THE FIRST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

Having been badly defeated by Axis forces at Gazala in June 1942, the British Eighth Army retreated east into Egypt and assumed a defensive position near El Alamein. Pursued by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the British constructed an elaborate array of defenses. Commencing attacks on July 1, Axis forces proved unable to break through the Eighth Army. Subsequent British counterattacks failed to dislodge the enemy and by late July a stalemate ensued. In the wake of the fighting, command of Eighth Army passed from General Claude Auchinleck to Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery, who would lead it to victory at the Second Battle of El Alamein that fall.

AUCHINLECK DIGS IN

Though it meant conceding additional territory, Auchinleck felt El Alamein presented a stronger position as his left flank could be anchored on the impassible Qattara Depression. The withdrawal to this new line was somewhat disorganized by rearguard actions at Mersa Matruh and Fuka between June 26-28. To hold the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the depression, Eighth Army constructed three large boxes with the first and strongest centered on El Alamein on the coast.

The next was situated 20 miles south at Bab el Qattara, just southwest of Ruweisat Ridge, while the third was located on the edge of the Qattara Depression at Naq Abu Dweis. The distance between the boxes was connected by minefields and barbed wire. Deploying to the new line, Auchinleck placed XXX Corps on the coast, while the New Zealand 2nd and Indian 5th Divisions from XIII Corps were deployed inland. To the rear, he held the battered remnants of the 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions in reserve.

It was Auchinleck’s goal to funnel Axis attacks between the boxes where their flanks could be assaulted by the mobile reserve. Pushing east, Rommel increasingly suffered from severe supply shortages. Though the El Alamein position was strong, he hoped that the momentum of his advance would see him reach Alexandria. This view was shared by several in the British rear as many began preparing to defend Alexandria and Cairo as well as readying for a retreat further east.
Approaching El Alamein, Rommel ordered the German 90th Light, 15th Panzer, and 21st Panzer Divisions to attack between the coast and Deir el Abyad. While the 90th Light was to drive forward before turning north to cut the coast road, the panzers were to swing south into the rear of XIII Corps. In the north, an Italian division was to support the 90th Light by attacking El Alamein, while in the south the Italian XX Corps was to move behind the panzers and eliminate the Qattara box.

Rolling forward at 3:00 AM on July 1, the 90th Light advanced too far north and became entangled in the 1st South African Division’s defenses. A sandstorm delayed their compatriots in the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions in getting started and soon came under heavy air attack. Finally advancing, the panzers then encountered heavy resistance from the 18th Indian Infantry Brigade near Deir el Shein. Mounting a tenacious defense, the Indians held through the day, allowing Auchinleck to shift forces to the western end of Ruweisat Ridge.

Along the coast, the 90th Light was able to resume their advance but was stopped by South African artillery and forced to halt. On July 2, the 90th Light attempted to renew their advance but to no avail. In an effort to cut the coast road, Rommel directed the panzers to attack east towards Ruweisat Ridge before turning north. Supported by the Desert Air Force, ad hoc British formations succeeded in holding the ridge despite strong German efforts. The next two days saw German and Italian troops unsuccessfully continue their offensive while also turning back a counterattack by the New Zealanders.
AUCHINLECK HITS BACK

With his men exhausted and his panzer strength badly depleted, Rommel elected to end his offensive. Pausing, he hoped to reinforce and resupply before attacking again. Across the lines, Auchinleck's command was bolstered by the arrival of the 9th Australian Division and two Indian Infantry Brigades. Seeking to take the initiative, Auchinleck directed XXX Corps commander Lieutenant General William Ramsden to strike west against Tel el Eisa and Tel el Makh Khad using the 9th Australian and 1st South African Divisions respectively.

Supported by British armor, both divisions made their attacks on July 10. In two days of fighting, they succeeded in capturing their objectives and turned back numerous German counterattacks through to July 16. With Germans forces pulled north, Auchinleck commenced Operation Bacon on July 14. This saw the New Zealanders and the Indian 5th Infantry Brigade strike the Italian Pavia and Brescia Divisions at Ruweisat Ridge.

Attacking, they made gains on the ridge in three days of fighting and turned back substantial counterattacks from elements of 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions. As fighting began to quiet, Auchinleck directed the Australians and the 44th Royal Tank Regiment to attack Miteirya Ridge in the north to relieve pressure on Ruweisat. Striking early on July 17, they inflicted heavy losses on the Italian Trento and Trieste Divisions before being forced back by German armor.
**FINAL EFFORTS**

Utilizing his short supply lines, Auchinleck was able to build a 2-to-1 advantage in armor. Seeking to capitalize on this advantage, he planned to renew the fighting at Ruweisat on July 21. While Indian forces were to attack west along the ridge, the New Zealanders were to strike towards the El Mreir depression. Their combined effort was to open a gap through which the 2nd and 23rd Armoured Brigades could strike.

Advancing to El Mreir, the New Zealanders were left exposed when their tank support failed to arrive. Counterattacked by German armor, they were overrun. The Indians fared somewhat better in that they captured the western end of the ridge but were unable to take Deir el Shein. Elsewhere, the 23rd Armoured Brigade took heavy losses after becoming mired in a minefield. To the north, the Australians renewed their efforts around Tel el Eisa and Tel el Makh Khad on July 22. Both objectives fell in heavy fighting.

Eager to destroy Rommel, Auchinleck conceived Operation Manhood which called for additional attacks in the north. Reinforcing XXX Corps, he intended for it to break through at Miteirya before proceeding to Deir el Dhib and El Wishka with the goal of cutting Rommel's supply lines. Moving forward on the night of July 26/27, the complex plan, which called for opening several routes through minefields, quickly began to fall apart. Though some gains were made, they were quickly lost to German counterattacks.

**THE AFTERMATH**

Having failed to destroy Rommel, Auchinleck ended offensive operations on July 31 and began digging in and fortifying his position against an expected Axis assault. Though a stalemate, Auchinleck had won an important strategic victory in halting Rommel's advance east. Despite his efforts, he was relieved in August and replaced as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Command by General Sir Harold Alexander.

Command of Eighth Army ultimately passed to Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery. Attacking in late August, Rommel was repulsed at the Battle of Alam Halfa. With his forces spent, he switched to the defensive. After building Eighth Army's strength, Montgomery commenced the Second Battle of El Alamein in late October.
THE BATTLE OF ALAM EL HALFA

With the conclusion of the First Battle of El Alamein in July 1942, both British and Axis forces in North Africa paused to rest and refit. On the British side, Prime Minister Winston Churchill traveled to Cairo and relieved Commander-in-Chief Middle East Command General Claude Auchinleck and replacing him with General Sir Harold Alexander. Command of the British Eight Army at El Alamein ultimately was given to Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery. Assessing the situation at El Alamein, Montgomery found that the front was constricted to a narrow line running from the coast to the impassable Qattara Depression.

MONTGOMERY’S PLAN

To defend this line, three infantry divisions from XXX Corps were positioned on ridges running from the coast south to Ruweisat Ridge. To the south of the ridge, the 2nd New Zealand Division was similarly fortified along a line ending at Alam Nayil. In each case, the infantry was protected by extensive minefields and artillery support. The final twelve miles from Alam Nayil to the depression was featureless and difficult to defend. For this area, Montgomery ordered that minefields and wire be laid, with the 7th Motor Brigade Group and 4th Light Armoured Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division in position behind.

When attacked, these two brigades were to inflict maximum casualties before falling back. Montgomery established his main defensive line along the ridges running east from Alam Nayil, most notably Alam Halfa Ridge. It was here that he positioned the bulk of his medium and heavy armor along with anti-tank guns and artillery. It was Montgomery's intention to entice Field Marshal Erwin Rommel to attack through this southern corridor and then defeat him in a defensive battle. As British forces assumed their positions, they were augmented by the arrival of reinforcements and new equipment as convoys reached Egypt.

ROMMEL’S ADVANCE

Across the sands, Rommel's situation was growing desperate as his supply situation worsened. While his advance across the desert had seen him win stunning victories over the British, it had badly extended his supply lines. Requesting 6,000 tons of fuel and 2,500 tons of ammunition from Italy for his planned offensive, Allied forces succeeded in sinking over half of the ships dispatched across the Mediterranean. As a result, only 1,500 tons of fuel reached Rommel by the end of August. Aware of Montgomery's growing strength, Rommel felt compelled to attack with the hope of winning a quick victory.

Constrained by the terrain, Rommel planned to push the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions, along with the 90th Light Infantry through the southern sector, while the bulk of his other forces demonstrated against the British front to the north. Once through the minefields, his men would push east before turning north to sever Montgomery's supply lines. Moving forward on the night of August 30, Rommel's attack quickly encountered difficulty. Spotted by the Royal Air Force, British aircraft began attacking the advancing Germans as well as directing artillery fire on their line of advance.
THE GERMANS HOLD

Reaching the minefields, the Germans found them to be much more extensive than anticipated. Slowly working through the mines, they came under intense fire from 7th Armoured Division and British aircraft which exacted a high toll, including wounding General Walther Nehring, commander of the Afrika Korps. Despite these difficulties, the Germans were able to clear the minefields by noon the next day and began pressing east. Eager to make up lost time and under constant harassing attacks from 7th Armoured, Rommel ordered his troops to turn north earlier than planned.

This maneuver directed the assault against 22nd Armoured Brigade's positions on Alam Halfa Ridge. Moving north, the Germans were met with intense fire from the British and were halted. A flank attack against the British left was stopped by heavy fire from anti-tank guns. Stymied and short on fuel, General Gustav von Vaerst, now leading the Afrika Korps, pulled back for the night. Attacked through the night by British aircraft, German operations on September 1 were limited as 15th Panzer had a dawn attack checked by the 8th Armoured Brigade and Rommel began moving Italian troops into the southern front.

Under constant air attack during the night and into the morning hours of September 2, Rommel realized that the offensive had failed and decided to withdraw west. His situation was made more desperate when a column of British armored cars badly mauled one of his supply convoys near Qaret el Himeimat. Realizing his adversary's intentions, Montgomery began formulating plans for counterattacks with the 7th Armoured and 2nd New Zealand. In both cases, he emphasized that neither division should incur losses that would preclude them from taking part in a future offensive.
While a major push from 7th Armoured never developed, the New Zealanders attacked south at 10:30 PM on September 3. While the veteran 5th New Zealand Brigade had success against the defending Italians, an assault by the green 132nd Brigade collapsed due to confusion and fierce enemy resistance. Not believing a further attack would succeed, Montgomery cancelled further offensive operations the next day. As a result, the German and Italian troops were able to retreat back to their lines, though under frequent air attack.

**THE AFTERMATH**

The victory at Alam Halfa cost Montgomery 1,750 killed, wounded and missing, as well as 68 tanks and 67 aircraft. Axis losses totaled around 2,900 killed, wounded and missing, along with 49 tanks, 36 aircraft, 60 guns, and 400 transport vehicles. Often overshadowed by the First and Second Battles of El Alamein, Alam Halfa represented the last significant offensive launched by Rommel in North Africa. Far from his bases and with his supply lines crumbling, Rommel was forced to move to the defensive as British strength in Egypt grew.

In the wake of the battle, Montgomery was criticized for not pressing harder to cut off and destroy the Afrika Korps when it was isolated on his southern flank. He responded by stating that Eighth Army was still in the process of reforming and lacked the logistical network to support the exploitation of such a victory. Also, he was adamant that he wished to preserve British strength for a planned offensive rather than risk it in counterattacks against Rommel’s defenses. Having shown restraint at Alam Halfa, Montgomery moved to the attack in October when he opened the Second Battle of El Alamein.

**M’44 SCENARIOS FOR THE 1ST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN & ALAM EL HALFA**

Desert War Part Six: The 1st Battle of El Alamein & the Battle of Alam El Halfa includes 13 scenarios, including 1 Overlord (OL) map and 2 Breakthrough (BT) maps. These scenarios chronicle the major engagements of these two battles, and include only the best available in the Scenarios from the Front (SFTF) files section on the DoW website.

No campaign rules are included; not all M’44 players have access to the Campaign books. Instead, simply tally up the number of medals won in each scenario after playing both sides. This campaign is broken down into 2 smaller campaigns; one for each battle. Separate medal tally tables for each, as well as a final medal tally table are included below.

Scenarios include armies of various nations. Although optional, it is suggested that you use the unofficial Battle of Nations rules when playing the sides of these armies. Unless stated otherwise, BCF command rules and Italian Royal Army rules are in effect for all scenarios.
THE 1ST BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

1. JUL 01: 1st Alamein
2. JUL 01: El Alamein OL
3. JUL 01: Deir El Sheikh – Action 1
4. JUL 10: Tel El Eisa 1
5. JUL 10: Tel El Eisa 2
6. JUL 14: Ruweisat Ridge
7. JUL 15: Deir El Sheikh – Action 2
8. JUL 26: Ruin Ridge

There are a total of 124 medals if all scenarios are played and 98 medals without the Overlord map.

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<td>2. El Alamein (OL) (26)</td>
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<td>3. Deir El Sheikh – Action 1 (12)</td>
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<td>4. Tel El Eisa 1 (12)</td>
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<td>5. Tel El Eisa 2 (14)</td>
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<td>6. Ruweisat Ridge (12)</td>
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<td>7. Deir El Sheikh – Action 2 (12)</td>
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<td>8. Ruin Ridge (12)</td>
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TOTAL MEDAL TALLY

- Stiff Upper Lip
  - Same as BCF [Nations 5].

Commando Forces
- British Specialised Units use 2 Battle Dice when performing a Stiff Upper Lip battle back instead of 1.

Indian Tenacity
- When any Indian unit is attacked and sustains no casualties, but is forced to retreat, it may ignore all flags.

Gurkhas
- Indian/Nepalese Infantry Units marked with a Gurkha badge apply these rules:
  - Unit may ignore 1 flag.
  - When in terrain that ignores a flag, may ignore 2 flags instead.
  - Unit at full strength in Close Assault battles at +1 dice.
  - Unit may move 8 hexes to combat into Close Assault.

Stiff Upper Lip
- Same as BCF [Nations 5].

The Haka
- When a full-strength New Zealand Infantry unit attacks an enemy unit, the NZ player may choose change one dice result to a flag.

Voorwarts Mars!
- Any South African infantry unit that takes ground after a successful Close Assault may move one extra hex. Terrain Movement restrictions still apply.
THE BATTLE OF ALAM EL HALFA

1. AUG 30: Battle of Alam El Halfa
2. AUG 30: Alam El Halfa Armageddon
3. AUG 30: Battle of Alam El Halfa BT
4. AUG 30 – SEPT 04: Six Days Run BT
5. SEPT 13: Raid on Tobruk

There are a total of 75 medals if all scenarios are played and 38 medals without the 2 Breakthrough maps.

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<tr>
<th>SCENARIO (+ total medal count)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Battle of Alam El Halfa (12)</td>
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<td>2. Alam El Halfa Armageddon (14)</td>
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<td>3. Battle of Alam El Halfa (BT) (13)</td>
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<td>4. Six Days Run (BT) (24)</td>
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<td>5. Raid on Tobruk (12)</td>
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**TOTAL MEDAL TALLY**

**FINAL MEDAL TALLY**

There are a grand total of 199 medals if all scenarios are played, 173 medals without the Overlord map, and 136 medals if only the standard scenarios are played.

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<th>CAMPAIGN</th>
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<td>2. Battle of Alam El Halfa</td>
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**FINAL MEDAL TALLY**

There is 1 additional scenario for the Battle of Alam El Halfa that you may wish to include in your campaign play:


Acknowledgments to the authors of the scenarios that make up this Desert War Part 6 campaign compilation:

jdrommel               secret_strategem
jamesherrell           Nightrain
generale1964           Quit2
Jeronimon              50th

This Desert War Part 6 booklet was compiled by Semba