

9. The defence system Sollum—Capuzzo—Halfaya—Sidi Omar is well constructed and strong in anti-tank defence. Frontal attack should therefore be avoided initially. It should, however, not be difficult or costly to cut this area off from the rear and to sever the Bardia pipeline on which it depends for water. Any attack on the rear of these positions will have to be accompanied or supported by armoured formations in view of the presence of the enemy 21st Armoured Division in that area.

It will be necessary to reduce these defences in due course to open up the direct route, but once they are isolated this problem should be easier.

10. Lines of advance open to us:—

- (i) Along coast.
- (ii) Hamra—Sidi Suleiman.
- (iii) Bir Sheferzen.
- (iv) Fort Maddalena.
- (v) Giarabub.

(i) Any advance along the coast is under observation from the escarpment, and entails attacking enemy positions at their strongest points.

(ii) Was used before, was easily outflanked, and leaves the forces at Sidi Omar in a position to act either way, unless other forces are moving wider south.

(iii) Too close to Sidi Omar for any but a direct attack on Sidi Omar, etc.

(iv) Advance by Maddalena gives opportunity of enveloping enemy defences. This line is, however, within forty miles of Sidi Omar and, therefore, if used as a line of supply, as long as the enemy mobile forces remain in the forward area, Maddalena must be covered.

(v) 450 miles from Bengasi, 180 miles from west of Tobruk. It offers best opportunity for surprise, and L. of C. not so vulnerable to air.

II. Broad Plan.

(i) *Southern Force*—under command Armoured Corps, to advance from south of Maddalena.

- 7th Armoured Division.
- 1st S.A. Division.
- 22nd Guards Brigade.
- One extra anti-tank regt.
- One medium regt.

Object—

(a) To destroy enemy armoured formations in region Tobruk.

(b) To relieve Tobruk in conjunction with an attack by forces in Tobruk.

(ii) *Centre Force*—initially under command 13th Corps, to advance from Maddalena area.

- 4th (or 22nd) Armoured Brigade.
- One sqn. or more armoured cars.
- One field regt.
- One bty. anti-tank guns.

This force will operate between the northern and southern forces. Its object will be to find and draw off and, if in a position to do so, attack the enemy armoured formations (at present enemy 21st Armd. Div.) which may try to interfere with the operations of the northern force. If the enemy are met in superior armoured strength, the object of this brigade group would be to draw off the enemy armoured formations in the direction of the southern force, where a concentration of our armoured forces could be brought to bear on him.

(iii) *Northern Force*—13th Corps.

N.Z. Div.

4th Indian Div.

1st Army Tank Brigade.

One or two army field regts.

Two or three medium regts.

Objects—

(a) To isolate the enemy forward defences by an advance in rear of them from the south on a north and south axis, and to pin them from the east.

(b) to clear the enemy from the area between the forward defences and excl. Tobruk, thereafter joining hands with our forces at Tobruk.

(c) In due course to reduce any pockets of the enemy left in the forward area.

12. The above plan would be associated with the formation of a "phantom" force operating from Giarabub towards Bengasi.

Wireless deception to represent the presence at Giarabub of a force equivalent to the southern force shown above will be put in hand. A skeleton force consisting of one or two armoured car regts. supported by a small composite force will advance from that area, and bombers will also be flown down and operated from the southern route.

13. Opportunity will be taken for exploitation westwards at the earliest possible moment, i.e., as soon as Tobruk and the area east of it are secure, and supply arrangements allow. In the latter connection, it is estimated that a minimum of forty days' supply will be in Tobruk, which should allow of the advance westwards being continued as soon as Eastern Cyrenaica is secure.

A. Cunningham, Lieutenant-General,
Commanding Eighth Army.

3.

G.H.Q., M.E.F. Operation Instruction No. 103.

17th October, 1941.

Commander, Ninth Army.

Commander, British Troops in Egypt.

1. Our primary object at present is to clear the enemy out of Libya, and to establish ourselves up to the Tunisian frontier. This object must be achieved before we have to turn and resist an attack from the north, which may eventuate next April.

2. To enable this object to be attained in the time available, every possible step which can be taken, and every possible need which can be foreseen, must be taken and foreseen now.

3. General Cunningham must be given now all the forces and resources he needs, and he must retain these for so long as he requires them.

4. Should the attainment of our object be retarded, for reasons now unforeseeable, until such time as it becomes evident that we must turn and prepare to resist attack from the north, then we may have to stop short in our offensive in the west. In this event, General Cunningham will retain the minimum necessary to enable him to establish a defensive front in Cyrenaica or Eastern Tripolitania, and the maximum force which he can release will be withdrawn from his command to reinforce the Northern Front. This step will be necessary.