

volved in this south-westerly attack in order to extend its bridgehead according to the original plan. The enemy appeared to be ready for this development and the New Zealanders and 10 Armoured Division came under very heavy shellfire; by dawn, however, all three armoured brigades had completed their deployment and joined hands with 2 Armoured Brigade on the right. The first phase of plan LIGHTFOOT in this sector had thereby been carried out, but twenty-four hours behind the time-table, largely owing to the extraordinary density of the minefields.

13 Corps' operations in the south met with limited success. The frontal attack on the enemy minefields on the night of 23rd October was preceded by thirty minutes' intense counter-battery fire and supported by timed concentrations on known enemy defensive localities in the same way as the main assault. 7 Armoured Division broke through the first enemy minefield and established 22 Armoured Brigade in a bridgehead to the west of it. The second minefield, however, was covered by heavy defensive fire and when, by 1000 hours, no breach had been made it was decided to postpone the attempt on it to the following night and widen the bridgehead by reducing the infantry positions on either side of it between the two minefields. These operations were very successful and yielded a large number of prisoners. Meanwhile 1 Fighting French Brigade, after a long and difficult night march, had reached the escarpment south of Himeimat when they were attacked by tanks. Their anti-tank guns had been unable to keep up with the advance in the soft sand, and the brigade was forced to withdraw, after suffering a number of casualties.

The failure to take Himeimat had unfortunate consequences the following night, when 13 Corps returned to the attack. 131 Infantry Brigade succeeded in penetrating the second minefield and formed a narrow bridgehead to the west of it; but, as soon as 22 Armoured Brigade started to go through, the gaps were covered by heavy fire not only from anti-tank guns and hull-down tanks to the immediate front but also by artillery from Himeimat in enfilade. After several attempts to overcome this opposition, which only brought further casualties, the two brigades were ordered to retire. It was clear that any further attempt to batter a passage through the minefield would result in heavy casualties, which could not be accepted. It was equally clear that 13 Corps was fulfilling its chief function of containing the southern group of enemy armour, for 21 Panzer Division, as well as Ariete, was identified on its front. General Montgomery therefore instructed 13 Corps to press the attack no further but to go on creating a diversion by limited operations. He laid stress on the vital importance of keeping 7 Armoured Division "in being."

By dawn on 25th October we could consider that the attack had opened well. 30 Corps had made a breach six miles wide which directly threatened the centre of the enemy's communications. 10 Corps had succeeded in deploying in a position from where it could threaten the envelopment of the enemy's line or bring the full weight of its seven hundred tanks and powerful artillery to bear in the event of the enemy counter-attack which it

hoped to provoke. The cover plan had been an unqualified success. During the critical hours of 24th October when 10 Corps was still trying to deploy the enemy was still inclined to believe that the weight of our armour lay behind 13 Corps and launched only a few minor counter-attacks in the north. So, although 13 Corps had failed in its secondary mission, its assault was sufficiently successful to convince the enemy that he must keep two armoured divisions in the south not only on 24th but even on 25th October. Moreover a naval operation which successfully simulated a landing at Ras-el-Kenayis 65 miles west of El Alamein made him keep 90 Light Division back at Daba. Undoubtedly the death of the Axis Commander-in-Chief had assisted the confusion which was evident in the enemy camp. General Stumme had gone forward on a reconnaissance on the night of the 23rd with his Chief Signal Officer; as they were standing close together the latter was struck down by a sudden burst of machine-gun fire and Stumme, who had apparently been overworking in a climate to which he was unaccustomed, was seized by a heart attack of which he died on the spot. It was some time before he was missed and his body recovered and this delayed the assumption of command by General von Thoma, Commander of the German Africa Corps.

The enemy began a series of counter-attacks in the north shortly after daybreak on 25th October. These efforts were not made in great strength but by battle groups containing some twenty to forty tanks each. This was a mistake: 10 Corps was well placed to accept counter-attack and against our armoured brigades in strong concentrations small battle groups stood no chance of success. 1 Armoured Division, against whom the attacks were at first directed, destroyed a number of enemy tanks without suffering damage. Later 10 Armoured Division was also repeatedly engaged and able to drive off the attackers without difficulty, though at some cost to itself. All this was in accordance with our plan and it was particularly gratifying that the enemy should be employing only the northern group of his armour, and using that up in piecemeal attacks.

General Montgomery was now ready to proceed with the second phase of the attack. Originally, as I have explained, it had been intended to extend 30 Corps' bridgehead through the enemy's positions to both north and south but the very fierce resistance which the New Zealanders had met when attacking the previous night showed that the southwards attack, which was to have been the more important, would prove extremely costly. It was accordingly decided to begin operations on the northern flank instead. The change of plan was likely to take the enemy by surprise and the operation would result in the capture of certain troublesome positions overlooking the Australians. The attack, which was made at midnight on 25th-26th October by 26 Australian Brigade, was completely successful. Many of the German defenders were killed and many captured, and the salient was extended by about two thousand yards to include the whole of the Tell el Eisa ridge. 1 Armoured Division had been ordered to operate in a due westerly direction on the Australians' left but they were unable to gain any ground. The enemy had succeeded in establishing a good defensive