

5. I know that you have taken and are taking numerous measures to meet an eventuality such as I have described; but I must tell you that, speaking from an office chair at a great distance from the battlefield, I wonder whether you should not put your armoured reserve a good deal further to the north, where it can hit the enemy immediately he emerges from his break-through, and before he can establish a defensive flank, which all our experience teaches us he will certainly try to do. I suggest that both your armoured divisions complete should be positioned astride the Trigh Capuzzo. It does not look from the map as if this would be too far north to meet the main attack, should it come round the southern flank, instead of against the centre as I anticipate. Your covering troops should give you good warning of any main enveloping movement on your left, even if you do not hear of it before it starts.

As always, the difficulty will be to decide which is the real attack and which the feint.

6. I feel that your reaction to my suggestion that you should put your armour more behind the centre of your position will be that your southern flank will be left bare of any mobile troops to delay and harass the enemy, and also of any armoured units to give immediate support to the Free French. I propose to send you at once the 3rd Indian Motor Bde., which, though not absolutely fully equipped, is fit for battle. I suggest you might like to keep them on your southern flank, and that this will obviate any need to leave either of the motor brigades of the two armoured divisions in this area. I consider it to be of the highest importance that you should not break up the organisation of either of the armoured divisions. They have been trained to fight as divisions, I hope, and fight as divisions they should. Norrie must handle them as a Corps Commander, and thus be able to take advantage of the flexibility which the fact of having two formations gives him. Moreover, you will be getting the 1st Armoured Brigade before long, and it should join the 7 Armd. Div., I feel, thus making both divisions similar.

As regards armoured support for the French, I suggest that if you move your armoured divisions further north you might spare some infantry tanks for them. I am sending you up as soon as possible the 7th Royal Tanks, with one Valentine squadron of 4th Royal Tanks and two Matilda squadrons of its own, to increase your force of infantry tanks.

As to the rest of the infantry tanks, I suggest that, if possible, they should be placed so as to support the infantry in that part of the position which is likely to bear the brunt of the enemy attack. I admit that this may be uneconomical, as tending to immobilise them, but I feel that it is essential to give this infantry all possible support in order to encourage them to hang on. It is of the highest importance that they should hold on whatever happens. I will be glad if you will consider this also.

7. If you can stop the enemy short of Tobruk and then get at him in flank with your armour and in rear with infantry and guns, I feel you may have the chance of scoring a decisive success. I think, therefore, that you should at once lay minefields across the corridor between the two escarpments to the west of Acroma and cover these with guns. You will see from the sketch what I mean. I suggest also that you

should consider mining the coastal corridor in more depth, so as to stop any break-through by that route, which, though it might not be serious, would be a serious nuisance and divert effort from the main task of destroying *once and for all* the enemy's armour.

8. Finally, I suggest that you should fortify El Gubi and protect it with mines. I am sure you will feel much more comfortable when you have something there threatening any wide turning movement from the south against Tobruk or from the west against Sollum, unlikely as this may seem to be. I know you want to keep 5th Indian Division as compact and uncommitted as possible for use as in a mobile role, should opportunity offer, either under Gott or under yourself. I am absolutely certain that this is right. I am sending you, therefore, at once, the 11th Brigade of 4th Indian Division to replace 29th Infantry Brigade in Capuzzo, in case you still feel you need another brigade there as well as the 2nd Free French Brigade. If you don't, so much the better; as you might then relieve the 9th Infantry Brigade of the 5th Indian Division in Tobruk, and so increase your mobile reserve. You could then use a brigade of the 5th Indian Division for El Gubi, if you feel so inclined.

The 11th Infantry Brigade is not mobile, and I do not want it committed forward of Sollum unless it is absolutely necessary to do so. I am bringing the whole of 10th Indian Division from Iraq, and the leading brigade will be sent up to you as soon as it arrives in relief of 11th Infantry Brigade, which I shall then hope to get back here, as it is part of the garrison allotted to Cyprus.

9. I am also bringing from Syria the Guides Cavalry (armoured cars and wheeled carriers) which I will give you if you want them to replace a battle-worn unit, or for the pursuit which I hope to see you carrying out.

10. I suggest that you must reorganise your system of command for this battle. For a defensive battle I feel you must have your mobile reserve, that is your armoured force, freed from all static commitments and responsibilities. Your Army falls, as I see it, into two parts one whose task it is to hold the fort, which is the Gazala—Tobruk—El Gubi—Bir Hacheim quadrilateral, and the other whose task it is to hit the enemy wherever he may thrust and destroy him. I think Gott should be solely responsible for the first, and Norrie for the second. I would relieve the latter of all responsibility for Bir Hacheim at once.

11. I am sorry to have inflicted such a long letter on you, but as I said before, so much hangs on this battle that I feel nothing must be left undone by anyone to help to win it.

As you know I have absolute confidence in you and your troops, and I am sure that if the enemy attacks, you will deal him a blow from which he may find it difficult, if not impossible to recover. *This is the object.*

17

*Letter from the Commander-in-Chief, M.E.F., to the Commander, Eighth Army.*

Cairo, 3rd June, 1942.

1. You will have had my signal in answer to your telegram of 3rd June.

2. I am glad you think the situation is still favourable to us and that it is improving daily.