

ROMMEL ON THE RUN



(image added)

An eyewitness story from the African desert where Hitler's Afrika Korps, crushed by the British 8th Army and Yanks in the AAF, flees in wild disorder leaving the blackened wreckage of its planes and panzer divisions behind in bomb-scarred sand.

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FROM A CAPTURED AXIS AIRDROME, SOMEWHERE NEAR TOBRUK (By Wireless) — Machines of war die a horrible death in this desert battle.

With Lt. Gen. Frank M. Andrews, who has arrived here from the Caribbean to take command of the U. S. Army in the Middle East, I have just completed a tour of the front, flying across miles and miles of tortured battle wreckage, the fire-blackened carcasses of panzer tanks and blitz machines left behind by Rommel's Afrika Korps as it ran from the British 8th Army.

We landed at air fields that were held by the Axis only a few hours ago and were still strewn with the mangled corpses of Stukas, Messerschmitts, and Macchis. These mechanical casualties lay there in the desert as grim testimonials of the destructive power of the British ground forces and the U.S. and RAF air armadas.

The first sign of life that we saw as we flew into the combat zone was a British armored force column moving up toward the front. Over the El Alamein battle ground, we could see salvage crews working in the debris of hundreds of bombed and shelled German trucks and tanks.

Some of these tanks lay in groups, showing how they had clustered together and fought it out to the bitter end. Other iron carcasses were alone in the desert, burned and twisted—relics of a hopeless single-handed struggle against the Allied forces.

Tank treads, ripped from their wheels, coiled like snakes hundreds of feet away from their machines, blown away by bombs from the air.

Flying over what had been an enemy headquarters, we saw another battle that had left its footprints on the sand.

All over the area were the tracks of tanks and ammunition carriers that ran in crazy circles like a snarled line of twine. We could pick out scenes of hot fights by the way that the tracks became dense and knotted. The land was dented by bomb craters only a few yards apart, telling of a ter-

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rifle bombardment. The crashed remains of ground-strafered Stukas were sprawled in the wreckage, souvenirs of the air battle that had raged overhead.

At Sidi Barrani airport, I landed with Gen. Andrews' party for a closeup inspection of downed Axis planes. They were well-constructed ships with plenty of aluminum and rubber. We were told that they had been ground-strafered and scuttled on the air field. I noticed a lot of German and Italian shoes scattered around the field. Evidently, our attack had literally scared the Axis right out of its boots.

We picked up a postcard dropped by a fleeing Italian soldier. It was from his family in Rome, asking him to be careful about his health.

There were several bundles of German and Italian newspapers, dated Oct. 28, at the airport, evidently flown to the desert from Europe to entertain the troops.

From Sidi Barrani, we continued westward past Sollum, Halfaya Pass and Bardia. Everywhere it was the same old picture—miles of wrecked Axis equipment—that told the story of an enemy taking torturous punishment in a mad, headlong flight.

Then we noticed a tremendously long motor convoy winding through the debris. Coming closer, we saw that it was a part of our own force bringing men and supplies up closer to Rommel's heels.

You never saw a convoy like this one. In one minute we counted 120 vehicles in the sands below and that was only a small part of the procession. Even though we were flying at top speed, it took us seven minutes to pass over this modern, streamlined desert caravan.

The Yanks in the Air Force over here are taking all the danger and excitement of this campaign in stride, as though it was just a part of the ordinary day's work.

For instance, at the advance post where I am writing this despatch, Maj. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton called a hurried formation this morning to confer the D.S.C. on Lt. Lyman Middleditch in recognition of his feat of downing three Messerschmitts in a recent dogfight. Middleditch received the medal, saluted, thanked the commander of the U.S. Army Air Force in the Eastern Desert, and then climbed right back into his fighter plane for another round with the enemy.

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