

that the enemy armoured forces were defeated or heavily embroiled, our forces would have only infantry to compete with and mostly Italian infantry at that.

When the armoured battle was over, the 1st South African Division was to secure a position about Sidi Rezegh to cut the Trigh Capuzzo and the by-pass road and, by threatening the rear of the Axis forces investing Tobruk, to assist the garrison in their sortie. At the same time General Scobie was to strike southwards to Ed Duda with the 14th and 16th Infantry Brigades and the 32nd Army Tank Brigade. Two feint attacks were to be made in the western and southern sectors by the Polish Carpathian Brigade and the 23rd Infantry Brigade, and the main attack was to take place soon after dawn on the day after the signal was received from the 30th Corps.

After the relief of Tobruk the area was to be cleared of enemy as rapidly as possible. The 70th Division and the 32nd Army Tank Brigade were to work closely with the 1st South African Division in this task. The enemy was then to be pursued with the greatest energy. The size of the pursuing force would depend on the degree of success achieved in the armoured battle, and on the supply situation at the time. In no circumstances was it likely to be less than one armoured brigade and one lorry-borne South African Infantry Brigade. Should the enemy hold Mechili in such strength as to hinder the pursuit, a special force was to mask that place.

#### *13th Corps.*

The task of the 13th Corps was to pin down and cut off the enemy troops holding the frontier defences, and then to advance westwards to help the 30th Corps to clear the battlefield, leaving the enemy garrisons to be reduced at leisure.

The 11th Indian Infantry Brigade below the Sollum escarpment and the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade above it were to contain the enemy frontally, and to cover our base and railhead by holding a line running south from Buq Buq. Then, on the first day of the offensive, the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade were to secure a position astride the frontier to mask the enemy positions at Sidi Omar.

The 13th Corps were to make no further move until the enemy armoured forces had been properly engaged and orders received from the Army Commander. When the order was given, the New Zealand Division was to advance on a north and south axis to isolate the frontier defences. Such troops as could then be spared from this division were to move westwards, coming under the command of the 30th Corps for operations against Tobruk, if its relief should not have been accomplished already.

If the enemy were to withdraw from his forward positions, the 13th Corps was to make every effort to cut him off and, if this was unsuccessful, to pursue him vigorously.

After the relief of Tobruk, General Godwin-Austen was to be prepared to move a motorised infantry brigade group to Derna.

#### *Oases Force.*

The primary task of the Oases Force was to protect the air forces which were to harass the enemy in the coastal sector south of Bengasi and to cause confusion among advancing or retiring enemy columns. The Oases Force had

orders in the first place to protect a landing ground some eighty miles west of Giarabub which was just within striking distance of the coastal road, and in the second to move on to Gialo to protect our air forces and harass the enemy as circumstances permitted.

Brigadier Reid had been instructed to continue with the deception scheme already in train, so as to make the enemy believe that the force was much stronger than it was and induce him to divert or withdraw his armoured forces to meet this threat. The force therefore included a high proportion of guns and armoured cars and was relatively weak in infantry.

One armoured car company of the 7th South African Reconnaissance Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel P. H. Grobelaar) was to carry out a raid against a target east of Giarabub and south of the line Tobruk—Mechili, and cause the maximum destruction. The target was to be selected so as to produce the greatest possible disruption in the enemy's rear. After completing this operation, Lieutenant-Colonel Grobelaar's force was to operate under the orders of Brigadier Reid.

#### *Long Range Desert Group.*

The Long Range Desert Group (Lieutenant-Colonel G. L. Prendergast) was given the important role of observing enemy movement along the tracks across the desert south of the Gebel Akhdar to the main battle area and along the approaches to Gialo from the north. Without prejudice to its primary role, it was to give all possible assistance to Brigadier Reid and to maintain communication with the South African armoured cars.

As operations progressed, the Long Range Desert Group was to move westwards and perform a similar observation role in Tripolitania.

#### *Raids.*

Raids were to be carried out to cause confusion and alarm in the enemy's rear by the 11th Scottish Commando (Lieutenant-Colonel G. P. T. Keyes) and by "L" Section of the 1st Special Air Service Brigade.

#### *The Approach March.*

The concentration of the Eighth Army took place during the first two weeks of November. Only a bare minimum of troops had been allowed in the forward area in order to keep the daily maintenance needs as low as possible and to enable the maximum amount of reserves to be accumulated. The greater part of the Army had therefore to be brought up during this fortnight, and the movement of vehicles across the desert was almost continuous. Yet captured enemy intelligence papers revealed no knowledge of what was happening: This praiseworthy achievement was due both to the work of the Royal Air Force in preventing enemy aerial reconnaissance, and to the high degree of camouflage, deception and dispersion reached during the concentration.

By the evening of the 17th November all were in place, and during the night the 7th Indian Infantry Brigade took up its position masking Sidi Omar. Soon after dawn on the 18th, the armoured brigades, with an armoured car screen thrown out far in front, crossed the frontier wire fence near Maddalena, and by evening had reached their battle positions astride the Trigh el Abd, except the 22nd Armoured Brigade which had been delayed and halted ten miles south of its destination. The