

C12

The following is the text of the speech delivered by the Commander-in-Chief Middle East (General Sir Harold Alexander) on the occasion of the parade of 9th Australian Division at Gaza Airport on 22 Dec 42.

"Officers, Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, and men of the Australian Imperial Force. These grave days we are living in are the time for deeds rather than words, but when great deeds have been done then it does no harm to speak of them, and great deeds you have done.

"The Battle of El Alamein will make history, and you are in the proud position of having done a major part in that great victory. Your reputation as fighters has always been famous, but I do not believe that you have ever fought with greater bravery or distinction than you did during that battle when you broke the German and Italian armies in the Western Desert. Now you have added fresh lustre to your already illustrious name. Your losses have been heavy indeed, but war is a hard and bloody affair, and great victories cannot be won without much sacrifice."

"It is always a fine and moving spectacle to see, as I do today, worthy men who have done their duty on the battlefield, assembled on parade, and those lines filled again with young recruits who have come to take the places of your fallen comrades. To them I extend a warm welcome and greet them as brothers-in-arms, and welcome them to the forces of the Middle East, which it is my honour to command."

"What of the future? The fortunes of war have turned in our favour. We now have the initiative and will strike when we will and where we will. It is we who will choose the future battle grounds, and we will choose them where and when we can hit the enemy hardest. There is a hard and bitter struggle ahead before final victory. There is much hard fighting to be done."

"In the fluctuations and changes of war individuals will know change, some will come, others will go. Formations will move from one theatre to another, and where you will be when the next battle is fought I do not know. But wherever you are my thoughts will go with you. I will follow you with interest, and watch your successes with admiration. But there is one thought which I will cherish above all others - under my command fought the 9th Australian Division."

-----