

# BATTLE REPORT

## CHECKMATE : NEAR EL ALAMEIN, 1 JULY 1942 (table size 8' x 12')

### Prelude

The summer of 1942 had so far been an unbroken string of glory for the soldiers of *Panzerarmee Afrika*. The capture of Tobruk followed closely on the destruction of the British tank fleet at Knightsbridge. By 21 June, Rommel's forces were poised for the invasion of Egypt. Rommel's personal appeals to Hitler and Mussolini for the pursuit of the broken enemy were heeded, and the great drive towards Cairo began.

The *Afrika Korps* entered Egypt with only 44 Panzers and a few thousand men, and the heady morale of victory could not entirely compensate for the exhaustion of unending summer fighting. Worse yet, the advance eastward outpaced the *Luftwaffe's* air cover, exposing the *Panzerarmee* to incessant attack from the Desert Air Force.

Despite these difficulties, the Germans were skillful (or lucky!) enough to penetrate the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's dispositions at Mersa Matruh. When the three exhausted German divisions got in the rear of two British Corps, the Corps commanders panicked and retreated eastward.

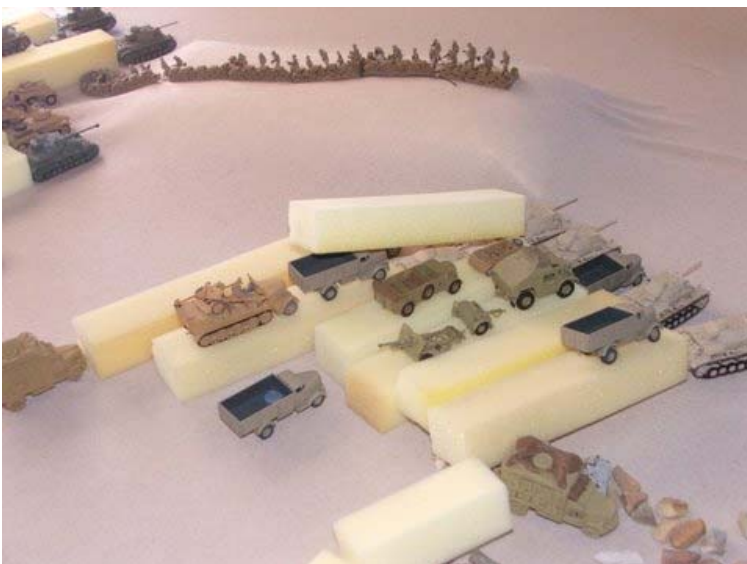
Now the British XIII Corps has established itself at El Alamein, the last strong position before the Nile. Alamein is north of the Qattara Depression, and therefore cannot be flanked from the south, and the position is garrisoned by fresh troops in fortified ground.

Against these long odds, the ill-supplied and exhausted *Afrika Korps* have only one chance, and that is to somehow repeat the success of Mersa Matruh, get in the rear of the British, and stampede them into retreat once again...

Success will pave the road to the Nile, but failure may well result in a lasting check to Rommel and the *Deutsches Afrika Korps*...

### Battle Report

The battle commenced with the Axis forces moving first, entering from the western edge of the board. They immediately targeted the Commonwealth right flank with artillery, and came on in force behind the barrage which landed on top of the 2/5 Essex Battalion, who were dug in on one of the three hills comprising the British front line. The depleted Axis forces then engaged the battalion with their armour.



By turn 2 it was already clear what the Axis strategy was – concentrate their forces and punch a gap through the British right flank, and make for the border (eastern edge of the table), where they had to exit 3 infantry companies to win the game. All they threw against the centre and left were their OP teams, who were left horribly exposed to fire from the other two British battalions in the front line...

The British responded by targeting the Axis infantry – well, whatever infantry they could see, as dust kicked up by vehicles and continual mirages made spotting quite difficult!

However, they managed to get a few rounds of artillery onto one of the 2 Axis infantry battalions, with telling results – and it looked like the Axis advance might get bogged down under suppressive artillery fire...

However, by bound 4 the Axis armour had broken through the British lines. The fact that the British left gaps in their line between the hills probably didn't help them much, as the Axis armour could basically just drive through the gaps...

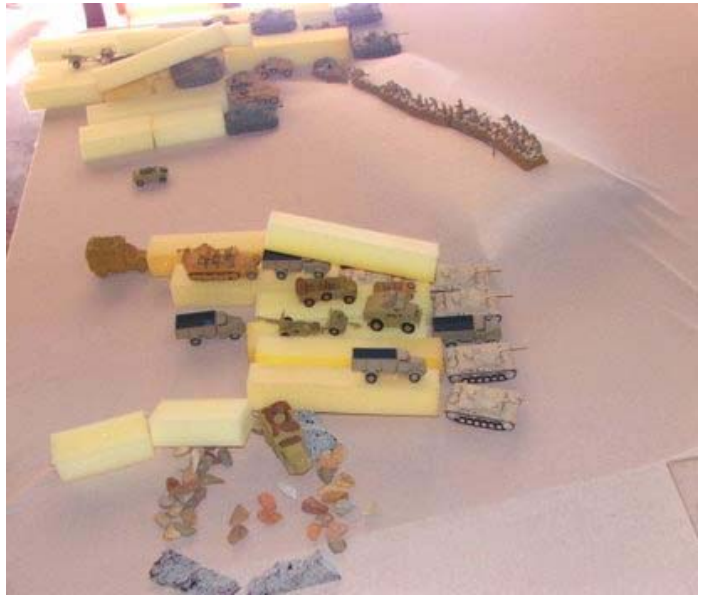
This, coupled with the fact that the 2/5 Essex surrendered unexpectedly, causing the British right flank to crumble, led to the British suddenly switching their artillery fire (very effective against the infantry) to the armour that had broken through, with (predictably) very little success...

During all of this, the British 1<sup>st</sup> SA Division, their 'mobile' reserve, had been busy – digging themselves in to form a second defensive 'line'...

In turn 5, the British scored a direct hit on a Panzer III, at which they rejoiced and stopped for a cup of tea...well that's what it seemed like, because they seemed to be very slow at reacting to the major threat that was developing on their right flank! Their artillery OP's were also now having a problem due to the poor visibility, so the British artillery support – one of their main assets – became somewhat ineffective after bound 5...

Then suddenly in bound 6, materialising in a wadi in front of the advancing Axis armour was a whole regiment of 25pdrs plus a 2pdr AT battery! Momentary panic swept through the Axis ranks, until it became evident that the whole thing was just a mirage, and the wadi was in fact empty...

The Axis advance continued relentlessly, and in bound 7 came the *coup de grace* – an attempted flank march by the remaining Axis infantry battalion, just 4' away from the eastern table edge – and into the teeth of the 1<sup>st</sup> SA, who were dug in precisely at that point...Un/fortunately for the Axis (depending on your point of view) they were delayed for one turn, which meant they were engaged by an off-table British brigade box, who managed to destroy the battalion's towed AT gun with its crew...



The Axis armour by this time had also reached the 1<sup>st</sup> SA's defensive line and drew reserved fire from a battery of 2pdr portees from the 22<sup>nd</sup> AT regiment RA – who missed! They paid for it dearly in the Axis turn; the entire battery was wiped out to a man...

The Axis flank march succeeded in shaking off the off-table brigade in bound 8, and the Panzergrenadier Regiment 104 (now reduced to a single battalion!) came charging onto the table – at precisely the same time as their supporting armour, Panzer Regiment 5, arrived from the west – perfect timing!

The British, who by now had woken from their post tea-time afternoon nap, finally began pushing troops towards the embattled 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Edinburgh, who were desperately trying to stave off a combined attack from the entire DAK...

But it was a case of too little, too late. The Axis forces broke through the second British defensive line in bound 9, and by bound 10 it was obvious that Rommel's forces could not be stopped, and the British conceded defeat...



This meant that Rommel had succeeded in his plan to 'bounce' the British out of their last remaining defensive line. Ahead would lie the riches and spoils of Cairo, the middle east oilfields, and the possibility of a second Russian front through the Caucasus – and as one of my colleagues pointed out, the probable entry of both Turkey and Spain into the war on the Axis side, which would have most certainly led to an entirely different modern world...

### **The Historical Outcome**

Rommel's exhausted troops were held up at the El Alamein line for a day in desperate fighting, but finally managed to overrun the 18<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade. The time the Indians bought enabled Auchinleck to re-organize his defences and send in the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, who succeeded in repulsing the 15<sup>th</sup> Panzer division's 55 tanks, destroying 18 of them in the process.

Over the next few days Rommel's attack faltered, largely due to the exhaustion and casualties suffered by the Axis troops, and eventually ground to a halt, with both sides digging and taking time to re-group and re-supply...