The Littorio Division had been practically destroyed and few of the Trieste escaped.

The action around Ghazal on 4th November ended the battle of El Alamein. Rather less than a third of the original Axis force succeeded in making good its escape. We estimated enemy casualties as ten thousand killed and fifteen thousand wounded; over thirty thousand prisoners were taken, ten thousand of them Germans, and nine Generals were included in the bag. Of six hundred enemy tanks four hundred and fifty were left on the battlefield. Over a thousand pieces of artillery were destroyed or captured. Large quantities of ammunition, stores and equipment of all natures fell into our hands intact in the early stages of the pursuit. The hostile force with which we now had to reckon amounted to little more than one composite division. 90 Light Division, upon whom fell the burden of covering the retreat, had been reduced to about a strong regimental group. The survivors of 164 Division equalled about another regimental group. Of the hundred and fifty tanks remaining about seventy belonged to the Ariete Division and shortly fell out along the road. The remnants of 15 and 21 Panzer Divisions, mustering some eighty tanks between them, formed the armoured component of the force. In reserve there were the Pistoia Division on the frontier and 80 Spezia Division which had recently arrived in Tripolitania, both as yet untried.

Our own casualties were not unduly severe—thirteen thousand five hundred killed, wounded and missing, or just under eight per cent. of the force engaged. A hundred guns had been destroyed and, although more than five hundred tanks were disabled in the battle, only a hundred and fifty were found to be beyond repair. It is fitting at this point to mention that it was very largely the high efficiency of the repair and recovery organization which enabled us to retain our superiority in armour throughout the fighting. In 10 Corps alone, of five hundred and thirty tanks received in workshops, three hundred and thirty seven were put in service again during the eleven days the battle lasted.

Our casualties were a negligible factor as far as the pursuit was concerned; on 4th November the Eighth Army could put into the field very nearly six hundred tanks against eighty German. The main problem was, not to find forces strong enough to defeat the fleeing enemy, but to arrange that the pursuit should not outstrip supplies. Great distances, scarcity of communications and scarcity of water are the principal attributes of the Libyan Desert. Tobruk is three hundred and fifty miles from Alamein, Benghazi three hundred miles further on and El Agheila, which on two previous occasions had proved the turning point of hitherto successful campaigns and which is the strongest defensive position in the desert, a hundred and sixty miles further still. The water sources along the coast as far as the frontier were expected to be, and were, thoroughly oiled*; the water pipeline from Alexandria could no longer be relied on. The railway ran as far as Tobruk, but it was not reasonable to suppose that it would be of any service in the early stages of the pursuit, though preparations had, of course, been made to repair it as fast as possible. For the leading troops road transport was the only means of supply. Even the road was not entirely reliable, since there were many places, such as the escarpment pass at Sollum, where it could easily be demolished, necessitating a long detour. Motor transport, though a great deal more plentiful than in earlier campaigns, was still inadequate to supply the whole of 10 Corps beyond Matruh and a pause would be necessary before we could advance across the frontier. The overriding consideration of the next phase of the offensive, therefore was to cut off and destroy as much as possible of what remained of the enemy before they could withdraw beyond our reach.

The battle of El Alamein had been a stand-up fight, lasting for eleven days but skilful leadership and the tenacity of the fighting soldiers and airmen won the day and with it the first great victory for the Allies. It proved to be the turning point of the war. This great battle was the fore-runner of a series of victories which never ceased until the enemy were finally cleared from the African continent and it had been decisively won four days before the Anglo-American Expeditionary Force under General Eisenhower landed in French North Africa. The world knew that the Axis had suffered a major disaster and there is no doubt that this knowledge, by its influence on French and Spanish opinion, was of vital importance in assisting General Eisenhower's mission.

The Pursuit to Agheila.

The enemy withdrew from his delaying positions south of Ghazal during the night of 4th November and on the 5th the pursuit proper began. 10 Corps commanded the pursuit force with 1 and 10 Armoured Divisions directed on Daba and 7 Armoured Division directed on Fuka. The New Zealand Division, which had some difficulty in extricating itself from the confusion of the battlefield, also moved off at dawn on its way to Fuka, passing from 30 to 10 Corps; it had 4 Light Armoured Brigade under command. The importance of Fuka lay in the fact that the road here passes up a three hundred foot escarpment which is almost impassable except on the axis of the road and railway. If we could get there across the desert quicker than the enemy could along the road we should be able to cut off a good deal of his rearguard. 30 Corps, with 51 and 9 Australian Divisions, was held in reserve and ordered to clear up the coastal area; the task of clearing the main battlefield was entrusted to 13 Corps.

The first stage of the pursuit went well. By midday on 5th November 1 Armoured Division had taken Daba and was ordered to strike across the desert to cut the road west of Mersa Matruh. At the same time 10 Armoured Division fought a sharp but short engagement with a German armoured rearguard at Galal, between Daba and Fuka, in which it destroyed or captured forty-four of the enemy's remaining eighty tanks. After this success the division was ordered to press down the main road to Fuka. The enemy rearguard attempted to hold the Fuka escarpment and the New Zealand Division was momentarily held up there south of the road; but 4 Light Armoured Brigade

* The best way of rendering a well unusable, as practised by both sides, was to pour in bone oil. This is not poisonous, but very nauseating