

towards Tobruk and El Adem. There was a third possibility that he might try to break through the northern sector of our position with the object of opening the coast road at once and easing his supply problem, but it was thought most unlikely that he would adopt this course.

The Enemy Plan of Attack.

Documents captured by our troops at an early stage of the ensuing battle disclosed the complete enemy plan of attack.

The Afrika Korps and 90th Light Division Battle Group were to concentrate north of Segnali on the evening of 26th May. On the 27th May, after a night advance, the Ariete Armoured Division was to capture Bir Hacheim, while the Trieste Motorised Division was to make a gap in the minefield south of the Sidi Muftah strongpoint, where it was crossed by the Trigh el Abd. Simultaneously the Afrika Korps was to form up south of Bir Hacheim with 21st Panzer Division (less one battalion of tanks) on the left, 15th Panzer Division in the centre and the 90th Light Division Battle Group on the right. These formations were then to advance northwards and, after destroying our armoured forces, were to reach Acroma and El Adem before nightfall. Motorised columns were to seize Sidi Rezegh and Ed Duda. On 28th May, the three armoured divisions were to attack our positions between Gazala and Alem Hamza from the east, while four Italian infantry divisions, stiffened by two regiments of the 90th Light Division and one tank battalion of the 21st Panzer Division, were to attack the same positions from the west.

Tobruk was to be captured during the two subsequent days.

Our Dispositions to Meet Attack.

General Ritchie's final dispositions to meet the enemy's attack were as follows:—

13th Corps. Lieutenant-General W. H. E. Gott.

50th Division. Major-General W. H. C. Ramsden.

1st South African Division. Major-General D. H. Pienaar.

2nd South African Division. Major-General D. Klopper.

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

9th Indian Infantry Brigade. Brigadier B. C. Fletcher.

The 1st South African Division was holding the front from the coast west of the Gazala inlet to Alem Hamza, astride the Via Balbia and the approaches to Tobruk south of the coastal escarpment. The 151st and 69th Infantry Brigades of the 50th Division were prolonging the line eastwards from the Alem Hamza salient to the point where it again turned southwards. The 150th Infantry Brigade was holding the detached strongpoint of Sidi Muftah. The 1st Army Tank Brigade (heavy tanks) was divided between these two infantry divisions in a supporting task.

The 2nd South African Division occupied the western part of the Tobruk defences and small strongpoints below the escarpment towards Gazala. The 9th Indian Infantry Brigade held the eastern half of the Tobruk perimeter.

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

1st Armoured Division. Major-General H. Lumsden.

2nd Armoured Brigade. Brigadier R. Briggs.

22nd Armoured Brigade. Brigadier W. G. Carr.

201st Guards (Motor) Brigade. Brigadier J. C. O. Marriott.

7th Armoured Division. Major-General F. W. Messervy.

4th Armoured Brigade. Brigadier G. W. Richards.

7th Motor Brigade. Brigadier J. M. L. Renton.

3rd Indian Motor Brigade Group. Brigadier A. E. Filose.

29th Indian Infantry Brigade Group. Brigadier D. Reid.

1st Free French Brigade Group. Brigadier-General J. P. F. Koenig.

The Free French Brigade Group was holding the detached strongpoint at Bir Hacheim. The 3rd Indian Motor Brigade arrived just before the 26th May and was set to prepare a defensive locality a few miles east of Bir Hacheim. The 29th Indian Infantry Brigade of the 5th Indian Division had moved to a defensive area at Bir el Gubi a few days before the battle began. The 1st Armoured Division was disposed round Knightsbridge and the 7th Armoured Division lay to the south of it with the 7th Motor Brigade holding a defensive locality between the 3rd Indian Motor Brigade and Bir el Gubi.

Advanced headquarters of the Eighth Army with the headquarters of the Air Officer Commanding Western Desert, Air Vice Marshal Coningham, were near Gambut, guarded by the 10th Infantry Brigade of the 5th Indian Division (Major-General H. R. Briggs).

Two brigades of the 5th Indian Division, the 10th and 29th, had been occupying the frontier positions at the beginning of May, but General Ritchie did not like having to immobilise this division which formed his principal reserve of infantry. Therefore, as soon as I received information that an attack was imminent, I arranged for fresh infantry formations to join him. I gave orders for the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade from Cyprus and the 2nd Free French Brigade to take over on the frontier, so as to release the 10th and 29th Indian Infantry Brigades to go to Gambut and Bir el Gubi respectively. On the arrival of the 10th Indian Division (Major-General T. W. Rees), which I had already ordered to move from Iraq, the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade was to be withdrawn and the 2nd Free French Brigade freed for other employment. But very soon after the battle started, I placed these two brigades also at General Ritchie's entire disposal, so that he should be free to concentrate the 5th Indian Division. I also arranged to bring over from Syria the Guides Cavalry, who were equipped with carriers and armoured cars.

I was satisfied that the Eighth Army had enough infantry to deal with any situation likely to arise—more would probably have been an encumbrance. But I wished it could have had more field artillery as there was no reserve of guns at the disposal of the two Corps Commanders, or of General Ritchie himself, with