

destroy the enemy forces, and particularly the German forces, in Cyrenaica and then to occupy Tripolitania.

2. The campaign in Cyrenaica has shown that generally the German tanks are superior to ours in mechanical reliability and in gun-power, while the modern Italian tank now coming into service is slightly inferior in performance and armament to our Cruiser tank, but is generally superior to the American light tank except in respect of speed.

After consulting those best qualified to give an opinion, I have concluded that we need at

least a fifty per cent. numerical superiority in tanks, if we are to have a reasonable chance of beating the enemy armoured forces on ground of his own choosing.

Our inferiority in tank equipment may improve as we are able to employ more American medium tanks, but this remains to be proved in battle.

3. The following is a forecast showing the extent to which the enemy might build up his tank force in Libya and of our own prospective tank resources in this Command.

*Cruiser or Equivalent Tanks.*

|                | <i>Enemy—with units.</i> |                 | <i>(Ours—with units.)</i> |                    |              | <i>Ours.<br/>Reserve.</i> |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
|                | <i>German.</i>           | <i>Italian.</i> | <i>Total.</i>             | <i>Excl. Iraq.</i> | <i>Iraq.</i> |                           |
| 1 February ... | 42                       | 185             | 227                       | 226                | 8            | —                         |
| 1 March ...    | 168                      | 276             | 444                       | 334                | 252*         | 193                       |
| 1 April ...    | 272                      | 276             | 548                       | 496                |              | 249                       |
| 1 May ...      | 272                      | 276             | 548                       | 570                |              | 285                       |
| 1 June ...     | 272                      | 276             | 548                       | 680                |              | 340                       |

\* *Date of arrival not known, and reserves for Iraq not included.*

Heavy or infantry tanks are not included in the table as they cannot take part in the main tank battle owing to their low speed and small circuit of action.

4. The table allows for our holding a 50 per cent. reserve of the total number of tanks with units. This may seem a large figure, but the initial stages of the Cyrenaican campaign amply proved that this is not so. Had we not been able to draw on large reserves to replace tanks lost or disabled in battle, we should not have been able to raise the siege of Tobruk. The enemy had a very small reserve of tanks at his disposal, but the greater reliability of his tanks and his better tank recovery equipment made up for this.

It would, however, be possible to take a risk and reduce the ratio of tanks in reserve to those with units to 25 per cent., particularly as the American tanks, with which we shall be equipped increasingly in future, are more reliable mechanically than British tanks, which have formed the major part of our equipment hitherto.

The 252 tanks shown as allotted to the Tenth Army in Iraq should not be counted upon, as they will be delivered at Basra and are needed to equip the Indian Armoured Division now forming in Iraq, though in an emergency it might be possible to draw on them to replace losses in the field.

5. Taking the worst case, which is that the enemy can and will reinforce his armoured forces to the extent shown in the table, and working to a 25 per cent. reserve of tanks for our own units, we may expect to be able to put in the field on 1st March 1942, from 450 to 500 tanks against a possible total of 400 enemy tanks. To give us a 50 per cent. numerical superiority, we should have 600 tanks.

On 1st April we ought to have about 620 tanks against the enemy's 550, still short of our needed margin of superiority.

On 1st May we might count on about 770 tanks compared with 550, which would just give us the superiority we need, but only at the expense of reducing our reserve of tanks still further from 25 per cent. to 11 per cent. Should the enemy bring over no more reinforcements of tanks or stop short at the 400

mark, which he is expected to reach on 1st March, then we should have our required superiority by 1st April, or even by the 1st March if he ceases at once to bring over any more tanks; but this is considered to be unlikely.

6. These calculations depend on concentrating all available tanks and armoured units on the Western Front, leaving none for the Northern Front, except those already allotted to Iraq whose date of arrival is uncertain. There is a risk; but one which can be taken, unless there is a rapid change in the situation on the Russian Front, as it now seems most unlikely that Germany will be able to mount an attack against Syria and Iraq through Anatolia, or against Persia through the Caucasus, before the beginning of August.

7. Provided, therefore, we are not forced by enemy action to fritter away our tank resources in detail in the meanwhile, we should plan now to resume the offensive possibly on 1st March or 1st April and certainly by 1st May, if we are prepared to take a risk on the number of tanks held in reserve.

8. So much for relative strengths. The other factor governing our ability to resume the offensive is maintenance.

When we resume the offensive the enemy may withdraw again to his defended area in south-west Cyrenaica round Agedabia and El Agheila in the hope that, by forcing us to fight at the end of a long and difficult line of communications, he will be able to discount our numerical superiority in tanks. A withdrawal on his part to this area does not necessarily imply that he will voluntarily abandon Bengasi.

9. We know from experience that unless we can make free use of Bengasi as a port of supply, we cannot maintain a force of more than about a hundred tanks and a few battalions of infantry with the necessary artillery in the Agedabia area.

Therefore our first action on resuming the offensive must be to take Bengasi.

It is not enough to take Bengasi; we must be able to maintain forward sufficient forces to hold it, while the necessary reserves of supplies are being built up for the further advance to the southward. This is likely to be the