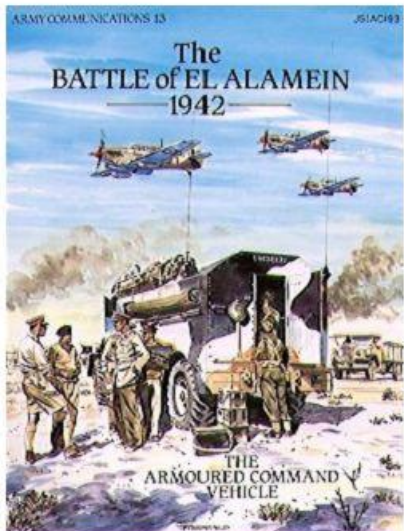


The Battle of El Alamein 1942 - The Armoured Command Vehicle

The forces engaged were the Panzer Armee Afrika under Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, including Italian forces under his de facto command, facing the British and Commonwealth 8th Army under Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery. In August 1942 Rommel had made his final and unsuccessful attempt to break through the British defensive position at El Alamein, at the battle of Alam Halfa. The Alamein line was a natural defensive position some thirty miles wide, flanked in the north by the coast, and in the south secured by the impassable Qattara depression and the great sand sea. With the position held securely after the failure of Rommel's

attack, Montgomery prepared for the great set piece battle planned to destroy finally the German and Italian armies threatening Egypt. The 8th Army was reinforced to give 2:1 superiority in tanks and men, a total of 1000 tanks and 190,000 men. Air superiority was assured. The battle began on 23 October with a tremendous artillery barrage, and the infantry of XXX Corps were soon deep into the enemy minefields and defensive areas. But the armoured forces of X Corps could not break out, and a period of attrition began. Montgomery regrouped his forces, planning to resume the attack in the centre and the north, under the code name 'Supercharge'. The final phase of the battle began on the night of 1,2 November. The tanks of X Corps and 7th Armoured Division were heavily engaged to the south and west, and after a severe struggle with both sides suffering large tank losses, the



long German and Italian retreat began.

Pursuit by 8th Army was hampered by heavy rain and supply difficulties, but when the Anglo-American forces landed in Algeria and Morocco on 8 November, the fate of the Axis forces in North Africa was sealed. With units widely dispersed, commanders were very dependent on their signal communications. In the preparation phase for Alamein, extensive telephone line networks were built by 8th Army Signals and subordinate formation signals.

Once on the move armoured formations relied on wireless, which in those days was primitive compared with modern equipment. Subject to 'fading' and distortions in unfavourable desert conditions, communications could often fail. To improve command and control Montgomery initiated the concept of the Tactical HQ at 8th Army, a small group of operations staff and signals vehicles, detached from the Main HQ, able to move at short notice.

The cover illustration shows the armoured command vehicle 'Al' at 8th Army Tac HQ. This vehicle, now on display at the Royal Signals Museum, Blandford, was issued to 8th Army Signals in September 1942, and was manned by G Ops staff during the battle. The Army command wireless net was controlled from this vehicle, which was often used by Montgomery to issue orders over the RT.

The Chief Signal Officer for 8th Army, from 1941-44, was Brigadier (later Major-General) CMF White. CB. CBE. DSO.

The battle of Alamein was a resounding victory, coming at a time when the British people sorely needed an encouraging turn in the war, and earned undying fame for 8th Army and its great commander. British and Commonwealth casualties of all kinds were 13,500, with some 500 tanks out of action. German and Italian losses were greater, and 30,000 prisoners were taken.

The 8th Army 'Crusader' shield forms the envelope date stamp design. The Africa Star campaign medal, with the coveted 8th Army bar, is shown also on the envelope.

Information from Army.mod.uk