

screen across the end of our northern corridor and we would not be able to break out there unless we could widen our hold still further.

The same night 13 Corps carried out a limited operation to divert the enemy's attention. A strong locality in the Deir el Munassib was selected as the objective as being both easily accessible and sufficiently important to call for a strong effort to retain it. 4 Light Armoured Brigade demonstrated in the depression to the south of the post in the afternoon and at night 69 Infantry Brigade (50 Division) attacked from the north. The enemy were found to be in strong force and well posted and the attack was not pressed.

At this point the Eighth Army Commander decided to make a pause. The intention was still to gain ground to the north of our salient but it was clear that 30 Corps needed a rest after its exertions. Casualties in infantry had been fairly heavy and in certain formations, in particular the South African and New Zealand Divisions, there were only limited replacements available. Moreover, since all formations were now in close contact with the enemy it would be necessary, in order to create a reserve, to draw forces out of the line. This could be done by moving the inter-Corps boundary further north and ordering 13 Corps on to the defensive. 10 Corps was temporarily relieved of responsibility for breaking out further and ordered to pass to the defensive while 13 and 30 Corps reorganized.* It was first necessary, however, to strengthen and round off the front. On the night of the 26th, accordingly, the South African and New Zealand Divisions advanced about a thousand yards so as to gain more depth in front of the Miteiriya ridge while 51 Division also reinforced its forward positions. At the same time 7 Motor Brigade at last succeeded after a stiff fight in advancing down the northern corridor and capturing Kidney ridge, a strongly fortified rise in the ground on the far edge of the enemy minefields. This was the position which had held up 1 Armoured Division the previous night; in our hands it was to be the key to our now defensive front.

The decision to reorganize and regroup had been taken on the afternoon of the 26th and the next two days were occupied by the necessary moves and reliefs. 13 Corps' front was extended to cover the southern half of Miteiriya ridge; in this sector 4 Indian Division relieved the South Africans who in turn side-stepped north and allowed the relief of the New Zealand Division. 51 Division relieved a brigade of the Australian Division to allow the latter to increase the strength of their northward drive. Besides the New Zealanders 1 Armoured Division was also to be drawn into reserve and joined by 7 Armoured Division from 13 Corps. This was to be the striking force for the new breakthrough when the northerly attack should have widened the breach still further. In order to give it power it was necessary to regroup extensively to create a force capable of maintaining its momentum in spite of casualties. 131 Brigade was therefore taken from 44 Division together with some artillery, and placed under command of

7 Armoured Division as a Lorried Infantry Brigade Group. The New Zealand Division was even more strongly reinforced: besides its original one armoured and two infantry brigades, which had all suffered casualties, it took command of 151 Brigade (50 Division) and 152 Brigade (51 Division); later it also commanded for certain specific attacks 4 Light Armoured Brigade (7 Armoured Division), 23 Armoured Brigade and 133 Brigade (44 Division). These formations were placed under command of 30 Corps but concentrated for the present in reserve. 13 Corps was ordered to carry out no major operations but to keep the enemy on the alert with raids and artillery fire. The Corps was restricted to forty rounds per gun for twenty-five pounders.

While this reorganization proceeded an appreciable change had come over the enemy's conduct of the battle, due without doubt to the return of Field-Marshal Rommel, who had been hastily sent back to Africa as soon as Stumme's death was known. After arriving on the 26th he immediately set to work to retrieve his predecessor's errors by concentrating his armour and mobile reserves, ordering forward the Trieste and 90 Light Divisions and bringing up 21 Panzer Division by forced marches from the south, followed by the Ariete Division. Trieste he put in to plug the gap made in his defences and grouped the remainder for a counter-offensive against our salient. The policy of dispersion had already seriously reduced the strength available for such a policy; 15 Panzer Division had been practically destroyed already and the Littorio Division was heavily depleted. Our defensive position was strong, with its flanks firmly based on the two ridges, our artillery well posted and the air force alert. On the 26th Rommel endeavoured to play once more the card which had so often won him victory in the past, a mass tank attack in the afternoon out of the sun; but the concentrations were broken up by continuous air bombardment and heavy shellfire before he could get to grips. On the 27th when, in spite of sustained bombing, he managed to launch heavy armoured attacks against Kidney ridge and the northern shoulder of the salient, all were driven off with heavy loss to the enemy by the stubborn resistance of 2 Rifle Brigade and of 26 Australian Brigade. The following day large concentrations were again seen to be gathering and it seemed likely that the attacks would be repeated. But the preparations were again disrupted by intensive bombing and such tanks as did probe our lines were held at a distance by the artillery of 10 and 30 Corps. Threatening though they were at times these attacks did not upset our reorganization, whereas they cost the enemy heavy and, worse still for him, disproportionate losses.

The new Eighth Army plan was given the name SUPERCHARGE. The preparatory northward attack by 9 Australian Division went in at 2200 hours on 28th October but it was only partially successful. 26 Brigade on the left gained its objective, just short of the railway, but 20 Brigade on the right was much delayed by heavily defended minefields. The result was that we had gained a small salient sticking out like a cocked thumb from the north side of our original salient, extending to within about half a mile of the coast road. This formed a corre-

* This pause was misinterpreted by the enemy and, among the Italians in particular, it was thought that we had called the battle off for good, accepting defeat