

EIGHTH ARMY IN CLOSE PURSUIT

NEARLY 10,000 PRISONERS TAKEN

NORTHERN ATTACK CONTINUED

GERMAN FORCES EVACUATE PICHON

The Eighth Army is still in close pursuit of the enemy, while the United States II Corps is carrying out mopping-up operations east of El Guettar. According to an Associated Press message the enemy is abandoning the railway town of Mezzouna and the coastal town of Mahares.

In north Tunisia the First Army has continued its attack, and has made some important tactical gains.

The German wireless last night announced that their forces had evacuated Pichon in the Central Sector.

The allied air forces are keeping up their remorseless assault on enemy transport and bases.

GERMAN SUPPLY PROBLEMS

FLANK IMPERILLED

From Our Special Correspondent

ALGIERS, APRIL 9

General Alexander, during a brief visit to Allied Force Headquarters, expressed the highest admiration for the work done by the troops under his command, notably the Eighth Army and the United States II Corps, with whom the Eighth Army has now linked up. General Alexander was in excellent spirits and obviously pleased with the recent progress of the campaign, and full of hope for the future, in which, it cannot be doubted, much strenuous and difficult fighting lies.

On the Eighth Army front Rommel's forces have been chased well north of the Gabès gap, and are held between Maknassy and the Tunisian coast in the east. General Montgomery's advance continues, and, with unremitting pressure from the south driving him into the wide plain between the coast and the hills of the central front, Rommel's supply problems are daily increasing. The narrow front that was formed by the Gabès gap is now spread into a very much longer tenuous line in the direction of Sfax, with the constant danger of an allied attack from any one of the numerous mountain passes on the west.

The United States II Corps in the area east of El Guettar have captured many prisoners but it is believed that the Germans were able to get away most of the armour they had placed in this sector. The American action, in attempting to gain the road from El Guettar to Gabès, though it did not succeed till the enemy withdrew, was of the utmost assistance to the Eighth Army by holding in that area the bulk of Rommel's armour.

NO RESPITE FOR ENEMY

PRESSURE ON ALL FRONTS

The following announcement was made yesterday by Allied Force Headquarters, North Africa:—

Pressure was maintained on Thursday on the enemy in both north and south Tunisia.

On the Eighth Army front the enemy continued his retreat, with our forces in close pursuit. The total of prisoners captured since the battle for the Wadi Akarit is now over 9,500 on the Eighth Army front alone.

The United States II Corps continued mopping up operations in the area east of El Guettar. During the past few days many prisoners have been captured in this area.

In the north the First Army continued its attack over very difficult country, and on Thursday occupied important tactical localities. Since Wednesday over 400 prisoners have been taken in this area.

On Wednesday night Wellington bombers attacked communication centres at Sfax and enemy transport columns. A large explosion was caused in the marshalling yards.

On Thursday strong forces of light bombers and fighter-bombers of the Tactical Air Force continued their attacks on enemy troops and vehicles in southern Tunisia. During the course of these attacks many enemy vehicles were destroyed.

Over the rest of the Tunisian front fighters and fighter-bombers attacked enemy positions and communications. In the central sector enemy transport vehicles were left in flames.

From all these operations seven of our aircraft are missing.

MAHARES AND MEZZOUNA REPORTED ABANDONED

NEW YORK, April 9.—According to a dispatch from Allied Headquarters, North Africa, to the Associated Press, the Axis forces are abandoning Mahares and the railway town of Mezzouna in their continued withdrawal on a broad front between the central Tunisian mountains and the sea.

Mahares is a coastal town within 22 miles of the port of Sfax. Mezzouna, on the Maknassy-Graiba-Sfax railway, is a score of miles down the line from Maknassy. The large Axis airfield there was frequently bombed recently in the allied air campaign against forward enemy air bases.—*Reuter*.

WET IN THE NORTH

In northern Tunisia the first attack in the Mezez area continues, with results of local importance. The weather there has been wet and windy, making progress in difficult country still more difficult. Enemy Stukas operating in the area are reported to have made a dive-bombing attack on their own tanks.

In the air strong forces of light bombers and fighter-bombers of the Desert Air Force attacked enemy columns moving north-east from Mezzouna and northwards along the coast road from Mahares. Throughout the day low-flying aircraft swept along the roads, bombing and shooting up vehicles, and causing much destruction and disorganization. The intensity of these attacks compelled the enemy to split his transport into small groups over a wide area. It is known that in the past two days 130 enemy vehicles have been destroyed and more than 200 others damaged. Spitfires patrolling the southern battle areas yesterday met practically no enemy opposition. One formation of Ju88s was engaged by our Hurricanes. In the northern and central sectors the weather restricted operations, but in an attack on transport moving north to Zaghuan, 15 miles east of Pont du Fahs, Spitfires left a petrol lorry and other lorries in flames and shot up a staff car.
