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Rommel Back To Jumping-Off Point

By SELWYN JAMES

The first phase of Marshal Erwin Rommel's week-old offensive in Egypt has flopped. Allied guns and planes have sent his armored forces scurrying back west of the British minefields to their original positions. It was announced in Cairo yesterday that Rommel's thrust had been no "reconnaissance in force," but a full-blown attempted drive for the Nile Delta and the Suez Canal. He had thrown in his entire striking force. Captured enemy prisoners testified that Rommel had told his men that "we are off to Cairo" when he opened the drive last Monday.

The Axis withdrawal took place under heavy fire. The prized 15th and 21st German tank divisions, the 90th German light division and mobile Italian troops were reported to have taken a terrific pounding from the RAF and Allied ground forces over the week end.

Crete Hit Again

Tobruk, oft-raided Libyan port, also suffered an RAF bombing, while American planes for the second time in a week made a smashing raid on the Axis base at Candia, on the island of Crete. U. S. Army Air Force headquarters in Cairo announced that ships were hit, the power station crippled by big bombs and many fires started in the dock area despite heavy antiaircraft fire.

Here is a day-by-day account of the Axis offensive:

Monday: Axis forces penetrated British minefields between the Ruweisat and Himeimat ridges (*Map on page 17*). A small armored unit then swung northeastward, apparently aiming to reach the Mediterranean coast and to isolate the British base of El Alamein. But it met attacks from the main Imperial forces.

Jumping-Off Point

Tuesday: Rommel's tanks again moved northeastward, but were flung back. On the Himeimat ridge sector, the Imperials took the initiative, making flank attacks on Axis infantry and armored units.

Wednesday: Two German officers appeared on the central sector under a white flag suggesting that the Imperials surrender "to avoid bloodshed and because German armor is behind you." The British laughed in their faces.

Thursday: German and Italian troops began to retreat slowly out of the area they had penetrated. Furious Allied air attacks and artillery barrages edged them on. At one stage Rommel tried to make a comeback, stabbing with Nazi shock troops at lines held by British and Indian forces.

Friday: Allied air losses were greater than those of the Axis because Rommel had brought up fresh anti-aircraft batteries. But on land the British 8th Army started its counteroffensive on the central sector.

Saturday and Sunday: The 20-mile wedge which Rommel drove into the British mine-fields was closed by British and New Zealand troops. Official reports said that "every effort of the enemy failed to penetrate our main defense system at any point." London sources said Rommel had taken a "hell of a plastering." Meanwhile, the British on the important southern sector held their positions firmly, awaiting a renewed Axis attack. Australian patrols struck out against German lines in the northern sector west of El Alamein.

Dispatches from London last night emphasized that Rommel's armored forces had not been crippled, that they were likely to strike again after resting up.

