

on 27th September and progress was timed to suggest 5th November as the date of completion. A large mock dump was started in the southern sector on 7th October and this too increased at a rate to suggest completion on 5th November. 10 Armoured Division used as an intermediate staging area a position right down on the southern flank from where it might be expected to move forward to 13 Corps sector. The westward move to this area was made openly in daylight and when the division moved due north after dusk it was represented in the staging area by the measures I have already described. A wireless network of 10 Corps, with all its brigades, was represented as operating in the southern sector up to D-day and from D minus 1 onwards occasional false messages were sent suggesting a move forward into 13 Corps' area.

To carry out so comprehensive a scheme of deception required a minute attention to detail and planning, the employment of large quantities of labour, transport and materials, mass production of dummies and careful control of the movements of many hundreds of vehicles. Carelessness in any area might have revealed the whole plan. In the event the deception was entirely successful; the main direction of our thrust and the location of our armour were unknown to the enemy at the time the attack began and for some time afterwards. It was not until D plus 3 that he finally concentrated all his resources against our real attack.

When all preparations for the battle had been made I felt that I could regard the coming conflict with a certain confidence but nevertheless with a sober appreciation of the importance of the event. We had the advantage over the enemy in men, tanks and guns and we had a vigorous and enterprising field commander who knew well how to employ these advantages. The Eighth Army was certainly the finest and best equipped that England had put in the field so far but for that very reason the test it faced was a crucial one. One thing gave us particular encouragement: the high standard of morale. From the moment that the troops had learned that retreat was no longer in question morale had begun to improve; it was raised to still greater heights by the successful defensive action of September and maintained at that level and even increased by the sight of the careful preparations, the heavy reinforcement and the arrival of powerful new weapons which had marked the subsequent period. The troops well knew that the battle would be long and costly but they were confident of the outcome and aware of the great change that victory would bring to the whole pattern of the war.

The Battle of El Alamein.

The night of 23rd October was calm and clear and brilliantly illuminated by an almost full moon. At 2140 hours the whole of Eighth Army artillery, almost a thousand field and medium guns, opened up simultaneously for fifteen minutes against located enemy batteries; it was an extraordinary sight, reminiscent of the previous world war, and the intensity of the fire had the effect of silencing almost all the hostile guns. After a five minute pause fire recommenced at 2200 hours against the enemy forward positions and simultaneously the

infantry of 13 and 30 Corps advanced to the attack.

In the north the enemy's forward defences were captured in two hours without serious opposition. After an hour's halt for reorganization the attack on the main positions began at about 0100 hours. Much sterner opposition was encountered and progress became slow. By 0530 hours 9 Australian Division on the right had secured most of its final objective, nine thousand yards from the start line; the New Zealand Division had also captured its final objective, the western end of the Miteiriya ridge. In the centre, however, the left brigade of the Australian Division and the Highland Division were held up about fifteen hundred yards short of their objective by enemy strongpoints in the middle of what should have been the northern corridor and on the left the South African Division fell short of the Miteiriya ridge by about five hundred yards. 10 Corps crossed their start line according to plan at 0200 hours and began to follow 30 Corps. The work of the engineers, advancing behind the infantry to clear the minefields for 10 Corps, was greatly delayed; in fact the whole area was one vast minefield. However, the southern corridor, leading to Miteiriya ridge, was opened by 0630 hours and an hour later 9 Armoured Brigade (New Zealand Division), closely followed by 10 Armoured Division, was on the eastern slopes of the ridge. This was an uncomfortable position, for as day broke the ridge came under heavy fire from artillery to the south-west so that the tanks were unable to cross it without incurring heavy casualties. Meanwhile the deployment of 1 Armoured Division was even more seriously held up, because the northern lane was still blocked by minefields under fire from the enemy strongpoints which the Australian and Highland Divisions had been unable to overcome. 20 Australian Brigade and two companies on the extreme right of the Highland Division captured their final objective soon after dawn; but the rest of the enemy strongpoints continued to resist stubbornly and 2 Armoured Brigade was still in the minefield at daybreak.

This was a serious delay. It was essential to General Montgomery's plan that 10 Corps should debouch and gain freedom of manoeuvre, so that we could enjoy the advantage of our great weight of armour. Moreover it was essential that this should be done at once, so that we could benefit by the tactical surprise gained. General Montgomery therefore ordered 10 and 30 Corps to clear the corridor without delay. At 1500 hours 51 Division and 1 Armoured Division, with massed artillery support, launched a combined attack which was completely successful. 51 Division secured the whole of its final objective, although a few enemy strongpoints continued to hold out in rear until the following day. 2 Armoured Brigade was then able to emerge with very light casualties and complete its deployment under cover of a night attack by 7 Motor Brigade.

On the left flank meanwhile the South African Division had succeeded in capturing its final objective on Miteiriya ridge. Owing to the heavy opposition in this sector, however, the attacks designed to gain more room for the armour to deploy had to be carried out by night. The New Zealand Division was also in-