

armoured formations to battle and destroying them east of Tobruk.

(b) Tobruk garrison to sally out and assist main attack by threatening enemy rear and flank and distracting his attention.

(c) 13 Corps to hold ground east of Halfaya—Sidi Omar enemy position, ready:—

(i) to stop any enemy attempt to strike at our advanced base areas, and

(ii) to move forward at once on successful outcome of armoured battle, against rear of enemy in area Bardia—Sollum—Sidi Omar, and towards Tobruk.

(d) Light mobile forces, based on Maddalena and Giarabub to move west and north-west against enemy L. of C. and aerodromes, etc., in area Mechili-Gialo, but not before 30 Corps commences its advance on Tobruk.

(e) Full arrangements to be made to pursue enemy with improved mobile columns at once, if he tries to slip away towards Bengasi and El Agheila after an unsuccessful battle.

5.

Letter to Lieut.-General Sir Alan Cunningham, Commander, Eighth Army.

Advanced H.Q. Eighth Army, 24th November, 1941.

1. Having discussed the situation with you and learned from you the weak state to which 7 Armoured Division has been reduced by the past five days fighting, I fully realise that to continue our offensive may result in the immobilisation, temporarily at any rate, of all our Cruiser and American M3 tanks.

2. I realise also that should the enemy be left with a superiority of fast moving tanks as a result of our continued offensive, there is a risk that he may try to outflank our advanced formations in the Sidi Rezegh-Gambut area and cut them off from their bases in Egypt. I realise also that in this event there would remain only very weak forces to oppose an enemy advance into Egypt. On the other hand, it is clear to me that after the fighting of the last few days, it is most improbable that the enemy will be able to stage a major advance for some time to come.

3. There are only two courses open to us:—

(i) To break off the battle and stand on the defensive either on the line Gambut-Gabr Saleh or on the frontier. This is a possible solution, as it is unlikely that the enemy would be able to mount a strong offensive against us for many weeks; and it would enable us to retain much of the ground we have gained, including valuable forward landing grounds. On the other hand, it would be counted as an Axis triumph and would entail abandoning for an indefinite time the relief of Tobruk.

(ii) The second course is to continue to press our offensive with every means in our power.

There is no possible doubt that the second is the right and only course. The risks involved in it must be accepted.

4. You will therefore continue to attack the enemy relentlessly using all your resources even to the last tank. Your main immediate object will be, as always, to destroy the enemy tank

forces. Your ultimate object remains the conquest of Cyrenaica, and then an advance on Tripoli.

5. To achieve the objects set out in para. 4 it seems essential that you should:—

(i) Recapture the Sidi Rezegh-Ed Duda ridge at the earliest possible moment and join hands with Tobruk garrison. It is to my mind essential that the Tobruk garrison should co-operate to the utmost limit of their resources in this operation.

(ii) Direct the Oasis Force at the *earliest possible moment* against the coast road to stop all traffic on it and if possible capture Agedabia or Benina, neither of which is strongly held apparently.

(iii) Use the Long Range Desert Group patrols offensively to the limit of their endurance against every possible objective on the enemy lines of communication from Mechili to Bengasi, Agedabia and beyond to the west. All available armoured cars should be used with the utmost boldness to take part in this offensive. The advantages to be gained by a determined effort against the enemy lines of communication are worth immense risks, which will be taken.

C. J. Auchinleck, General,
C.-in-C., M.E.F.

6.

*G.H.Q., M.E.F. Operation Instruction
No. 110.*

Western Front.

19th January, 1942.

Lieut.-General W. G. Holmes,
Commander, British Troops in Egypt.
Lieut.-General N. M. R. Ritchie,
Commander, Eighth Army.

1. My present intention is to continue the offensive in Libya and the objective remains Tripoli.

2. In view, however, of the fluidity of the general strategic situation, we must face the prospect of being unable to continue the Libyan offensive, and of having to pass to the defensive on the Western Front.

3. If this should be forced upon us, it is my intention to stand on the line Agheila—Marada and prevent any enemy advance east of it. General instructions for the defence of this line will be issued separately.

4. If we should be unable to secure this line; or, having secured it, to hold it, I intend to withdraw north-eastwards and eastwards to the general line Sollum—Giarabub, on which the enemy will be stopped.

During this withdrawal every effort will be made to delay the enemy and thereby to retain the use of forward landing grounds as long as possible.

5. The main axis of withdrawal will be Agheila—Agedabia—Bir Ben Gania—Bir Hacheim—Sidi Omar.

The coast road Bengasi—Derna—Tobruk—Sollum may be used for the clearance of material and stores, but will not be used by fighting formations or units except those located north of the line exclusive Bengasi—Mechili.