

possibility that Rommel might not be ready for his attack for many weeks made me give up this idea, though with some reluctance. We know now beyond any doubt that Rommel intended to attack Tobruk from the east on the 23rd November and we have all his plans for this operation.

For various reasons our offensive had already had to be postponed. After dumping had been finished, it was not possible to rely on the transport echelons being reorganised before the 11th November in readiness for the advance. Nor was it possible to complete the training of the 22nd Armoured Brigade, which disembarked early in October, and that of the Armoured Corps Headquarters before that date. At the Commanders-in-Chief Conference held on the 3rd October, therefore, 11th November was fixed as the date for the offensive to begin. Unavoidable delays arose, however, in providing the full quota of transport for the 1st South African Division, and Major-General Brink found it impossible to complete its training by that date. The opening of the offensive was finally deferred until 18th November.

By the evening of the 17th November the formations of the Eighth Army had concentrated behind the frontier and were ready to advance.

British Forces.

The principal forces taking part in the offensive were:—

13th Corps.—Lieutenant-General A. R. Godwin-Austen.

New Zealand Division.—Major-General B. Freyberg.

4th Indian Division.—Major-General F. W. Messervy.

1st Army Tank Brigade.—Brigadier H. R. B. Watkins.

30th Corps.—Lieutenant-General C. W. M. Norrie.

7th Armoured Division.—Major-General W. H. E. Gott.

4th Armoured Brigade Group.—Brigadier A. H. Gatehouse.

1st South African Division (two brigades).—Major-General G. E. Brink.

22nd Guards (Motor) Brigade.—Brigadier J. C. O. Marriott.

Tobruk Garrison.—Major-General R. MacK. Scobie.

70th Division.—Major-General Scobie.

32nd Army Tank Brigade.—Brigadier A. C. Willison.

Polish Carpathian Infantry Brigade Group.—Major-General S. Kopanski.

Oases Force.—Brigadier D. W. Reid.

(6th South African Armoured Car Regiment and a battalion group from 29th Indian Infantry Brigade.)

In reserve—

2nd South African Division (two brigades).—Major-General I. P. de Villiers.

The Plan.

30th Corps.

The main attack was to be delivered by the 30th Corps whose primary role was to seek out and destroy the enemy, at the same time ensuring that the left flank of the 13th Corps was protected against an attack in force by the enemy armoured formations. As a first step towards bringing the enemy to battle, the bulk

of our armoured forces were to move to a central position round Gabr Saleh whence they could strike north-west or north-east according to developments. Every effort was to be made by ground and air reconnaissance to discover the enemy's whereabouts and the extent to which it would be possible to prevent his southward movement by obtaining control of the few crossings of the coastal escarpment, to the north of which the enemy was believed to be lying.

The Army Commander reserved to himself the responsibility for deciding which direction the armoured forces should take, if the 30th Corps were not able to engage the enemy under favourable conditions on the first day. General Cunningham intended to stay close to the headquarters of that Corps until he had sufficient information to make a decision. In the event of a westward move, he foresaw that it might be necessary to leave some of the armour to protect the 13th Corps.

The more immediate plan was for the 7th Armoured Division to take up a central position astride the Trigh el Abd with the 4th Armoured Brigade on the right, the 7th in the centre, and the 22nd on the left. The armoured car regiments were to push well forward to watch the main crossings of the escarpment north of the Trigh Capuzzo. From this central position the Armoured Division might have to move right or left. If the other two brigades were ordered to move left towards Tobruk, the 4th Armoured Brigade was to remain in its battle position so as to be ready to protect the right flank of the Armoured Division, the communications of the 30th Corps and the left flank of the 13th Corps. On the left, should the Ariete Division withdraw, it was not to be pursued, if pursuit involved dispersing our armoured forces and allowing the German Panzer Divisions to concentrate in superior force against us.

The first task of the 1st South African Division was to protect the western and south-western flanks of the communications of the Armoured Division. Subsequently it might have to secure a defensive locality round Bir el Gubi on which the Armoured Division could pivot. The 22nd Guards Brigade was to protect the lines of communication, supply dumps, and landing grounds in the rear.

Tobruk.

The secondary role of the 30th Corps was to relieve Tobruk, but no operations were to be undertaken to this end until the main enemy armoured forces had either been defeated or prevented from interfering with the relief. General Norrie was to give the signal when he was satisfied that his own forces were or would be in a position to support the sortie from Tobruk. On receipt of this signal, the Tobruk Garrison was to come under command of the 30th Corps and to remain under its command until all enemy resistance in the neighbourhood had ceased.

The basis of the plan for relieving Tobruk was the capture of two ridges to the south-east of it. These two ridges, Ed Duda and Sidi Rezegh, 5,000 yards apart, between them commanded the two main lines of communication of the Axis forces. The Tobruk by-pass road climbs up from the coast, crosses a saddle, and then turns west along the southern slope of Ed Duda Ridge: in the valley between the two ridges runs the Trigh Capuzzo. Provided