

it to the westward to prevent his communications with El Daba being cut. He was also reinforcing it with tanks and infantry from his northern wing.

I had no reserves with which to reinforce the 13th Corps and, in face of the rapidly stiffening enemy opposition, their advance came to a standstill. Although the operation did not succeed in rolling up the enemy and destroying him, as at one time I had hoped it might, it succeeded in drawing off enemy troops from the north, which greatly relieved the pressure on our right and centre and gave us time to consolidate these important sectors.

On the 4th July, the 9th Australian Division began to concentrate on the coast in rear of the El Alamein fortress, but I had to ask its commander, Lieutenant-General Morshead, to detach one of his brigades temporarily to provide some infantry to hold the vital Ruweisat Ridge, which was the key to our whole position. This division was incorporated in the 30th Corps, in command of which Major-General Ramsden succeeded Lieutenant-General Norrie on the 7th July. The enemy now began to move tanks and other troops round the left flank of the 13th Corps which had been stretched as far west as Deir el Harra. Our front was now much extended and loosely knit. In order, therefore, to close the gap existing about Deir el Hima between the left of the 30th and the right of the 13th Corps, the New Zealand Division was ordered to take ground to the eastward, their place on the outer flank being taken by the 7th Motor Brigade. The enemy took advantage of this to extend his positions to the south and east and, on the 9th July, he occupied our defensive locality near Deir el Qattara, which had been evacuated in accordance with my policy of avoiding the isolation of troops in detached posts. The enemy continued to exert pressure on this flank and eventually pushed as far east as Qaret el Himeimat, but he consolidated his position in this sector further in rear on a line through Qaret el Khadim and the El Taqa plateau. I had not sufficient troops to hold this southern sector in strength and had to entrust it to the 7th Armoured Division, which organised its defence on a mobile basis suitable to the light armoured and motorised units composing it. This released a brigade of the 5th Indian Division to take over the defence of the Ruweisat Ridge, which enabled the 1st Armoured Division to be withdrawn into reserve.

#### *The Capture of Tel el Eisa.*

Further progress in the south was for the moment impracticable, but I was resolved not to surrender the initiative we had gained and to continue to force the enemy to conform to our movements. I therefore instructed the 30th Corps to capture the Tel el Eisa mounds on the railway west of El Alamein. The attack, which was launched early on the 10th July with skill and dash by the 9th Australian Division, supported by the 1st South African Division and infantry tanks, was successful. The enemy immediately launched heavy counter-attacks with tanks and infantry, well supported by artillery; but in spite of this, the Australians held fast to all the important ground they had gained. During this operation we destroyed a number of German and Italian tanks, captured fifteen guns and took over a thousand prisoners, nearly all Italians. I had hoped to be

able to exploit this success to the west and south, but the enemy offered strong resistance and I had no reserves available with which to reinforce the attack.

The Tel el Eisa salient was an important acquisition, since it threatened the enemy positions further south. Fully conscious of this, the enemy transferred German infantry from the centre of his line to stiffen the Italians on the shoulder of the salient and made heavy and repeated counter-attacks against our new positions. Some posts changed hands more than once, but the Australians held fast to all the principal tactical features. We thus retained a firm base from which to attack southwards against the enemy's centre or westwards along the coast.

#### *Consolidation of the Position.*

In order to improve our position against a possible enemy offensive and to set the stage for a further attack on our own part, the Eighth Army maintained its pressure along the whole front.

On the night of the 14th July, the New Zealand Division and 5th Indian Infantry Brigade attacked along the Ruweisat Ridge and south of it and gained considerable ground to the west, including valuable observation posts on the ridge itself overlooking the Deir el Shein Depression and the country to the north. During the action Major-General Lumsden, commanding 1st Armoured Division, was wounded and replaced by Major-General A. H. Gatehouse, commander of the 10th Armoured Division which was still training and equipping in the Delta. About a week later, during the attack of the 22nd July, General Gatehouse himself was wounded and was succeeded in the command of the 1st Armoured Division by Brigadier A. F. Fisher. Although the enemy counter-attacked with tanks on the evening of the 15th and regained some of the lost ground, our tactical position in this very important part of the front was improved by the operation. Moreover, we took some 2,000 prisoners, mostly Italians.

The enemy showed the value he attached to this ground by attacking the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade once more on the following day. But his tanks and lorried infantry were heavily engaged by our 2nd Armoured Brigade and by a powerful concentration of artillery and failed to gain a footing. In order to relieve the pressure on our centre, I ordered both Corps to press the enemy on the northern and southern flanks. Accordingly, on the night of the 16th July, the 9th Australian Division captured the low ridge of El Makh-Khad, eight miles west of El Alamein railway station, with 500 prisoners, thereby enlarging our salient, which throughout this period was the scene of continuous fighting. Further attacks against the 5th Indian Division on the Ruweisat Ridge on the 18th and 19th July were repulsed.

In the south, the 7th Armoured Division with light tanks and motorised units kept up their pressure and, on the 18th July and subsequent days, attacked the enemy positions at Gebel Kalakh and on the Taqa plateau, but were unable to make much headway, being weak in artillery and infantry and without medium tanks. Moreover, the country in this sector was difficult and broken.