

G.H.G. Reserve.

- One armoured division of
- One armoured brigade group
- One motor brigade group
- One infantry division.

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*G.H.Q., M.E.F. Operation Instruction
No. 116.*

8th March 1942.

Lieutenant-General N. M. Ritchie, Commander,
Eighth Army.

1. A convoy will be despatched to Malta during the coming dark period. The supply situation in Malta is serious, owing to the failure of the last convoy to arrive. The Commanders-in-Chief have therefore decided that measures for the protection of the next convoy will be accorded first priority.

2. Full particulars concerning the movement of the convoy will be made known to you by the Naval Liaison Officer attached to your Headquarters. In outline, the movements of the convoy will be as follows:—

- (a) Leave Alexandria afternoon D1 day.
- (b) Arrive Malta early D4 day.

D1 day may be altered if the weather is unfavourable, but you will receive twenty-four hours notice of the time of departure of the convoy from Alexandria.

3. The Commander-in-Chief directs that you will create a diversion with the object of drawing off enemy air attack from the convoy throughout D2 day.

4. This diversion will be of an appreciable size—not less than the equivalent of one bde gp. The diversionary effect of your operation is not required to continue after the evening of D2.

5. The maximum possible fighter protection is to be afforded to the convoy, therefore your diversionary operation may have to be carried out without any air protection.

6. Your outline plan will be forwarded to reach this Headquarters by 13th March 1942.

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Note on the Libyan Offensive—I.

21st March 1942.

1. *The object.*—Our permanent and overriding object is to secure our bases in Egypt and Iraq against enemy attack.

2. *Factors affecting the achievement of the object.*—Our policy on the Western Front in North Africa has been hitherto: first, to protect our main base area in the Delta, and secondly, to drive the enemy out of North Africa so as to increase the security of the Delta base, to open the Mediterranean sea route, and to provide a base for operations against Sicily and Italy.

3. So long as the enemy is able to send convoys freely to Tripoli and Bengasi, he is in a better position to build up his forces on this front than we are, because the route is much shorter than our reinforcement route round the Cape and from India. The most effective way, therefore, to secure Egypt from attack from the west is to control the Central Mediterranean.

4. To gain control of the Central Mediterranean, we require:—

- (i) To operate strong air forces and light naval forces from Malta. This will not be

possible unless we can keep Malta adequately supplied, and provide it with reasonable protection against air attack.

(ii) To operate strong air forces from bases in Western Cyrenaica.

(iii) To provide air protection for our fleet operating from Alexandria.

5. If we could establish a high degree of control over the Central Mediterranean, the enemy's strength in North Africa must gradually decline. Both the capture of Tripolitania and, alternatively, the defence of Cyrenaica would then be easier, thus enabling us to release forces for the Northern Front, if required.

It is obvious that the advantages of capturing Tripolitania would be largely discounted if the enemy could establish himself in Tunisia. The only certain way of preventing this is to occupy that country ourselves.

6. The carrying out of our policy falls, therefore, into three phases:—

- (i) The securing of Cyrenaica.
- (ii) The building up of our striking forces in Cyrenaica and Malta, with a view to gaining control of the Central Mediterranean.
- (iii) The occupation of Tripolitania and, if necessary, of Tunisia.

7. Viewing the war as a whole, we must concede that the enemy will have the initiative during the summer of 1942, and that some reverses are to be expected. This will influence our operations in North Africa in the following ways:—

(a) We must not become involved in operations in Libya which cannot be broken off at short notice. To be in a position to release forces to meet the enemy elsewhere, we must aim at being able to pass quickly to the defensive, and to consolidate our gains without delay.

(b) The morale of the public will require sustaining. A successful offensive would be beneficial, but another failure would have a harmful effect.

8. From the foregoing considerations, the phases of offensive operations in Libya can be defined:—

- (i) To secure Cyrenaica.
- (ii) To gain control of the sea communications in the Central Mediterranean.
- (iii) To capture or secure Tripolitania, which may depend on whether operations to secure Tunisia can also be undertaken, either from the east or from the west.

9. *Factors affecting offensive operations in Cyrenaica.*—Experience has shown that it is more difficult to hold than to capture Cyrenaica. Therefore, an essential element in the plan to capture Cyrenaica is the destruction of the enemy forces, and particularly the most effective part of them, the German armoured and infantry formations.

10. The configuration of the coast of the Gulf of Sirte and the defensive possibilities of the El Agheila area are the governing considerations in any plan for the defence of Cyrenaica. A much smaller force is needed to defend Cyrenaica in the Agheila position than in any other, and, since we must be ready to secure Cyrenaica with the minimum force, the capture and consolidation of the Agheila position is essential. This fixes our maintenance needs.