

*Attack in the Centre.*

Having made the enemy extend his front and disperse his reserves to some extent, I thought the time had come to strike hard at the centre of his line with the object of cutting his forces in half. We should thereby have a chance to sever his communications and roll up the northern part of his army. With this end in view I told General Gott to attack the enemy positions about Deir el Abyad and El Mreir.

Just before dusk on the 21st July the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade and the 5th and 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigades advanced along the Ruweisat Ridge and to the south of it with the object of opening a way for our armoured forces to break through. The attack was preceded and supported by very heavy artillery fire and aerial bombardment. At the same time supporting and diversionary attacks were made on either flank. In the north the 9th Australian Division attacked north-westwards from Tel el Eisa and southwards towards Tel el Makh-Khad with the object of improving their positions and of exploiting to the south, while the 1st South African Division was directed on Miteiriya. At the same time the 69th Infantry Brigade, temporarily attached to the 7th Armoured Division, attacked enemy positions on the Taqa plateau in the south.

The initial advance in the centre went well, the infantry gaining most of their objectives by dawn on the 22nd, after which they proceeded to clear gaps in the enemy minefields for the passage of our tanks. The enemy, however, counter-attacked and overran the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, capturing many prisoners. On the right a battalion of the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade entered the Deir el Shein defended locality but was counter-attacked and practically destroyed; the rest of the brigade, however, consolidated their gains on the Ruweisat Ridge. The 23rd Armoured Brigade, which had but recently come from England and was equipped with Valentine tanks, then passed through the gaps made by the infantry and made considerable progress towards their objective. Later, however, this attack seems to have lost momentum and cohesion, apparently owing to loss of control due partly to the failure of wireless communications. However that may be, the armoured thrust was defeated with heavy losses in tanks. The attack was renewed in the evening by the 2nd Armoured Brigade which had been held up during the day by enemy minefields.

By the evening of the 22nd, our main attack in the centre had gained valuable ground, but in spite of considerable losses in men and tanks, had failed in its object of breaking through the enemy's positions and splitting his army in half. The enemy, however, had obviously been hard hit. The 9th Australian and 1st South African Divisions in the north took their objectives, but a successful enemy counter-attack forced the Australians to give up some of their gains. The 69th Infantry Brigade won a footing on the Taqa Plateau, but were counter-attacked and pushed back.

The failure of this operation was largely due to the lack of reserves with which to maintain its momentum, and this was a constant limiting factor throughout the El Alamein battle. The enemy continued

busily to dig and lay mines along his whole front and it was obvious that he had no intention of withdrawing; rather, he was hoping to build up his strength with a view to resuming his offensive against the Delta.

*Attack in the North.*

I was firm in my intention to go on hitting the enemy whenever and wherever I could with the aim of destroying him where he stood. Having failed in the centre, I decided to attack in the north with the aid which the possession of the Tel el Eisa salient would give me. I had to withdraw the 69th Infantry Brigade from the southern flank, which was thus left very weak, but I was ready to risk this in order to strengthen the 30th Corps, whose infantry had been fighting continuously for a long time.

On the night of the 26th July, General Ramsden launched his attack against the enemy's positions to the south of the Tel el Eisa salient with the object of breaching this front and, if conditions permitted, of passing our armoured and motorised formations through the gap to take the enemy in rear and roll up his position from the north. The 9th Australian Division attacking southwards secured Sanyet el Miteiriya by first light, while the 1st South African Division lifted enemy mines to the south of this point, thus enabling the 69th Infantry Brigade to drive westwards with the object of gaining the track running from Miteiriya through Deir el Abyad. The 2nd Armoured Brigade moved during the night from its position south of the Ruweisat Ridge to an assembly area south of the perimeter of the El Alamein fortress, ready to exploit success. The 4th Light Armoured Brigade, comprising light tanks and armoured cars with motorised infantry and artillery, followed the 2nd Armoured Brigade from the 13th Corps front and was given the task of exploiting further, should opportunity offer. The 13th Corps meanwhile carried out vigorous patrolling and feint attacks to deceive the enemy as to the real front of attack and prevent him reinforcing it.

The main attack started well but ended in failure. The Australians captured Miteiriya but were heavily counter-attacked by German infantry and tanks from the south-west, and, though supported by infantry tanks and a strong artillery, were forced back to their original positions. The South Africans experienced great difficulty in clearing gaps in the enemy minefields sufficiently safe and wide to be acceptable to the commander of the 1st Armoured Division. This greatly delayed the advance of the 2nd Armoured Brigade in support of the 69th Infantry Brigade, which had made good progress towards its objective, though it was unable to establish the strong anti-tank screen on its southern flank which was an essential part of the original plan. About noon the enemy counter-attacked strongly from the west and south and cut off the leading battalions of the 69th Brigade, which the 1st Armoured Division then tried to extricate. Perceiving that the situation had become hopelessly confused and out of control, General Ramsden decided, with my approval, to discontinue the operation and rally the 69th Brigade east of the enemy minefields. The brigade had suffered so heavily that it had to be taken out of the line.