

the morning following the second night march. I suggested that it would probably only be possible to stage an operation lasting four or five days, since that appeared to be the limit for which supply arrangements could be made.

4. Meanwhile, General Wilson and General O'Connor had also been considering plans for an offensive. After discussion with them, it was agreed that there were objections to an attack on the Sofafi group of camps owing to their comparative strength and to the greater distance from our starting base at which they lay. It was decided to make the attack against the enemy's centre, leaving his flanks, on the coast and at Sofafi, to be contained by small forces. I directed that detailed plans and preparations should be put in hand at once.

At this time Mr. Eden, the Secretary of State for War, visited Egypt and was made aware of the plans, to which he gave approval and promised his full support. It was largely this support which enabled us to obtain the air reinforcement on which the success of the plan greatly depended.

The provisional date originally selected was in the last week of November. It soon, however, became obvious that the preparations for the attack, especially the provision of additional transport and the re-equipment of the artillery with 25-pdrs., would not be completed in time. Further, the invasion of Greece by Italy at the end of October brought a demand for support from Greece, and instructions from the War Cabinet to send certain troops from the Middle East to occupy Crete and to assist Greece. It looked at one time as if this might cause the postponement or abandonment of the plan, since it very seriously weakened the air support available and also removed from the Western Desert some anti-aircraft guns, engineers, transport and other troops which it had been intended to employ in the operation. Owing to the intervention of the Secretary of State, reinforcements of aircraft were promised, and it was decided to stage the operation if the air situation made it at all possible. The date was postponed till about the end of the first week in December.

5. In order to maintain secrecy, as few persons as possible were made aware of the plan. Its details were worked out by Generals O'Connor, Creagh (commanding 7th Armoured Division), and Beresford-Peirse (commanding 4th Indian Division). General Wilson and myself visited the Western Desert at frequent intervals and discussed the progress of the plan and the additional troops required in the Western Desert. Practically nothing whatever was put on paper, and not more than a dozen senior commanders and staff officers knew of the plan until shortly before its execution.

6. On the 25th and 26th November a training exercise was held near Matruh, which was, in fact, a rehearsal of the proposed operation. Entrenched camps were marked out on the ground to represent the enemy camps to be attacked, though this was of course known only to the few who were aware of the forthcoming operation. To the troops it was represented as a training exercise in attack on enemy camps, and it was intimated that a further exercise would be held at a date early in December. As a result of this exercise it was possible to make several improvements in the plan of attack,

and General Wilson issued a paper laying down certain methods, which were used in the actual attack and proved to be sound.

7. Co-operation with the Royal Navy was arranged through a naval liaison officer attached to General O'Connor's headquarters, and the air plan was drawn up by Wing Commander Collishaw, commanding the Air Force in the Western Desert. Needless to say, both Royal Navy and Royal Air Force co-operated most whole-heartedly, both in the plans for attack and in maintaining complete secrecy.

### 3. *Enemy's Position and Strength.*

8. The Italian force East of the Egyptian frontier was believed to consist of 6 or 7 divisions (of which two or three were Libyan divisions, two were Blackshirt divisions and two Metropolitan divisions) and an armoured group. The total strength was believed to be about 80,000 (63,000 Italian, 17,000 Libyan), with 250 guns and 120 tanks.

9. These forces were distributed in a series of fortified camps, from the sea East of Sidi Barrani to the escarpment about Sofafi, a distance of about 50 miles, in echelon from the left flank. The camps were usually circular, with an anti-tank obstacle round them and defences consisting for the most part of stone sangars. There was a gap of over 20 miles between the enemy's right flank at Sofafi and the next camp at Nibeiwa. It was through this gap that General O'Connor intended to pass the attacking force. Arrangements were made during the planning stage to prevent the enemy establishing a camp to close this gap.

To the North of Nibeiwa lay the Tummar group of camps, occupied by the 2nd Libyan Division, and to the North-East of these lay the enemy's most advanced camp near the sea coast at Maktala, occupied by the 1st Libyan Division. There were further fortifications round Sidi Barrani, but there did not otherwise seem to be any organised second line of defence.

### 4. *Plan of Attack.*

10. The troops taking part in the attack were:—

7th Armoured Division	... General Creagh.
4th Indian Division	... General Beresford-Peirse
16th Infantry Brigade	... (Brigadier Lomax, attached to the 4th Indian Division.)
7th Battalion R.T.R.	... (Infantry tanks.)
Matruh Garrison Force	... (Brigadier Selby—a brigade group made up from the Matruh Garrison.)

Total force consisted of approximately 31,000 men, 120 guns, 275 tanks, of which more than half were light tanks, 50 were infantry tanks and remainder cruisers, and 60 armoured cars.

11. In view of the limited amount of transport available it was necessary to form dumps of ammunition, water and petrol in the desert between our lines at Matruh and those of the enemy. This was successfully accomplished, apparently without attracting the enemy's notice. Several days' supplies for the whole force were actually stored some 20 to 30 miles in advance of our fortified lines, covered only by our advanced patrols.