El Alamein: The Temple of Inviolable Memory in the Desert

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In the heart of the Egyptian desert, where history merges with sand and the wind whispers tales of heroism, stands the **Military Shrine of El Alamein**, a sacred place that transcends its function as a cemetery to become a true **temple of memory**. This site is not merely a monument, but a living symbol of the indomitable spirit of the soldiers who fought and fell during the Second Battle of El Alamein, between October 23 and November 4, 1942. Here rest **over 5,200 Italian heroes**, but it is the echo of the over 50,000 lives involved in that conflict – among the fallen, wounded, and prisoners – that resonates strongly, reminding us of their courage in defending the tricolor flag.

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A Beacon in the Desert Plain: The Structure of the Shrine

The Shrine, masterfully conceived by engineer and officer **Paolo Caccia Dominioni**, former Officer of the Alpine Corps and Commander of the XXXI Engineer Demolition Battalion in North Africa, stands at **km 120 of the Alexandria-Marsa Matruh coastal road**, on a wide area of hilly terrain. The Arabic toponym "Tel El Alamein" aptly means "the hill of the twin peaks", a place predestined to become the peak of memory. All around stretches the vast desert plain, the theater of the great battles of El Alamein.

The masonry work consists of **three distinct blocks of constructions**, a testament to the meticulous care with which it was designed: the Shrine itself, the complex of buildings along the coastal road, and the Italian base of "Quota 33".

The **Shrine proper** consists of an **octagonal tower**, slightly tapered upwards, which widens at the base into a large pavilion. Inside this majestic structure are kept the **Remains of the Fallen**, each a precious fragment of that collective memory that must be preserved and passed on.

The Sacredness of Quota 33 and the Recovery Mission

About 500 meters northwest of the Shrine, on a small hill, stands the **Italian base of QUOTA 33**. This place is steeped in heroism, as here the **52nd Artillery Group 152/37 sacrificed itself on July 10, 1942**, an act of valor that did not yield to the overwhelming Australian attack. It was precisely at Quota 33 that the Italian Base was built in 1948, a monument to the

valor of the artillerymen and the starting point for **355 desert reconnaissance missions**, covering over 400,000 kilometers of route for the compassionate recovery of the Fallen. The construction of the base was completed in 1955.

This **recovery mission**, carried out by the Veterans of the **31st AFRICAN DEMOLITION BATTALION**, under the orders of the General Commissariat for Honoring the Fallen, not only brought home the over 5,200 Italian Remains scattered in the desert, but also participated in the recovery of about 6,000 German or Allied Remains, and created the architectural works of the Italian Necropolises of Alamein and Tripoli. A work of dedication and respect, led by **Colonel Paolo Caccia Dominioni**, who with tenacity devoted himself to this arduous and complex search, even among the extensive minefields that unfortunately caused the death of seven indigenous collaborators during the ten years of research.

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A Complex of Memory and History

The **buildings along the road** complete the Shrine, offering a path of memory and reflection. These include:

- The **Libyan Ascari cemetery**, where the Remains of 232 Fallen rest, with an adjoining mosque, completed in 1955 according to the strict rules of Muslim burial, a testament to the respect for every sacrifice.
- The **entrance portico with the Court of Honor**, a solemn access to the temple of memory.

- The **service complex** with a small museum of war relics and a video-film screening room, a place where history comes to life through direct testimonies.

The Duty to Preserve the Inviolable Memory

El Alamein is not just a physical place; it is an **indelible symbol of Italian national identity**, an eternal testimony of courage, unity, and supreme sacrifice. As the powerful voice that rises from this sacred place proclaims: **"Here a mighty voice rises and warns never to despair in the destinies of Italy"**.

Yet, right around this symbol of heroism, a new, crucial battle is being fought: that between the sacredness of historical memory and the relentless advance of urban development. The speed and magnitude of urbanization works, with projects like **New Alamein** and **Ras El-Hekma**, are already alarmingly erasing the traces of the past. Bulldozers have destroyed significant sections of the historic battlefield, erecting highways and new structures right over the positions heroically defended.

The memory of those soldiers cannot be swallowed by advancing modernity. While the need for development and progress is undeniable, it is an **absolute imperative** that new generations do not forget the roots from which they come. The future being built in the region must **harmoniously coexist with the past**, without the latter being sacrificed on the altar of progress. The battle between memory and modernity is just beginning, and it is up to all of us to honor and preserve that memory, so that it continues to be a beacon of hope, pride, and warning for generations to come.