THE ROLE OF THE EIGHTH BRITISH ARMY IN THE BATTLE OF ALAM HALFA

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ABSTRACT

Egypt was the site of the Battle of Alam Halfa, which was of strategic importance to the British forces, and also occupies a great strategic importance for the Axis forces that wanted to control Egypt because their main goal was to control the Suez Canal and open the Middle East to the Axis forces, so the British high military command worked to make changes in Military leaders in order to maintain their position in Egypt, and Bernard Montgomery was chosen to lead the British Eighth Army responsible for the war battles in the Egyptian desert, which proved his worth and gained the trust of British military leaders, and great love from the general British people.

Hence the importance of the research “The Role of the British Army in the Battle of Alam Halfa” to show the role of the British Eighth Army and its commander Bernard Montgomery in the Battle of Alam Halfa and how he was able to raise the morale of the British Eighth Army and surpass Rommel’s forces after the Allied forces in North Africa suffered losses. The research consisted of two sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first section showed the Eighth British Army after Bernard Montgomery assumed its command, and the second topic explained the Battle of Alam Halfa.

Keywords: Alam Halfa, British Army, WW2

I. INTRODUCTION

Bernard Montgomery left Britain on August 12, 1942 in a private plane to Egypt to take up his new position in the supreme command of the forces fighting the battles[1], and Montgomery mentioned this in his memoirs, saying: “He will be put to trial, the result of many years of work and accumulated experience, While I was on the plane heading to Egypt, these thoughts came to me, I carried my military creed, which I outlined earlier, but how to implement this creed?

The topography of North Africa is different from that to which I am accustomed, and the relations of geography to strategy have always been of interest to me...”[2].

Bernard Montgomery landed at an airport near Cairo on August 12 and was received there, then went to the Mena House Hotel near the Great Pyramid and was staying at General Ouchinleck[3]. There, after he bathed and had breakfast, he went to the headquarters of the General Command of the Middle East in Cairo and entered the office of Ouchinleck[4] and talked about this in his memoirs, saying: “I arrived at the headquarters of the General Command shortly after ten o’clock in the morning. And I was wearing the service uniform that I was wearing in Britain, so I sent an officer to buy me a complete device for the desert, and he took me to the map room of his office, and he closed the door and we were alone. He asked me if I knew that he was leaving!! Is that the Eighth Army must be preserved at any cost, so it should not be destroyed in battle, and he told him that he should go to the desert and spend two days in the General Headquarters of the Eighth Army Command to get an idea of the situation and added that he was still the commander of the Eighth Army and Ramsden was assigned to on his behalf and that I should not take over the leadership before August 15 is the date on which he will hand over his leadership to Alexander, and all of this seemed strange to me, so I soon withdrew as quickly and politely as I could”[5].
Montgomery took command of the British Eighth Army on August 13, 1942, General Alexander[6] took command of the Middle East Army on the same day, and Winston Churchill[7] issued strict and explicit orders to General Alexander limiting his goal to destroying the enemy forces in North Africa, and with the arrival of Montgomery to the headquarters of the Eighth Army, he began Inspiring a new spirit to excite enthusiasm and restore confidence in his own character, his works aroused interest and then admiration[8], Montgomery made a tour of the entire front, visited all units and met all the officers at a certain point on the Alam Halfa mountain range on the evening of August 13 and addressed them for the first time and explained his new policy, which is[9]:

1. The bad days have passed forever, and our mission is to destroy the Axis forces in North Africa, and anyone who does not trust our ability to carry out this duty can go at once.

2. Do not retreat after today, and we must forget everything about retreating or withdrawing. We must fight from the moment we are in now.

3. An order was issued to burn all the previous plans for the withdrawal of the Eighth Army and the defense beyond the El Alamein line.

4. The order was issued to withdraw all forces and means of combat that were devoted to defending the Nile Delta and to throw them at the El Alamein Front to support and strengthen it.

5. Work will begin immediately to develop the necessary plans for a strong strike in order to destroy the Axis forces. The forces of that strike must have a sufficient amount of reserve forces that are trained away from the battle lines.

6. The organizations of brigades, fighting groups and independent battalions have been abolished, and work will be done to integrate all formations within the framework of the division's organization, as it is the fighting formation.

7. Arrangements have been made to place the headquarters of the Eighth Army next to the headquarters of the (Desert Air Force) in order to jointly develop operational plans and to coordinate cooperation with the Air Force on an ongoing basis.

8. Any complacency or relaxation at work is unacceptable and will not be allowed, and the officers must stop controversy and discussion and implement orders with firmness and speed.

The Battle of Alam Halfa
Montgomery benefited from his experience and knowledge of the conditions of the desert since he worked in Jordan, and he studied the African theater of operations with precision. In the war, as he relied in his style on verbal orders and pushed commanders and officers to leave their offices and work in the headquarters in the field and to keep in constant contact with the forces and soldiers, all of this led to raising the morale of the soldiers and restored confidence to the forces of the British Eighth Army in their ability to work[10].

Montgomery's preparations to face Rommel:
After studying the land, Montgomery found that the height of Alam halfa’s occupied a special importance for the entire El Alamein front, as this height was located in the middle of the British front and to the back of it, and therefore it would be facing Rommel’s forces if they advanced towards Ruwaisat to threaten the right wing of the British forces, and if Rommel’s forces succeeded From controlling the site of Alam Halfa, it will threaten the rear of the British army and its lines of communication[11].

So Montgomery ordered[12]:

- The newly arrived British 44th Infantry Division defending the Alam Halfa.
- Supporting other defensive positions and laying minefields.
- Stop all defensive actions that were taking place behind the El Alamein front and direct them all to reorganize and support the main resistance line as quickly as possible.
• Training all administrative soldiers in the different bases so that they can fight offensive and defensive battles.

• He issued his orders to the 51st Division, which had not yet completed its training and organization to defend Cairo with the aim of providing all the formations trained to fight.

• He issued an order to complete all the necessary preparations for the deployment of his tanks in protected locations equipped with artillery fire.

Rommel had German intelligence information that there was a naval convoy of about 100,000 tons that would arrive in early September 1942 to Egypt, carrying large numbers of modern American tanks and other equipment for the Eighth Army. The 8th is in the month of August and the preparations of the British are disturbed [13].

General Rommel's [14] plan was to carry out a diversionary attack in the north by the Italian Tenth and Twenty-first Corps, until the main attack turned into a circumvention movement in the south by the German African Legion and the Italian Twentieth Corps, then heading north towards Alam Halfa and then to Alexandria[15].

Rommel's forces began the attack on the night of August 30-31 on the British positions, and then the Italian divisions, especially the infantry teams, began attacking the British forces, but the forces collided with the British mine barriers, which were planted with great depth and density, and the British Royal Air Force also began bombing aircraft and sites occupied by the forces of As a result, the Axis forces lost many of their defensive positions. Rommel was unable to achieve his plan and carry out the circumvention movement. Therefore, the British then knew his plan, and Rommel now had no choice but to either continue the fight or stop the battle[16].

It became clear to Rommel that the struggle for the location of the Alam Halfa Mountains, which is key to the El Alamein region, is very difficult, especially since the morale of the German army was not the same as it was a few months ago, so he asked the Air Force to strike the British defenses in the Alam Halfa region, and then the forces of the two panzer divisions 15 and 21 broke through the British mine lines on the morning of August 31 and headed east[17].

The process of refueling the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions took a long time, and in the meantime, a sandstorm blew up and obstructed the view, and the German forces took advantage of this opportunity to get rid of the air attacks of British planes, and the Australian 9th Division managed to thwart the German attack, and the 5th Indian Division managed to thwart the attempt to seize the hill Al-Ruwaiaat and the expulsion of the German forces, and the German forces were exposed on the night of August 31 to September 1 to a group of violent air attacks by British bombers, which led to incurring heavy losses and limiting to a large extent all night movements to reorganize, which led Rommel to issue an order to limit the operations of the next day, September 1 to very limited operations[18].

Throughout the night and morning of September 2, the Axis forces were subjected to continuous attacks of aerial bombardment with bombs of all sizes. Because of the critical situation and the interruption of supply lines, Rommel decided to stop advancing and withdraw step by step in the hope that the British forces would withdraw and try to advance again, but Montgomery ordered the British forces not to withdraw. From their places and with the British air force continuing the bombing operation, and the Axis forces attacked the British air force, but the British discovered the "88 mm" guns, which succeeded in the previous days in shooting down British planes and attacked them from much higher altitudes[19].

The Axis forces incurred losses amounting to 570 dead, out of a total of 3,000 men and 1,800 wounded. In addition, they lost 400 vehicles, 50 tanks, 15 artillery pieces, and 85 anti-tank guns. 350 soldiers were captured. Nile[20].

The Battle of Alam Halfa was the decisive turning point for the Eighth Army and its commander Montgomery, as this battle was a test of the leadership of the Eighth Army, its soldiers, its means of combat, and its plans and new tactical mobilization methods that Montgomery had identified, and he was able to move forward with his preparations for the offensive battle that he was planning, taking advantage of all the lessons. that can be learned from that battle[21].
II. CONCLUSION:

After Montgomery assumed command of the British Eighth Army and the measures he took and raised the morale of the members of the army from the smallest to the oldest, the preparations he made and the objective plans for war and passing the Battle of Alam Halfa with a decisive victory for the British forces raised their morale and increased the ties between the Eighth Army and the Air Force. The Eighth Army that they owed it the new victory, because of the changes made by Montgomery in the place of command of the army and made the place of command of the air force along with the field forces.

The mistakes made by Rommel in the battle were that he attacked without receiving reinforcements with weapons and fuel, that supply lines were not available and there was a shortage of spare parts for vehicles, and that the Italian army was infantry teams and lacked military vehicles, in return Montgomery got supplies in the military teams and that he secured the supply lines and put in place appropriate plans, and secured the location of the forces. In other words, we can say that Rommel hastened the decision to attack in the battle of Alam Halfa.

REFERENCES

[3] Ouchinleck: He is Claude John Eyre O'Connell, born on June 21, 1884, attended Eagle House School in Crowthorn and then Wellington College on a scholarship. He was responsible for the defense of the Suez Canal, then moved to Aden, participated in the Mesopotamian campaign, and held several military positions. During World War II, he served as commander-in-chief of British forces in Norway, and then as commander-in-chief of British forces in the Middle East, but Churchill dismissed him Alexandre was appointed to replace him, and he died in Marrakesh in 1981. look: Evan McGilvray, Field Marshal Claude Ouchinleck, Pen and Sword Military, 2020.
[6] Alexander: Earl Harold Alexander was born in London, and he is one of the British military leaders and statesmen, and one of the senior Allied leaders during World War II, he organized the withdrawal of the Allied armies from Dunkirk in 1940, he was chosen to lead the Middle East and replaced O'Connell, and he supervised the Battle of El Alamein, He took command of the Allied armies in Sicily in 1943, and was called the commander-in-chief of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean region, and was called a Viscount in 1946, and Earl in 1952, he served as Minister of Defense from 1952-1954. Nigel Nicolson, Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis, Tape Inc., 2000; Memoirs of Marshal Earl Alexander, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Battles of the Arab Desert, North Africa and Italy in World War II from 1940-1945, translated by: Saleh Al-Shara, National House of Printing and Publishing, Undated.
[7] Winston Churchill: British politician, born on November 30, 1874 in Britain, graduated from the Royal Military College Sandhurst in 1895, served in India in 1896, was promoted in many positions, was appointed in 1917 as Minister of Munitions, Churchill became Minister of the Colonies in 1921, and after In 1922 he resigned from government work, and in 1933, when Hitler came to power, he announced his concern about the British government's reduction in spending on the air force and warned of Germany's superiority over Britain. In 1939, when Britain declared war on Germany, Chamberlain appointed Churchill as Minister of War. After the resignation of Chamberlain's Ministry, King George VI summoned Churchill on May 10, 1940, and assigned him to form the ministry that lasted until 1945, and in 1951 he became prime minister for the second time. Churchill retired in 1955, and received many honors, including the Rabat Medal to become Mr. Winston. The effect of a stroke in 1965. See: Muhammad Yusuf Ibrahim Al-Quraishi, Winston Churchill and his role in British politics until 1945, unpublished doctoral thesis, College of Arts - University of Baghdad, 2005; Ellen Labrecque, Who Was Winston Churchill?, Penguin, 2015; Richard Toye, Winston Churchill: A Life in The News, Oxford University Press, 2020; Steven F. Hayward, Churchill on Leadership: Executive Success in the Face of Adversity, BoD Book on Demand, 1998.
[14] Rommel: He is Erwin Johannes Eugen Rommel, born in the German city of Heidenheim on November 15, 1891, from a middle-class family, and after completing his primary studies, he entered the Royal High School, and his dream was to become an aviation engineer; but his father refused and wanted him to He entered the army, which made him give up his dream. He graduated from the Military College in January 1912 as a lieutenant, participated in the First World War, and preferred to remain a field commander on the battlefield over the position of Chief of Staff of the War, and with the beginning of World War II he was promoted to Commander of Hitler's personal guard force In 1941, he was assigned to support the Italian forces in North Africa, and the news of his victories reached Hitler and he was promoted to Marshal, and after his return to Germany he was arrested for plotting against Hitler's life after he proved his involvement in the assassination attempt and the leader chose him to drink poison and announce his death from his wounds Or to submit to the People's Court, choose the first method, and be buried in a military ceremony, keeping all his ranks and decorations. See: Khamael Hassan Muhammad Al-Zawaar, Erwin Rommel and his military and leadership role in the German army 1891-1944, unpublished master's thesis, College of Education for Girls - University of Basra, 2019; Daniel Allen Butler, Field Marshal: The Life and Death of Erwin Rommel, Shocking Revelation, Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2019.
[16] B.H. Liddell Hart & G.P. B. Roberts, A Battle Report: Alam Halfa, Commander of Hitler's personal guard force in 1941, he was assigned to support the Italian forces in North Africa, 1941, he was chosen to lead the Middle East and replaced O'Connell, and he supervised the Battle of El Alamein, He took command of the Allied armies in Sicily in 1943, and was called the commander-in-chief of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean region, and was called a Viscount in 1946, and Earl in 1952, he served as Minister of Defense from 1952-1954. Nigel Nicolson, Alex: The Life of Field Marshal Earl Alexander of Tunis, Tape Inc., 2000; Memoirs of Marshal Earl Alexander, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in the Battles of the Arab Desert, North Africa and Italy in World War II from 1940-1945, translated by: Saleh Al-Shara, National House of Printing and Publishing, Undated.
[18] Ibid, P. 25.