

# **EIGHTH ARMY: DEEDS AND DATES**

from the "Eighth Army News" for July 30, 1945

The Eighth Army was formed in September, 1941, and placed under the command of Lt-Gen Sir Allan Cunningham.

It first went into action as an Army on November 17, 1941, when it crossed the frontier of Cyrenaica to meet the thrust of Rommel's Africa Korps.

The resultant battle of Sidi Rezegh was the key battle of this campaign, and was a pitched battle between armour.

British tanks at this time were greatly inferior to the German tanks, but although our losses were heavy, the German armour was almost wiped out. The battle lasted from November 19 to December 1.

The garrison in Tobruk was broke out on November 21 and met the Army's drive up the desert.

The relief of Tobruk was completed by December 10, after an eight months' siege. On November 26, 1941, Lieut.-Gen. N. M. Ritchie took over command of the Eighth Army from General Cunningham.

The enemy retired and made a stand at Gazala. The Eighth Army attacked on December 13, and had broken through by the night of December 16-17. Benghazi fell. The enemy made a stand at Agheila.

War with Japan had broken out on December 8, and the Eighth Army began to send troops to the Far East.

The Bengali attacked our weakened forces on January 21, 1942, drove us out of Bengazi and back to Gazala.

He attacked again on May 27, and by June 2 it looked as if we would win. There had been a steady drain of our armour, however and the tide turned. The Eighth Army withdrew from its forward positions on June 14.

On June 20 Tobruk was captured by the enemy.

On June 25 General Sir Claude Auchinleck, then C-in-C Middle East took over Command of the Eight Army at Bagush, and controlled the retreat to El Alamein. The Eighth Army took up positions on July 1.

On July 4 the Eighth Army attacked, and by July 11 and captured the Tel El Eisa salient, essential springboard for the subsequent attack by General Montgomery.

On August 15, 1942, General Alexander took over the Middle East Command and Lt-Gen. B. L. Montgomery became the

On November 8, British and American troops landed in North Africa.

By November 25, Eighth Army troops were at Agheila, from which the enemy began to withdraw on December 12, employing delaying tactics.

Tripoli was captured on January 23, 1943 and the Eighth Army moved up to the Mareth Line.

On February 20 the Eighth Army came under the command of the 18th Army Group, commanded by General Alexander, who had relinquished C-in-C Middle East.

On March 6, the enemy attacked from his Mareth positions, but this was broken by artillery.

The frontal attack on the Mareth Line by the Eighth Army on March 20 was held up at Wadi Zigzaou, but the left hook to El Hamma forced the enemy out of the Mareth positions, and we entered Gabes on March 29.

The enemy's next stand was a Wadi Akarit, which we attacked on April 6. The Atari was leaving by April 7, and the Eighth Army got into the Kairouan plain of Tunisia.

The Enfidaville Line commanded by the Takrouna mountain feature was the enemy's next stand, and this was attacked by the Eighth Army on April 19. At this time the Eighth was keeping the Akron busily engaged while the First Army prepared to break through to Tunis.

On May 12 the enemy began to surrender to the First and Eighth Armies in large numbers. The German 90th Light Division - old enemies of the Eighth - surrendered in its entirety.

The Army was now strung across North Africa, from Cairo to Algiers, but with the North African campaign at an end, the Eighth Army began immediately to plan its part in the invasion of Sicily.

The operation was mounted from all parts of North African coast.

On July 10, 1943 - now under command of 15th Army Group commanded by Gen'l. Alexander - the Eighth Army landed troops on Sicily, and immediately captured Syracuse.

Sweeping up the east coast into the Catania plain, our troops crossed the River Simeto and found the enemy in considerable strength on the Mt. Etna Line.

It was decided not to make a costly frontal attack. The line was outflanked by a left hook, and Catania fell on August 5.

Another left hook reached Ranzazzo which was captured by

The battle for the town and port of Termoli began on October 1. On October 3 a landing was made at Termoli, and the enemy was taken completely by surprise.

The town and port were captured intact. A desperate battle ensued, but by October 6 the Eighth Army had consolidated its gains.

The Army then began a slogging advance, progressing from defended ridge to defended ridge, until the troops reached the Trigno River, outpost of the Barbaric Line.

The river was crossed on the night of October 22-23, and a fierce battle to consolidate this bridgehead began on October 26.

The attack on San Salvo, a town on the top of a commanding height, began on October 27, was held up, and renewed on November 3.

It was captured on November 4, and in a two pronged drive the Eighth Army pursued the enemy to the Sangro River, outpost of the immensely strong Gustav Line.

The advance to the Sangro was slow, and hindered by extensive demolitions, and the beginning of bad weather.

On one road there were 18 major demolitions in 15 miles. On another, 45 major demolitions in 27 miles.

The Eighth Army was commencing the hardest battle of its career.

On the Adriatic sector the battle for the Sangro began on the night of November 21-22. On the inland sector on November 27. It was all over on both sectors, after prolonged and bitter fighting, by December 2.

A firm bridgehead across the Moro River was secured by December 20.

The battle of Ortona, fought and won by the Canadians, began on December 21 and ended on December 28.

On December 31, 1943, Lt.-Gen. Sir Oliver Leese took over the Eighth Army from Gen. Montgomery.

The battle of Orsogna, on the inland sector, began on December 23 and ended on January 17, 1944. This marked the conclusion of the Eighth Army's winter offensive.

By May 11, 1944, the 8th Army, with the exception of Fifth Corps - left on the Adriatic sector - had been switched across to the central sector for the drive up the Liri Valley

The attack launched across the River Garigliano (Rapido) on May 11. Cassino was eventually captured by Polish troops on May 18. The Gustav Line - actually the Rome defenses - was thus

By August 4, the 8th Army had reached the line of the Arno, south of Florence. By August 8 our troops were in the southern portion of the city, which was cleared in the ensuing week.

Between August 9 and August 24 the bulk of the Army was secretly switched across to the Adriatic sector, and on August 25 the attack was opened on the Gothic Line, which was breached west of Pesaro on August 31.

Between September 5 and 12 bitter battles took place for the Coriano - Gemmano Ridge, and there were heavy casualties on both sides.

The ensuing advance was marked by heavy fighting south of the River Marecchia, which ended with the capture of Rimini on September 21.

The Eighth Army crossed the Rubicon River on September 26.

On October 1, 1944, Lt.-General Sir Richard McCreery took over command of the Eighth Army from Lt.-General Sir Oliver Leese.

Cesena fell on October 21, Forlì November 9, Ravenna Dec. 4, and Faenza December 16. Thirteenth Corps on the left had advanced with the American Fifth Army through mountainous terrain to within 12 miles southeast of Bologna.

The Eighth Army's winter line ran from Monte Grande in the mountains on the left, and all along the Senio River to the Adriatic coast on the right.

Before the offensive in the spring, 1945, a number of Eighth Army's divisions were withdrawn to the Western Front.

The bulk of the 8th Army was now on the fringe of the Lombardy plains. During the winter the line underwent several minor adjustments in preparation for the last battle.

On April 9, 1945, the Eighth Army launched its attack across the Senio River. By April 14 the Senio, Santerno and Sillaro rivers had been crossed.

The Enemy was routed from the Argenta Gap by April 19, and the Po crossings came within range of the 8th's guns.

On April 21 Polish troops entered Bologna. Ferrara fell on April 24. Prisoners were being taken in large numbers. By April 25 there were secure bridgeheads across the Po. On April 28 the Adige R. was crossed on a broad front, and on April 29 Eighth Army troops entered Venice.

**The advance continued, and Udine was entered on May 1. Overnight our troops advanced 75 miles to link up with the forces of Marshal Tito coming from the east.**

**On May 2, 1945, the German C-in-C surrendered. The Eighth Army had fought and won its last battle.**

***Information by Eleanora Globic, Archives, American Field Service***