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PATHE GAZETTE SPECIAL... OUR LIBYA OFFENSIVE... FIRST PICTURES

The eve of battle in the Great offensive in Libya brought about one of those moments in British history which will be recorded for all time. General Cunningham comes to see his brother Admiral Cunningham concerning Naval co-operation in the big attack. This is the meeting which produced that classic remark "I spoke to my brother about it". Cyrenaica becomes a huge battle ground for the second time.

The Commander of the newly formed Eighth Army leaves by plane to visit his men about to go into action. Brilliant Military director in the partnership of Cunningham, Cunningham and Coningham, Axis busters of the Army, Navy and Air Force in the Middle East.

The British Imperial attack opened at dawn on a November day along the whole front. Through the ten foot thick barbed wire fence that divides Egypt from Libya, the armoured columns began to sweep on the start of their great encircling movement. After many many months of preparation, British troops could meet the Germans on an equal footing. Passing through the frontier barrier the constant stream of our invading forces start to spread out fanwise. The plan is to pen up General Rommels tanks within an area bounded by Bardia, Sidi Omar, Eli Gobi and Tobruk. Within this region the tank battles which followed raged furiously. These are the first authentic pictures of the opening phase of the offensive. We know full well that the ensuing battles have taken heavy toll on both sides, but surely this is a time for us to back up our men, the New Zealanders, Indians and Allied Forces with big courage, and applaud their prowess, not sink into unwarranted doubt or detract from their successes.

If we liken the offensive to a contest of strength between two heavy weights, we can better understand the wax and wane of battle as first one and then the other of the contestants win points in this grim arena of war. In the first round we scored heavily. We sailed into the combined German and Italian armies catching them completely off their guard. Many American tanks roared into battle for the first time at 40 miles an hour, over camel-thorn and salt-bush studded desert. All the time our blows were aimed at the body of Rommel's force, battering continually in our efforts to destroy it.

The work of the Royal Air Force has been beyond all praise. From the start they have won and have held the mastery of the air.

The battle of giants in the desert has more behind it than many of us fully appreciate.

The eyes of the whole world are watching its outcome. The smashing of Rommel's Afrika Corps will have an undeniably important effect on the war. From Admiral Cunninghams Mediterranean Sea comes Naval support which makes Bardia, Sollum, and Hell Fire Pass shake beneath a death dealing bombardment. As usual, the Navy is very much there.

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The sky and sea around Cyrenaica are ours. The work of our land forces is a tough one. Every soldier in the field is putting every ounce of energy into the task. In a bleak and dangerous desert is being fought one of the two bloodiest battles of this war. From long range guns a shattering weight of shells rains down on the Nazis.

A field communication post in the desert can be a very ~~uncomfortable~~ uncomfortable place unless well camouflaged. From his dug out the Artillery Officer directs his fire.

It was a few hours before the Army started its advance into Cyrenaica that the Navy swung into action off the Libyan Coast to prepare the way. A strong force of warships was ordered inshore, and as their main armament opened fire, the night was pierced as every gun belched flame and a rain of projectile.

From gun emplacements on land the artillery join in the chorus as the offensive gets under way.

The rapid movement of this fluid offensive makes yesterdays news from the desert seem old. But nothing can age the glorios attacks at the point of the bayonet by the New Zealanders, Indians, and South Africans as they followed up the rapid advance of the British tanks. Before the onrush of our armoured columns the Germans and Italians fell back westward towards Sidi Rezegh. The days which lay ahead were to hold the story of that bitterly contested oasis.

A silver painted flying ambulance comes in to land. One of the new Red cross planes being used to convey casualties from the forward areas back to the base hospitals. This unit of the Royal Australian Air Force is the last word in design, and by its use, many precious lives have been saved.

The barren desert land of North Africa is the scene of a struggle which goes on with undiminished fury. The second round looms up. The second round in which we have to be content to match blow with blow; frequently being forced on the defensive. With hardly breathing space for either side, the iron clad hosts batter each other to a standstill. But Britain will never say halt until the final victory is won.