed or abandoned on the enemy flying fields. (25) The final stage for the battle was completed.

#### THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

At 1940 hours on the 23 October for the first time in history, an entire army launched a night attack. An unprecedented artillery barrage was launched all along the front. Over a 1,000 guns fired over 400 rounds apiece. Over 800 of the guns were concentrated in the northern sector. (26) These guns concentrated their fires on previously located enemy gun positions for fifteen minutes. At 2000 the fires were shifted to the enemy forward positions. Under this rolling barrage the engineers and infantry of the 30th Corps and 13th Corps advanced to the attack. This was another of Montgomery's surprises. Rather than follow the accepted practice of the desert <sup>warfare</sup> of sending the armor first, he held it back to exploit the success of the infantry, and to fight from the ground they had chosen for maneuver, or defense against counterattack. (27) <sup>I - this should have been covered in Section.</sup> Knowing that his flanks were secure on the north by sea and on the south by the Qattara depression, Montgomery had adopted a simple plan of a deep frontal penetration; to be followed by a break out to the flanks once the central drive was successful. By 0800 on the morning

(24) A-12, p. 851; (25) A-3, p. 14; (26) A-2, p. 87; (27) A-5,

of the 24 October the infantry had advanced in the northern sector on an eight mile front and reached their first objectives. (See Map D)

In the center the 4th Indian Division had breached the first enemy mine fields; <sup>the</sup> 2d New Zealand, had reached their objectives; and by evening, their organic armor was operating patrols on Miteiriya Ridge.

In the north the Australians had broken into enemy positions and secured a toe hold. <sup>hold?</sup> They also had successfully repulsed several enemy counterattacks throughout the day.

In the south the attack was not quite so successful. The lack of artillery support had slowed up the advance. The Free French had taken their first objectives, but soft sand had prevented their bringing up ~~their~~ anti-tank guns, and an enemy counterattack drove them off. <sup>how far?</sup> (28)

The Germans evidently did not feel that the main attack was in the north and made no effort to group their armor. Furthermore, a <sup>a</sup> feinted landing of the British Navy at Ras El Kenayis, seventy miles to the west contained the 90th Light Division and prevented its early employment in meeting the attack. (29)

On the 25 October the forward divisions continued to mop up in the north and to consolidate their positions. <sup>where?</sup> Positions were strengthened on Miteiriya Ridge. The 10th Corps was trying to force its passage in the forward enemy mine fields. A joint attack by two British Armored Brigades <sup>(equivalent of)</sup> (2 U. S. Regts.) was unsuccessful at Kidney Ridge. Tank action, at this stage of the battle, was not on a major scale but more or less a series of brief attacks to test the strength of various points.

Map D

In the south the infantry forced through the second enemy  
(28) A-5, p. 20; (29) A-1, p. 59.



mine field between Munassil and Himeimat, only to run into another new and unexpected mine field.

Continuous Allied air attacks lasted throughout the day. Six hundred and sixty sorties were flown, <sup>besides the</sup> ~~con-~~ <sup>fuel</sup> concentrations broken up, <sup>and</sup> the fuel dumps destroyed; great importance was attached to the destruction of a destroyer and a merchant ship. The latter was loaded with fuel and ammunition. Enemy apprehension was so great over fuel and ammunition that they were given a number one priority in <sup>his</sup> the supply plan. (30)

It was evident by his failure to group his armor and the <sup>continued</sup> efforts of the Stuka dive bombers on the center of the 4th Indian Division, that the Axis still expected the main attack to come at that point. (31)

At the close of the day, Montgomery showed his ability to grasp the situation by changing his plan. The efforts to drive the wedge in the southern corridor were abandoned. Finding the New Zealand drive too costly in this corridor <sup>✓</sup> Montgomery moved them up to join the attack in the northern corridor. The 9th Australian was to direct its attack toward the sea in an effort to destroy the German forces in the coastal salient created the first day of battle. Armored units were to push to the west. If the armor could succeed in its attack there was a possibility of cutting off the enemy <sup>EL-</sup> supply line in the Rahman area. (32) <sup>why?</sup>

Little progress was made on the 26 October and the general situation remained much the same. Armor heavily supported by artillery did succeed in gaining a foot hold on Kidney Ridge. Allied air attacks continued their close support of the ground forces with all-out efforts to prevent the concentration of enemy armor for counterattacks. The 27th

(30) A-1, p. 48; (31) A-1, p. 48; (32) A-5, p. 22.

*also made in 26-28*

October was perhaps the most eventful day of the first phase of this Battle. Kidney Ridge, the object of two days attack, was finally taken and successfully defended against enemy counterattacks with heavy losses to enemy tanks. British tank losses were also great, but since she was in possession of the ground many of her losses were reclaimed and returned to action.

For the first time the Axis showed a move towards grouping his armor. <sup>1st</sup> 21st Panzer <sup>or</sup> and Ariete <sup>(?)</sup> turned north to join the 15th Panzer and Lettorio. <sup>2nd</sup>

The 90th Light began to move its position from the north toward the 21st Panzer. <sup>(where)</sup> Rommel had now returned to assume command of the Axis forces but even his presence was not strong enough to change the tide of battle. (33)

*the* The morning of (the) 28 October saw the regrouping of both the Axis and British forces. <sup>with opposite</sup> The southern front was held mainly by the Italian infantry, and their armor except <sup>3</sup> for Ariete, had joined that of the Axis armor in the northern sector. The Axis armor was placed as follows:

The 15th Panzer in rear of 164th German infantry,  
The 90th Light to the north of the 15th Panzer,  
The 21st Panzer was opposite the 2d New Zealand Division,  
and the Lettorio to its rear.

Montgomery, in order to gather needed strength and organization for the break-through, had again changed his plans. The 13th Corps was to assume a primary role of defense. <sup>with a mission of</sup>

~~Its mission to keep the enemy guessing as to its actual intent by strong patrol and artillery action.~~

The 7th Armored, a brigade of the 50th Division, a brigade

of the 44th Division, and the Greek Brigade were released in the south to join the 30th Corps. A brigade of the 51st Division relieved the 20th Australian Brigade. The 1st Armored Division and the 24th Armored Brigade were placed in reserve. *FN* New Zealand Division was augmented by brigades from the 13th Corps and selected to lead the drive westward. The Australian Division was to continue its drive to the sea. (34) During this period of regrouping the Air Force was to concentrate on preventing the Axis from regrouping for counter-attacks. Montgomery had placed his strength at the enemys' strong points and also given himself a strong reserve.

*(Map needed to show new regrouping of British)*

SECOND PHASE OF THE BATTLE

On the morning of the 29 October Montgomery realized that Rommel was expecting an attack along the coast, so he shifted the direction of his attack to the south of the northern sector. Rommel had shifted the 21st Panzer to the north and there they were joined by the 90th Light with the objective of reducing the salient at Thompson's Post. *(not on map C)* (Map C). This left the Trieste in reserve and they moved to the position vacated by the 21st Panzer. Again the Axis armor was split, leaving the first two mentioned in the extreme north and the Trieste in reserve. Opposite the 2d New Zealand were the 15th Panzer, Lettorio, and Ariete. (35) Allied air attacks continued and another vital supply ship containing much needed fuel was sunk at Tobruck. (36)

*Commander's Report*

*all* → The 30 October showed little change in the disposition except that the Australians had driven their attack northward across the road running from Tel El Bissa-Sidi Aba El Rahman. This attack reached within two miles of the sea and the

~~failure to close the gap between the two divisions provided the escape route~~

(34) A-5, p. 24; (35) A-1, p 52; (36) A-1, p. 52.



for the Germans trapped in the salient. Rommel continued to concentrate his forces in the north by adding an Anti-Tank Unit and the Kiel Group (?)

The 31 October and 1 November showed little change in the situation, with the British organizing for the final phase of the attack.

At 0100, 2 November operation "Supercharge" was launched. Again the Artillery started a creeping barrage with the infantry-engineer team moving forward to prepare the way for the Armored Divisions. Over 1,500 rounds were concentrated during this barrage on a 4,000 yard front. (37) In the next four hours the infantry drive had carried them through the enemy mine fields four miles, to a position on the track south of Sidi Abd El Kahman. Mine fields were cleared and the way was now relatively clear for Armored Action. (38) Through the gap raced British Armored cars with the mission of destroying lines of communication and enemy supply dumps. Closely following came the 10th Armored Division and 7th Armored Division. Rommel had the single choice, an immediate counterattack to save the situation or to cover a withdrawal. Rommel followed his usual form - That is, he attacked with all the strength at his command. (39) Here the British showed the Mark IV tanks and 105mm self-propelled guns for the first time. At Tel El Aqqaqir, a slight elevation occupied by the 15 Panzer, developed the focal point of the battle. All day long the battle raged with casualties heavy on both sides. Success for the British meant a complete penetration and an opportunity to operate to the Axis rear. (Map E) At the close of the day the Axis lines were broken and Tel El Aqqaqir was taken. ~~Enemy armor and tanks were destroyed.~~

(37) A-1, p. 72; (38) A-1, p. 72; (39) A-2, p. 55.

and 2,000 prisoners were taken. (40)

3 November saw the British mopping up in the Tel El Aqqaqir Area and racing out fanwise to the enemy's rear. The movement of the British armor was so rapid that Rommel, on being advised of the British position, refused to believe the report. He sent General Von Thoma to verify the report, still believing it was the Trieste Division. (41) Von Thoma was captured, and Rommel ordered a complete withdrawal, leaving the Italians to their fate of starvation and capture. Tel El Aqqaqir was a graveyard of Axis armored (42). It is estimated that at this <sup>TIME</sup> the Axis armor did not exceed 75 German and 160 Italian tanks. (43)

In the south where the Axis had expected the main attack, explosions were heard signifying the destruction of the fortified positions in that sector.

Allied air power took up the attack flying 1,044 sorties over the retreating columns and areas of congestion. It is interesting to note that despite the intensity of these attacks many vehicles along the line of retreat were found abandoned only because of a lack of fuel. (44)

The Battle of El Alemein was won, the enemy was in full retreat. The British Armored Forces were fanning out in all directions to cut off the fleeing enemy. The 1st Armored was operating in the vicinity of El Daba, the 7th Armored on Ghazal, the 10th Armored due west. To the south moved the New Zealand with the task of rounding up the Italians.

#### THE PURSUIT OR FINAL PHASE

Montgomery, in an effort to make his victory a total one, pushed the pursuit of the retreating enemy. By (the) 4 November, the British forces were in full pursuit of the enemy.

(40) A-2, p. 55; (41) A-12, p. 851; (42) A-3, p. 14; (43) A-1, p. 72; (44) A-4, p. 8.

Isolated pockets of resistance were by-passed to be taken by the (echelons of) troops doing the mopping up. The work of gathering up the Italians was well under way.

On the 5 November, British Armor was operating south of <sup>the</sup> Ghazal area and Mersa Matruh almost a hundred miles to the west.

The main Axis forces were reported in Fuka along the coastal road. Air attacks continued without let-up on the retreating enemy columns. As fast as an enemy air field was abandoned, the British put it into operation for their own use.

On 6 November, with the complete destruction of the enemy forces inevitable, nature intervened and saved Rommel's remaining forces. The heavy rains that were due at this time of year came and turned the desert into a quagmire. Armored pursuit was slowed to a standstill. Air operations were completely cancelled, <sup>which</sup> This enabled Rommel to leave his desert tracks and take to the hard surfaced coastal roads. To the Nazi press and radio this became "a strategic advance westward, with complete freedom of movement on the part of Rommel."

(45)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The Battle of El Alamein <sup>is</sup> was of great value to the student of military history as a study of the use, and failure to use, certain principles of leadership and warfare. No battle fought up to this time in World War II ever more clearly showed the value of good leadership than this one. Montgomery taking over the command of a beaten army, quickly whipped it into fighting shape and turned what appeared to be a last ditch defensive stand into an overwhelming victory. Rommel, overconfident of himself, deemed it impossible for the British to change their previous methods in tactics. His failure to

(45) A-2, p. 55.



credit the British <sup>with</sup> of being capable to meet him and do anything but retreat, was indication of his (self) ego. Perhaps he, ~~himself~~ believed the press notices of both the Allied and Axis newspapers. Even so his personal leadership was such that in his absence even the hardiest of his combat veterans lost their morale.

*no personal leadership possible when leader is absent.*

The close cooperation of the British Army and Allied air force was something that just didn't grow, but was a result of careful staff work and was certainly one of the vital factors in the defeat of the Axis.

The <sup>air</sup> reconnaissance missions on the part of the British and the prevention of <sup>communications</sup> the Axis air arm were alone of great value, in enabling the British to lay the foundation for their artillery support of the attack. This, coupled with the missions against the concentration of enemy forces and supply lines, was certainly one of the most important factors in the British victory.

The importance of logistics was clearly demonstrated by the British making every effort to maintain their supply lines, and gain a superiority over the Axis in supplies, materiel, personnel and equipment.

*not a clear demonstration of logistic factors*

Montgomery's ability to take the army that he had, and fit a plan to its capabilities, was a mark of his ability as a tactician. His constant changing of plans to meet the battle situation as it developed certainly was instrumental in his success. Once he gained the initiative, after the Alam Halfa, battle he never lost it, but developed it to his favor.

The surprise and deception, the lessons learned from World War I all were part of his plan for success. Without these he would never have placed his army in position to

successfully execute the deception in the south and the main thrust in the north.

Rommel's failure to plan any kind of a position in depth left him at the mercy of the British, once his front lines were penetrated.

The extensive training in night operations and the assigning of limited objectives gave Montgomery complete control of his force at all stages of the battle.

Whether or not the use of more artillery would have enabled the force in the south to make greater headway, is debatable. Also there is every possibility, if the attack in the south had succeeded, it would have only driven the Axis forces into a more compact defensive unit at the point of the main attack.

In summary, I think the success of Montgomery lay in the simplicity of his plan; his ability to adopt his plans to the changing battle situation; his employment of the night attack; the wise use of a mobile reserve; the close cooperation of his command in conducting operations; and last of all, to his personal leadership.

The Axis failure can be laid to their failure to adopt a plan, other than the one they expected the British to follow in their attack; their failure to present an organized armored resistance at the opening of the battle; the complete satisfaction with their plan of action and the failure of their reconnaissance to keep them completely warned of the British movements.

#### LESSONS

(1) Personal leadership must be continuous; and the absence of it in critical combat, will demoralize even the best of combat veterans.

(2) The use of mass at the right place, as shown by the

*General*

*General*

*this is not a general plan*

emplacment of artillery and armor, <sup>is</sup> necessary for success.

*not complete*  
Also the refusal of Montgomery to follow past practice of committing armor piece-meal, *contributed to "iron"*

(3) Surprise can be gained by careful training in camouflage and deception.

(4) ~~That~~ Night attacks, to succeed, must be carefully prepared for by intensive training. They must be given limited objectives.

(5) ~~That~~ No army can succeed until it first insures its lines of supply.

(6) Continuous reconnaissance must be maintained at all times.

(7) ~~That~~ Armor should not be trained exclusively as an independent unit, But rather, that it achieves its greatest success as part of the Infantry-Artillery-Tank team.

(8) ~~That~~ <sup>a simple</sup> simplicity of plan with definite objectives, easily understood by all, has the greatest chance of success.

(9) ~~That~~ Good staff co-ordination is necessary for success in combined operations.

(10) ~~That~~ the creation of a reserve is a must; and that proper committment will exploit ~~(the)~~ success to the fullest extent.

(11) Training for battle should be realistic and fit the individual to meet the situations he encounters in combat.

(12) ~~That~~ Tanks, given the advantage of selecting their own ground, can act as well as a <sup>7</sup> single purpose anti-tank gun.

(13) ~~That~~ The wise use of anti-tank mines can be of great support in a rear guard action.

\* Author's Note:

In a post-war interview General Von Thomma claims: Rom-



mel's threat to Egypt developed only haphazardly. After the unexpected collapse of the British 8th Army at Tobruck, he could not resist the temptation to push into Egypt, extending his supply lines beyond their capacity. But his success had caused such a sensation he could not draw back. Hitler would not let him. As a result he had to stay there until the British gathered overwhelming forces to smash him. (46)



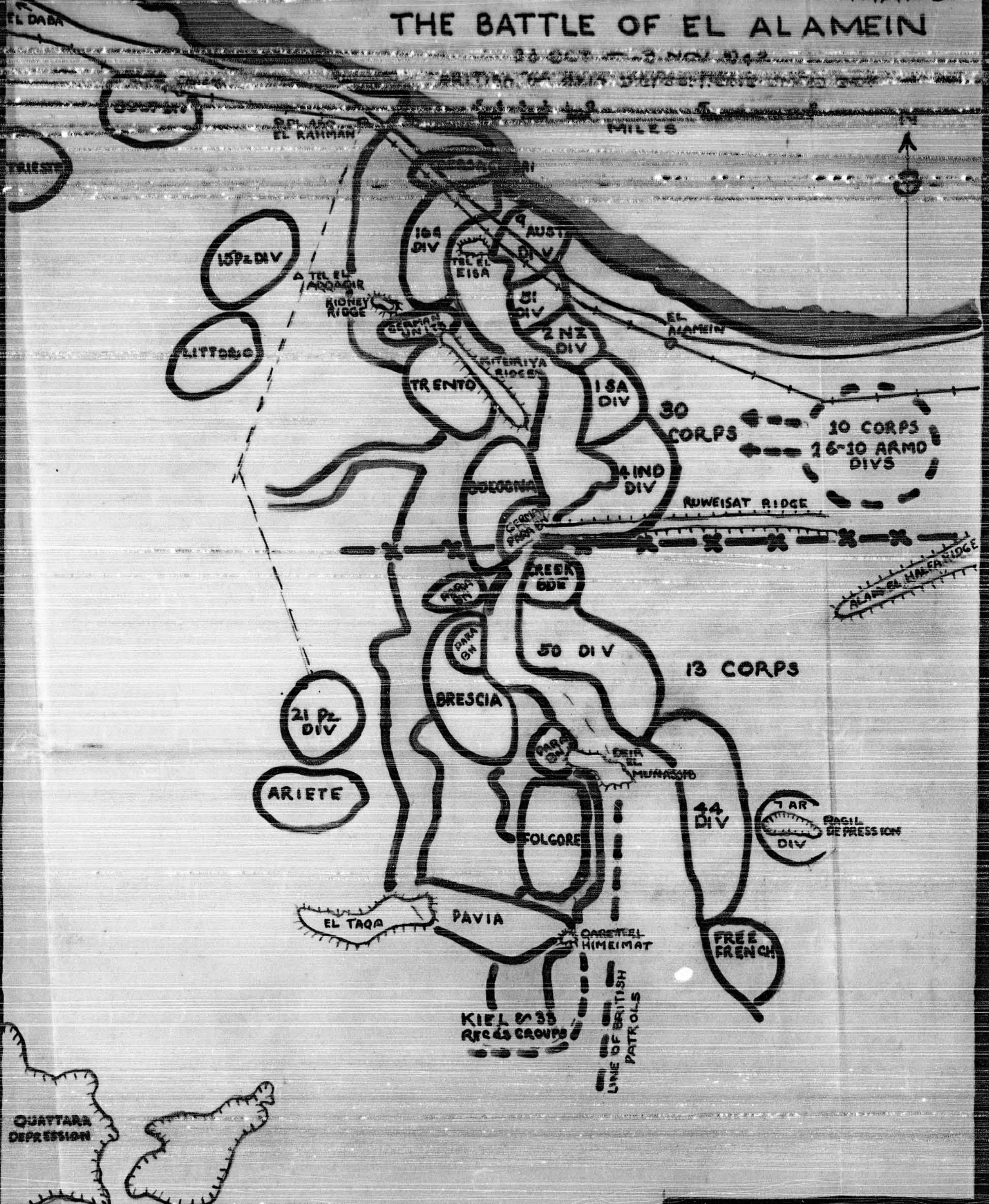


MAPA"  
NORTH AFRICA  
AND THE  
MIDDLE EAST

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# THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN



## LEGEND

- APPROX ZONE OF AXIS DEFENDED
- LOCALITIES INCLUDING MINEFIELDS

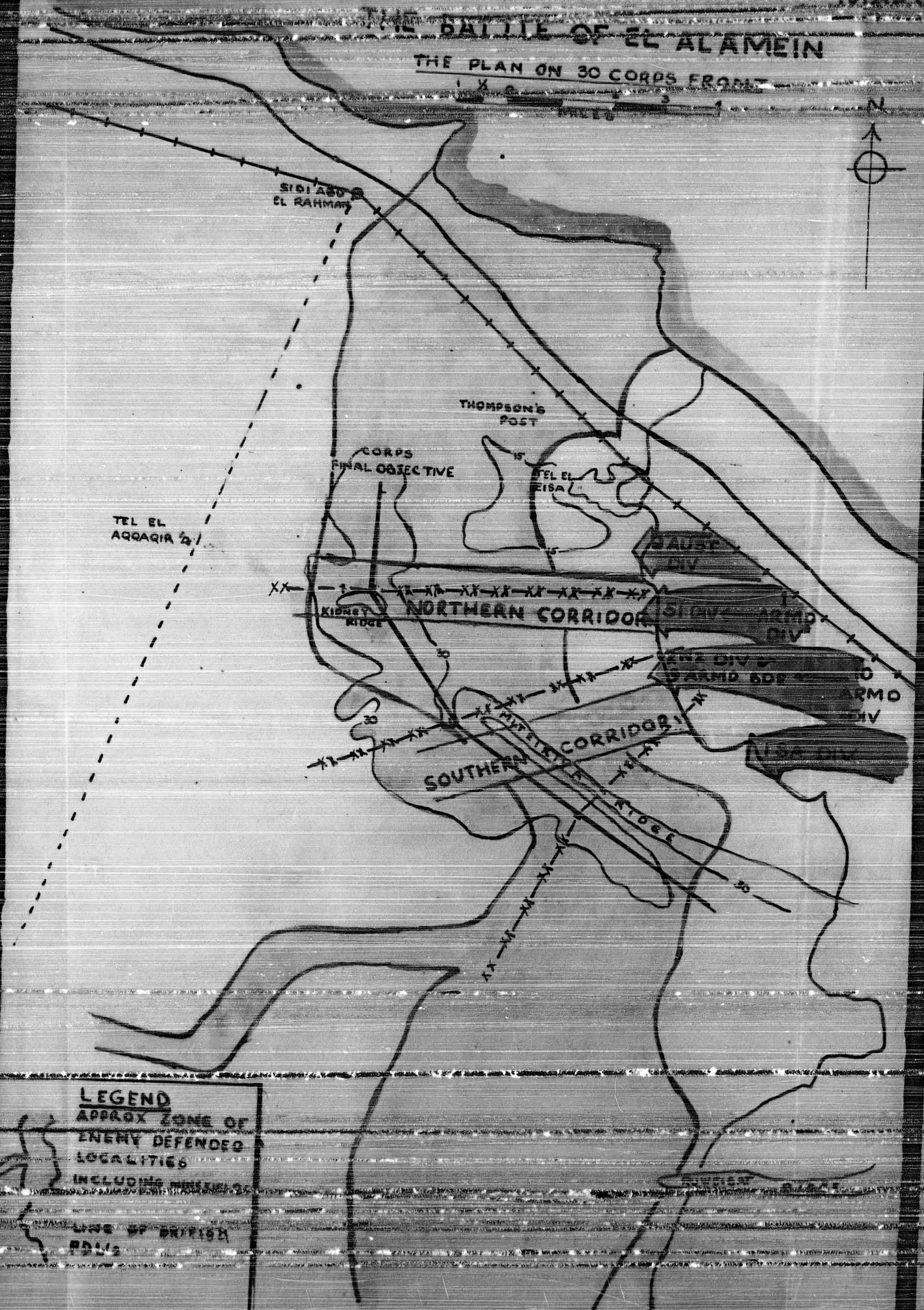


MAR 0

# THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

## THE PLAN ON 30 CORPS FRONT

1 X 0  
MILES

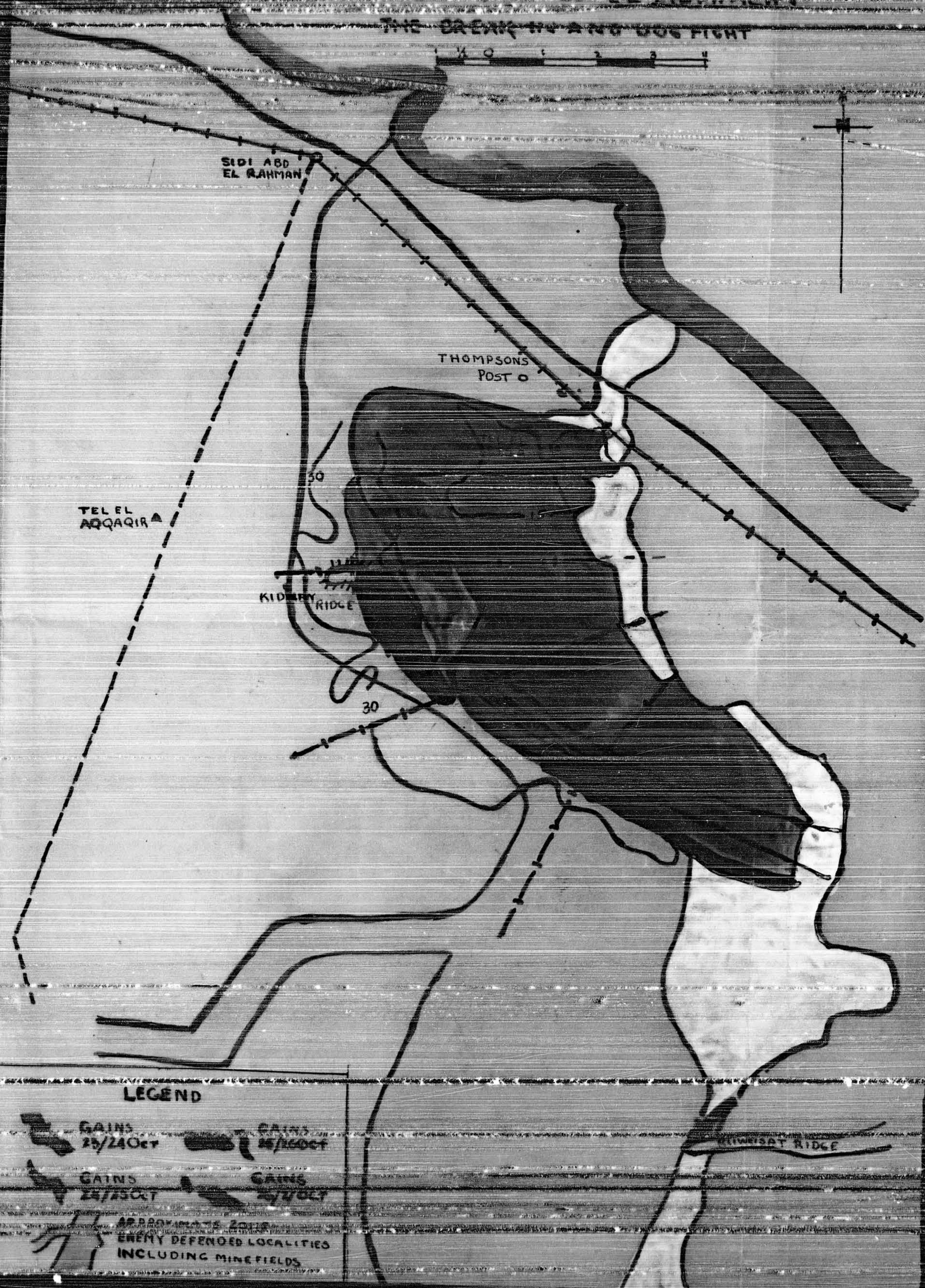
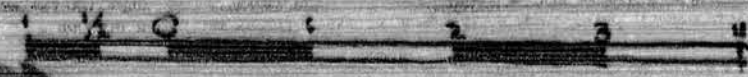


**LEGEND**  
APPROX ZONE OF  
ENEMY DEFENDED  
LOCALITIES  
INCLUDING MINERALS  
LINE OF BRITISH  
POS.



## THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

THE BREAK-THROUGH AND BGS FIGHT



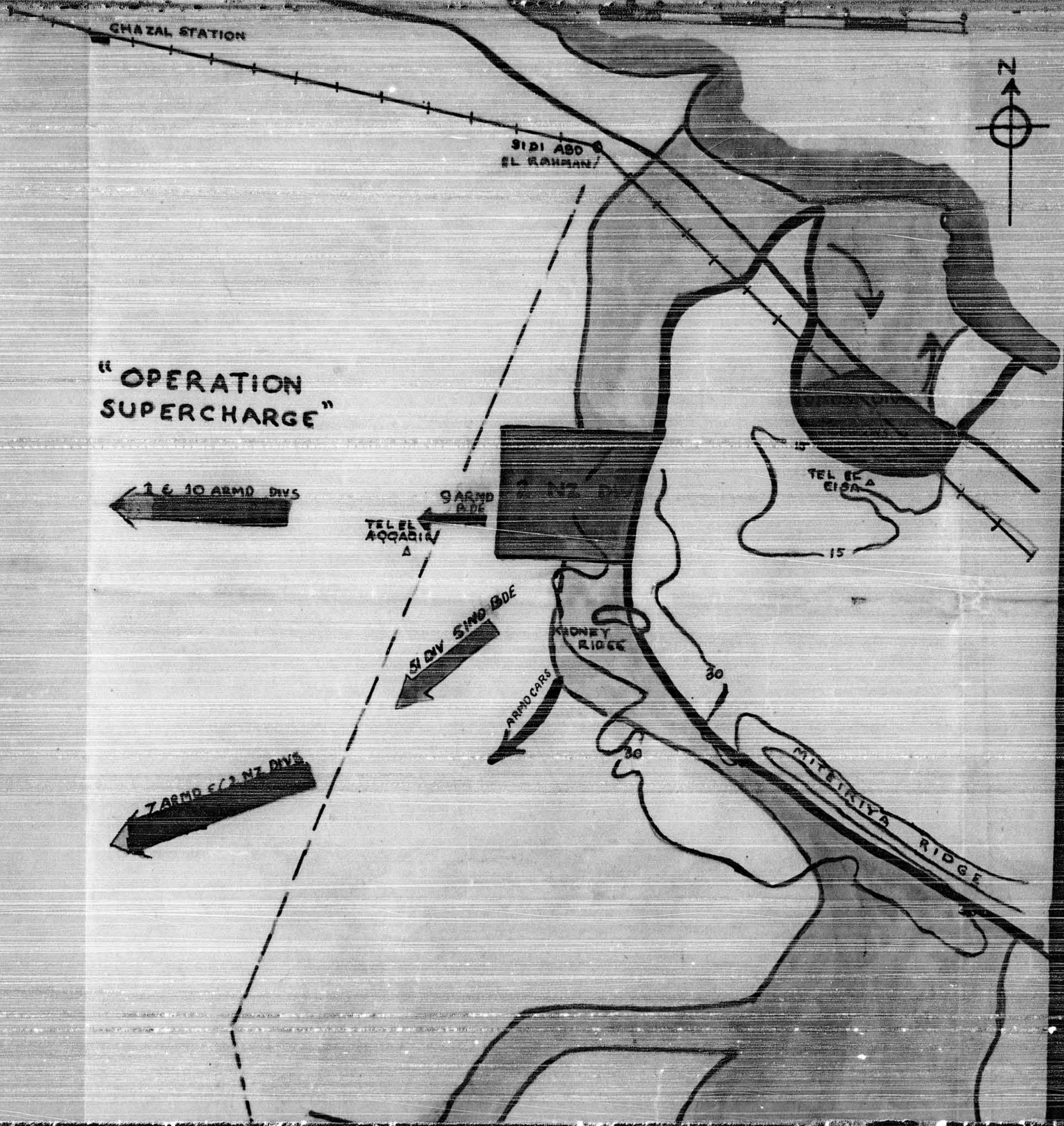
## LEGEND





# THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

## THE BREAK-OUT



"OPERATION SUPERCHARGE"

1 & 10 ARMD DIVS

9 ARMD BDE






TEL EL AQQADIA

51 DIV SIND BDE

ARMO CARS

7 ARMD & 2 NZ DIVS

### LEGEND

-  LINE REACHED 1 NOV
-  OPERATIONS 2 NOV
-  OPERATIONS 3 NOV
-  OPERATIONS 10 NOV
-  APPROXIMATE ZONE OF ORIGINAL ENEMY DEFENSIVE LOCALITIES INCLUDING MINEFIELDS