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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION NO. VII/118

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WAR DIARY OF PANZER ARMY

21 January - 6 February 1942

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TRANSLATED BY

AIR MINISTRY A.H.B.6

SEPTEMBER 1952

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G.334617/EFT/9/52/60

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21 January 1942

Situation

The preparations for attack were completed during the night without enemy interference. Deceptive measures were taken, such as the burning of petrol drums, the starting of fires in the town and harbour of Marsa el Brega, and the prohibition of all movement of wheeled traffic towards the front, in an attempt to give the enemy the impression that we were withdrawing. On the morning of 21 January an Army order in both languages, calling on the German and Italian soldiers to do their utmost in the decisive days to follow was given to the troops and posted in all streets etc. of the rear areas.

At 08.30 hrs. the armoured and motorised units attacked. The German-Italian army artillery, concentrated in the area west of Marsa el Brega, supported the attack by engaging enemy batteries and with long range harassing fire. Due to excellent sapper work, mine-fields were crossed without our suffering any losses.

Due to the difficult terrain, the attack by Africa Corps could only move forwards slowly. Thus the enemy was able to withdraw without suffering any losses of importance. In the evening 15th Panzer Division reached the area south-west of B. Bilal, 21st Panzer Division the area north-east of Bleidet et Tarant. The motorised corps proceeded with the Ariete armoured division north of the Via Balbia then turned at the Cantoniera<sup>1)</sup> 16 km south-east of Marsa el Brega towards the south-east. The division met weak enemy resistance and reached B. Bilal towards evening. The leading second line Trieste Motorised Division reached the area west of Melah en Nogra without making contact with the enemy. This point had already been reached at 14.00 hrs. by the Marcks battle group which had had to overcome slight enemy resistance. The 90th Africa Division covered the area east of Marsa el Brega towards the south-east.

X and XXI Corps had a peaceful day. The consolidation of the positions was continued.

In the morning the Luftwaffe attacked enemy HQ's in Agedabia, Solluch and Cirene. During the whole of the day the Luftwaffe supported effectively the advance of the motorised units.

The enemy air force was hardly ever seen.

Air reconnaissance had by evening failed to discover any sign of enemy retreating movement in the area Rta. el Gtafia - Mn.el Mensci and northwards.

Appreciation

According to statements made by P.Ws, the enemy was completely surprised by our attack. Nevertheless, by means of evasive and escape actions on the line Mn.el Mensci - Rta.el Gtafia, he succeeded in saving the main bulk of 1st and 200th Guards Brigades from annihilation. Although air reconnaissance observed no enemy retreating movement eastwards, enemy withdrawals under cover of night had to be reckoned with. It therefore became a question of cutting off his retreat if possible and of keeping him off the Via Balbia and away from his supply points. H.Q. armoured group therefore ordered further advances to be made on 22 January on Agedabia.

Orders and reports see appendices 557 - 571.

/Appendix 557

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1) Cantoniera is house and stores of highway foreman - common to Italy and her Colonies.

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Appendix 557

From: Panzer Group

21 January 1942

Commander

Army Order of the Day

German and Italian soldiers!

You have battles against far superior enemy forces behind you. Yet your fighting spirit has not been broken.

Now we are numerically stronger than the enemy forces facing us on this front. Today the Army goes into action to annihilate this opponent.

I expect every soldier to do his utmost in these decisive days.

Long live Italy! Long live the Great German Reich! Long live our Fuehrer!

The Commander

signed: Rommel

General Armoured Troops

Appendix 558

From: Panzer Group Africa

21 January 1942

Commander

To: All German and Italian Troops

09.30 hrs.

The Fuehrer has invested me with the Oak Leaves with Swords to the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross in recognition of the defensive victory gained, up to the present against superior enemy forces, by the heroic fight of the German - Italian troops. I am proud of this award in which we all share. Let it, henceforth, spur us on to inflict final defeat upon the enemy.

signed: Rommel

Appendix 559

From: Marcks Battle Group

21 January 1942

To: Panzer Group Africa Ia

12.30 hrs.

Reached east bank of salt lake south of Mn. Tabilba at 12.00 hrs.

Appendix 560

From: Africa Corps

21 January 1942

To: Panzer Group Africa Ia

13.20 hrs.

Ariete reports 12.00 hrs. area around 151 left 3 partly occupied, free of enemy. In further advance to 151,5 left 2 slight enemy artillery fire silenced by assault guns.

/Appendix 561

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Appendix 561

From: Africa Corps 21 January 1942  
To: Panzer Group Africa Ia 13.25 hrs.

Enemy stronger south-east Bir es Suera and at Bleidet et Taraut. In order to encircle have turned 15th Panzer Division to 150, 21st Panzer Division to 147,5 left 2,2. Terrain very difficult for wheeled vehicles.

Appendix 562

From: Motorised Corps 21 January 1942  
To: Panzer Group Africa Ia 15.25 hrs.

Trieste 15.00 hrs. arrived on Via Balbia. Intend next establishing strong point at 20 km. north-east of Marsa el Brega.

Appendix 563

From: Africa Corps 21 January 1942  
To: Panzer Group Africa Ia 19.00 hrs.

Due to extremely difficult going on bad terrain we have fought mainly against arillery and by 18.00 hrs. have reached: 8th Panzer Regiment south-west of Bir Bilal. Further thrust westwards postponed on account of fuel shortage. 15th Infantry Brigade Area 150. 2nd Machine Gun Battalion area 148,5 left 2. Of 21st Panzer Division one battle group at 147 left 2,5, one battle group at 145 left 7,5. No reports of enemy tanks. Supplies for night ordered urgent, in view of doubtful terrain. Detachment sent north of Bettafal to secure large numbers of arms and transport. Report on result later.

Appendix 564

From: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group 19.15 hrs.

Our Luftwaffe will attack Agedabia from tonight until early tomorrow morning. Do not therefore occupy Agedabia tonight.

Appendix 565

From: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21 January 1942  
To: X and XXI Army Corps 20.18 hrs.

Tomorrow mass armoured troop offensive against Agedabia. X and XXI Corps will remain tomorrow in their present positions. Motor transport of Bologna and Sabratha to be prepared immediately in conjunction with Italian Q.M.G. Must be possible by early morning of 23 January.

/Appendix 566

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Appendix 566

From: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21 January 1942  
To: 90th Light Division 20.20 hrs.

Massed motorised units attack Agedabia tomorrow. 90th Light Division to clean up area B.el Ginn. Report minimum transport requirements of battle groups Burckhardt and group Daumiller. 90th Light Division's other tasks unaltered.

Appendix 567

From: Africa Corps 21 January 1942  
To: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21.30 hrs.

Progress report: 20 prisoners, about 15 guns, partly destroyed, 3 gun tractors, 2 tanks, 10 armoured recce cars destroyed, many vehicles partly destroyed. Detailed report to follow after return of special detachment.

Appendix 568

From: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group 22.10 hrs.

Full recognition of your achievement today. Hedgehogs to the north-east and south-east between 163 left 4,5 and 160 left 4,5. South-west joining up to 152 left 5,5 is covered by motor corps. Block track 163,5 left 3,5. Mines!

33rd Reconnaissance Unit no longer under command. Is reconnoitring area Agedabia and west of Agedabia thrusting northwards.

Appendix 569

From: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21 January 1942  
To: Motorised Corps 22.15 hrs.

Full recognition of your achievement today. Occupy area each side of Via Balbia and cover south eastwards between 152 left 5,5, and 160 left 4, 5. Keep roads clear for heavy artillery and later for Africa Corps. From 09.00 hrs. tomorrow ready to move at one hour's notice. Between 160 left 4,5 and 163 left 4,5 covered by Marcks.

Appendix 570

From: Panzer Group Africa Ia 21 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps 22.30 hrs.

Africa Corps to advance along the Via Balbia as quickly as possible, firstly on to Agedabia, in order to cut the enemy off from his rear communications. Report when and where Via Balbia will be reached. Greatest haste ordered. Motorised corps covering area 160 left 4,5 to 152 left 5,5. Will follow later. Own long range fire on Rta.el Gtafia.

Appendix 571

Daily report for 21 January 1942

1. The enemy fled before the concentrated attack and yielded along the line

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Mn.el Mensci - Rta.el Gtafia. He was thus able to save the bulk of his forces from encirclement, in spite of the element of surprise. Up to this evening air reconnaissance had still not observed any sign of movement towards the rear by enemy forces in the area el Haseiat - Agedabia - Mn.Mensci. Nevertheless moves by the enemy in a north-easterly direction are to be expected during the night.

2. German and Italian motorised and armoured units, advancing in convoy formation, reached a general line Mn.El Gefera - B.Bilal - Melah en Nogra by the evening of 21 January. On 21 January the Luftwaffe attacked British higher H.Q.s. and also carried out a series of attacks in waves against enemy concentrations in the Wadi el Faregh with some success.

3. Plans for 22 January 1942

Continuation of the advance of the armoured and motorised units to the north-east in order to separate the enemy from his troops fleeing to the rear through Agedabia.

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22 January 1942

Situation

The Marcks Battle Group started along the Via Balbia in the direction of Agedabia at 5.00 hrs. Its advance was slowed up by heavy artillery fire coming from the south. At 11.00 hrs. after overcoming slight enemy resistance, the battle group took Agedabia and then thrust on towards Antelat which was taken at 17.00 hrs. In the course of the continued advance towards Saunna there were several encounters with enemy forces coming from the south-west in the direction of Msus and attempting to break through. After a hard battle, Saunnu was taken in the late evening. The motorised corps which was following up behind the Marcks battlegroup was brought forward via Agedabia to occupy both sides of the Agedabia - Antelat track north-east of Agedabia and to cover the area to the north-east and south-east.

Due to the difficult terrain, Africa Corps did not reach the Via Balbia south-west of Melah en Nogra until 13.00 hrs. The Commander ordered the commanding General to throw the forward part of the corps against Antelat with all possible haste and to bring the bulk of the corps into the area west and south-west of Antelat in order to prevent the enemy escaping.

33rd Reconnaissance Unit carried out reconnaissance in the area to the north of Agedabia. 90th Light Division cleared stragglers from the B.el Ginn area.

The Luftwaffe attacked in waves throughout the day. These attacks were made against retreating enemy columns in the south-east of Agedabia and met with great success.

Again on 22 January the enemy avoided action and sought to withdraw as quickly as possible in the general direction of Msus. According to interception reports it was his intention to bring 4th Indian Division into the area Saunnu - Ghemines for the defence of Benghazi.

X and XXI Army Corps were instructed to prepare to move their divisions into the Agedabia area. It was intended at first to take one division from each corps. Engineer troops had cleared mines from the Via Balbia and the track Agedabia - Antelat - Saunnu by the evening of 21 January, so that it was to maintain full supply traffic along the Via Balbia.

According to reports so far received, the following were either captured

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or destroyed on 21 January: 26 tanks and armoured vehicles, 47 guns and over 100 motor vehicles.

On orders from O.K.H., the Panzer Group Africa was renamed Panzer Army Africa. Operational H.Q. of Panzer Army Africa H.Q. was moved to Agedabia.

Appreciation

Part of the enemy forces had escaped across the line Saunnu - Antelat and west thereof towards the north. However, enemy forces in strength were still to be found in the area east and south-east of Agedabia. It was therefore a question of overtaking these forces and of cutting off their road to the north-east.

For this purpose the Marcks battle group was moved from Saunnu to Mn.el Grara to face the enemy in this sector; at the same time Africa Corps lying to the west of Saunnu - Antelat, was to prepare to attack in the direction of Giof el Matar. But it was to be expected that the enemy would attempt to relieve his troops from the Benghazi area and from the east. Therefore, the remaining motorised corps and Africa Corps, remaining in the area north-east of Agedabia had to be prepared to face the necessity of a possible advance in the direction of el Abiar - Benghazi.

Orders and reports see attachments 572 to 579

Appendix 572

From: Africa Corps 22 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 02.25 hrs.

Night march impossible on account of dunes. Divisions to reach Via Balbia by dawn, by way of Bilal, at 154 left 4,5. All possible speed ordered. Exact time of arrival on Balbia cannot be definitely stated on account of supply problem.

Appendix 573

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22 January 1942  
To: XXI Army Corps 07.35 hrs.

Proposed employment of XXI Army Corps.

Take up defensive position with units at Agedabia, main concentration in line Antelat - Beda Fomm.

For this purpose:

- (a) Sabratha Division to be ready to move off as from midday 22 January to area south of Marsa el Brega.
- (b) Half of Pavia Division (rear support troops) to be brought on foot immediately to Via Balbia in area north of Si.Hmuda.
- (c) Trento Division to clear lanes through mine-fields in order to proceed via B.el Ginn to the Via Balbia. Otherwise no further mines to be lifted. Area forward of F.D.L's to be cleared.

Appendix 574

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22 January 1942  
To: X Army Corps 07.40 hrs.

/X Army

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X Army Corps to prepare for immediate take-over of Burckhardt sector and to hold with weak covering parties.

Appendix 575

From: Africa Corps 22 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 10.45 hrs.

Move will be speeded up to maximum depending however on extreme terrain difficulties.

Appendix 576

From: Marcks Battle Group 22 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 11.30 hrs.

11.30 hrs. reached Agedabia.

Appendix 577

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22 January 1942  
To: XXI Army Corps, X Army Corps, 20.50 hrs.  
Motorised Corps, Africa Corps,  
Burckhardt Special Formation, Marcks Battle Group,  
90th Light Division, Reinforced 33 Reconnaissance Unit,  
Hecht Flak Group, Artillery C.O.104, A.Q.M.G.

Via Balbia as far as Agedabia and tracks Antelat and Saunnu free of mines.

Town of Agedabia, 5 km. radius and both sides of Via Balbia up to 12,5 km. west of Agedabia not yet cleared of mines. Warn troops.

Appendix 578

From: Marcks Group 22 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.30 hrs.

In the course of isolated engagements near Antelat and Saunnu, about 60 prisoners were taken and several motor vehicles captured. 2 armoured cars destroyed. Near Antelat at 18.00 columns linking up with north including 22 Panzer Brigade. Group hedge-hogged in Saunnu.

Appendix 579

Daily report for 22 January 1942

1. Enemy did not show fight on 22 January and fled in the general direction of Msus - Solluch. According to intercepted messages he intends to bring 4th Indian Division to the south for the defence of Benghazi.

2. Pursuit of the enemy was continued on 22 January. At 10.00 hrs. Agedabia was taken after a short battle and around 13.00 hrs. Antelat and Saunnu were taken. Luftwaffe attacking in waves conducted successful operations against retreating enemy columns in the area south-west of Agedabia.

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3. Plans for 23 January:

Continued pursuit with units from Saunnu area direction Mn.el Grara. At the same time bulk of armoured and motorised units hold themselves in readiness in the area north-east of Agedabia so to be available either to join the pursuit to the south-east or to advance in the general direction of el Abiar - Benghazi according to the demands of the situation. Commencement of the withdrawal of the Italian Infantry division in the Agedabia area.

4. According to reports so far received, the following were either destroyed or captured on 21 January: 26 tanks and armoured cars, 47 guns, and over 100 motor vehicles.

5. Operational department of Panzer Army at Agedabia.

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23 January 1942

Situation

Marcks Battle Group started out at 05.00 hrs. for Mn.el Grara. It met repeatedly with enemy detachments protected by tanks; these were either routed or pushed back southwestwards. Mn.el Grara was reached at 11.00 hrs. Further enemy detachments were routed, and many prisoners and a great deal of equipment were taken. Reinforced II/Motorised Infantry Regiment 155 was brought into the area of Giof Megraf in order to prevent the enemy escaping between Mn.el Grara and Saunnu. After Marcks Group had moved off, Africa Corps was ordered to put units into Saunnu in order to prevent an enemy breakthrough to the east. Due to an oversight, this order was not passed on to 21st Panzer Division (the formation concerned). It was afternoon by the time C.in C. became personally aware of this oversight and by that time strong enemy units had escaped over Saunnu towards the north-east.

The motorised Corps, which was placed between Agedabia and the west flank of Africa Corps, prevented several enemy attempt to break through to the north.

3rd Reconnaissance Unit operating in the direction of Msus was compelled to withdraw in face of superior enemy forces. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit was taken from the area north of Agedabia and put in to recce el Haseiat. Two batteries of artillery were placed under command to attack retreating enemy columns.

Relieved by X Army Corps, the XI Fliegerkorps Demonstration Paratroop Unit (Burckhardt Battle Group) was moved up by supply columns to Agedabia. Sabratha Division were also moved up in lorries as army reserve and on arrival in the battle area placed under command of motorised corps. Units covered area to north of Agedabia.

90th Light Division had no contact with the enemy.

In order to continue this pursuit to the north-east, it was necessary that infantry divisions should be brought in to secure the rear areas. Their removal from the Marsa el Brega position had already begun. This operation had to be broken off since, on 23 January, General Cavallero, Chief of Comando Supremo, presented to Army H.Q. an order from the Duce. According to this order it was not permitted to move Italian Infantry Divisions, except the Sabratha Division, from the Marada - Marsa el Brega position. In the meantime General Bastico, Supreme Axis Commander in North Africa, had already ordered the cancellation of all orders and the suspension of all measures taken in connection with this operation, without the knowledge of Army H.Q.

The rapid clearing of mines on Agedabia airfield made it possible for the field to be used as an advance airfield on the afternoon of 23 January. Thus

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the prospects of establishing the Luftwaffe there by 24 January were good.

The enemy were only partly successful in escaping towards the north-east and strong units of 1st Infantry Brigade, 200 Guards Brigade and 2nd Armoured Brigade were still to be found in the area Saunnu - east of Agedabia. Reconnaissance units of 4th Indian Division were identified west of Beda Fomm and small numbers of 200th Guards Brigade were located south-east of Beda Fomm.

Appreciation

On 24 January it would be necessary to destroy the enemy forces in the area Saunnu - east of Agedabia - Mn.el Grara by a concentric attack of the Marcks Battle Group, Africa Corps, the Motorised Corps and the reinforced 33rd Reconnaissance Unit. Reconnaissance would have to cover the north and north-east as there existed the possibility of an enemy diversionary counter-attack.

Orders and reports see appendices 580 to 610.

Appendix 580

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: Marcks Group 00.05 hrs.

Marcks arrive 23 January 05.00 hrs. on Mn.el Grara. Confirm immediately by wireless. Detailed instructions follow.

Appendix 581

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps 01.10 hrs.

- 1) Part of enemy forces probably still in area el Haseiat - Giof el Matar. According to intercepted messages, advance of 4th Indian Division from Benghazi area southwards possible.
- 2) Panzer Army prevents enemy escape to north or north-east from area el Haseiat - Giof el Matar and is, in addition, ready to advance in general direction Benghazi and eastwards.
- 3) At 05.00 hrs. 23 January Marcks Battle Group coming from Saunnu reaching Mn.el Grara and faces enemy retreating from south-west to prevent their escaping to north and north-east.
- 4) Africa Corps await special orders in area Bu Garba - Gsr. Auami - Antelat and are ready to move at 1 hour's notice to go into action in the area Giof el Matar as well as to the north in the general direction of Abiar. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit will reconnoitre area Msus and beyond towards Sceleidima in force.
- 5) Motorised Corps will remain for the present in the Agedabia - Bu.Garba (excluded) area and be ready to advance towards Benghazi should the necessity arise.
- 6) 33rd Reconnaissance Unit reconnoitre area Soluch - Ghemines.
- 7) Army Battle H.Q. 5 km. south-west of Agedabia.

Appendix 582

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: Motorised Corps 01.10 hrs.

Paras. 1 & 2 as appendices.

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- 3) By remaining in its present area Agedabia - Bu Garbaa (excluded), Motorised Corps hinders any possible attempt by the enemy to escape north and north-east. The corps holds itself in readiness to move at one hour's notice under special orders towards Soluch - Ghemines in order to counter possible enemy advance from Benghazi towards the south.
- 4) Africa Corps is in the area Bu Garbaa (excluded) - Gsr. Auami - Antelat and ready to go into action either in the direction of Giof el Matar or in the direction of el Abiar.
- 5) At 05.00 hrs. Marcks Battle Group coming from Saunnu reaches Mn. el Grara and faces enemy retreating from south-west to prevent their escaping north and north-east.
- 6) On night 22/23 January Sabratha Division occupies area between 13 km. and 25 km. south-west of Agedabia.
- 7) 33rd Reconnaissance Unit - under immediate command Panzer Army - reconnaissance area Soluch - Ghemines.

Appendix 583

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group 01.10 hrs.

- 1) Some enemy forces apparently still in area Haseiat - Giof el Matar.
- 2) At 05.00 hrs. on 23 January Marcks Battle Group coming from Saunnu reaches Mn. el Grara and faces enemy retreating from south-west to prevent their escape north and north-east. Request treat as extremely urgent.
- 3) Africa Corps in area Bu Garbaa - Saunnu (excluded) - Antelat ready to attack in Giof el Matar if expedient.

Appendix 584

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: X and XXI Corps 01.10 hrs.

- 1) Enemy in full retreat.
- 2) Army motorised formations in area Agedabia - Saunnu - Antelat in order to attack north or south according to the demands of the situation.
- 3) X and XXI corps prepare to bring their divisions up into area south of Benghazi. Report as from when and to what extent move possible with own means.

Appendix 585

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: 90th Light Division 01.10 hrs.

- 1) Enemy in full retreat.
- 2) Motorised formations in area Agedabia - Saunnu - Antelat ready to attack either to the south-west or north according to the demands of the situation.
- 3) Sabratha Division covering Via Balbia south-west of Agedabia.

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4) 90th Light Division to give order of battle and situation report for Marada.

5) Army battle H.Q. 5 km. south-west of Agedabia.

Appendix 586

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942

To: Sabratha Division 02.30 hrs.

Sabratha Division to retain transport allocated to it until further orders and is motorised Army reserve. Division must be ready to move within one hour from 10.00 hrs. on 23 January.

Liaison officer with plan of present breakdown and deployment of division to Army Battle H.Q. 5 km. south-west of Agedabia.

Appendix 587

From: Marcks Battle Group 23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 04.45 hrs.

Night quiet, arriving 09.30 hrs.

Signed: Marcks

Appendix 588

From: 90th Light Division 23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 06.30 hrs.

Night passed quietly and uneventfully.

Appendix 589

From: Marcks Battle Group 23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 07.00 hrs.

Marcks battle group in action against strong enemy columns 10 km. south of Saunnu.

Appendix 590

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942

To: Africa Corps 07.15 hrs.

Africa Corps to occupy Saunnu immediately, most urgent.

Appendix 591

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942

To: Africa Corps 08.22 hrs.

At 07.00 hrs. 10 km south of Saunnu Marcks in action against strong enemy forces. Africa Corps to intervene immediately.

/Appendix 592

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Appendix 592

From: Marcks Battle Group 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 08.35 hrs.  
07.30 hrs. Enemy columns routed. 15 tanks captured. Advance continues.

Appendix 593

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: X and XXI Army Corps 08.45 hrs.

X Army Corps with Bologna and Corps troops, XXI Army Corps with all troops, move off to Agedabia. 30 km. per day to be covered by foot troops. Announcement to be made when division has arrived. Rests and night halts to be taken along each side of the route. Congestion to be avoided at all costs. Beware of mined strips each side of Via Balbia which are fenced off. Foot troops to march in columns on the left or right verge of road so that centre of road remains free. Minefields to be fenced before march off. Mines will be lifted later. Brescia remains in present position until further notice. Liaison officer to report to Army.

Appendix 594

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps 10.20 hrs.

Motorised Corps reports between 175 left 6,2 and Saunnu not occupied. Enemy breakthrough to the north to be feared. Corps request information on situation in Africa Corps sector. Please meet this request. Any attempts to break through towards the north in right hand portion of corps sector to be stopped at all costs.

Appendix 595

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23 January 1942  
To: Motorised Corps 10.21 hrs.

Africa Corps instructed to give motorised corps situation report.

Appendix 596

From: Motorised Corps 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 12.00 hrs.

Armour of Ariete Division reached left flank Trieste. Trieste report put down stonk on approximately 100 enemy motor vehicles with armoured cars at 10.00 hrs. 6 to 7 km. south of Chor el Bidan. Enemy artillery (1 or 2 batteries strong) silenced. Several prisoners claim to belong to 4th Infantry Brigade. Between 11.00 and 12.00 hrs. enemy harassing fire on Agedabia by S.P. guns (1 battery strong). Fire direction by three armoured reconnaissance cars 8 to 10 km. south-east of Agedabia.

/Appendix 597

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Appendix 597

From: 90th Light Division 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 13.40 hrs.  
Situation Marada unchanged. No contact with enemy.

Appendix 598

From: Marcks Battle Group 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa 13.35 hrs.  
C. in C.

Area each side of Giof Megraf closed by a reinforced battalion.

Appendix 599

From: Motorised Corps 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 14.05 hrs.

Around 13.00 hrs. Sabratha Division with one battalion occupied position north of Agedabia. A further battalion en route. At 14.30 hrs. Battle H.Q. to 167 left 5.

Appendix 600

From: Motorised Corps 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 15.40 hrs.

Ariete with exception 1 battalion relieved at Agedabia and has reached area 172 left 5 as ordered.

Appendix 601

From: Marcks Battle Group 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa 16.40 hrs.

C. in C.

At 172,5 right 9 considerable armoured recce car activity in front of holding force. Position under fire from enemy battery from south-west.

Appendix 602

From: Africa Corps 23 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 17.15 hrs.

At 1600hrs. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit turn towards Antelat to avoid enemy group of 150 vehicles and 35 tanks at 181 left 7. After defending itself enemy group turned eastwards.

/Appendix 603

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Appendix 603

From: 90th Light Division

23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

19.00 hrs.

Situation unaltered. No contact with enemy. Same for Marada. Remaining formations 90th Light Division regrouping. The H.Q. and 1 rifle company of the von Burckhardt Group moving to Agheila evening 23 January. Transport will be arranged. Units required for 25 January will arrive there evening 24 January. Arrival of special equipment by 24 January doubtful.

Appendix 604

From: XXI Army Corps

23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

20.00 hrs.

All steps taken so far towards the move forwards of the Italian XXI Army Corps including the change of location of Corps H.Q. are blocked. General Commanding XXI Italian Army Corps has ordered me to report as follows: Divisions remain in their present positions on orders of the Comando Superiore.

Appendix 605

From: Motorised Corps

23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

20.00 hrs.

According to report from O.C. Ariete, contact with 155 Infantry Regiment established at 175 left 6,2. From there to about Saunnu no sign of enemy occupation. Strong enemy forces in area 175 left 2,8. I fear enemy breakthrough to north and request urgently information on deployment of divisions and situation of Africa Corps. Further request one section flak machine guns be attached.

(Signed) ZINGALES

Appendix 606

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

23 January 1942

To: 90th Light Division

21.00 hrs.

1. Army with motorised formations will destroy enemy locked in area Saunnu - south of Antelat - east of Agedabia - Giof el Matar on 24 January.
2. X and XXI Army Corps remain for time being in present positions.
3. Tasks of 90th Light Division with regard to area Agheila, defile at el Mugtaa - Marada remain the same. Burckhardt forming at Agheila. 90th Division's troop for salvaging enemy material will be directed by Army.

Appendix 607

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

23 January 1942

To: X and XXI Army Corps

21.02 hrs.

90th Light Division

/Movements

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Movements in the direction of Agedabia with exception Sabratha to be cancelled for time being. Present divisional positions to be reported by wireless. Further orders follow.

Appendix 608

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

23 January 1942

To: Africa Corps - Motorised Corps

Marcks Battle Group - 33rd Reconnaissance Unit

1. On 24 January Army will destroy enemy in area Saunnu - 25 km. south-west of Antelat - east of Agedabia - Mn. el Grara.

2. In order to surround the enemy in area 169 right 2,5 - 171 right 5 - 174 right 8 - 177 right 5 the attack will be carried out as follows:

(a) 33rd Reconnaissance Unit with one heavy battery from 104th Artillery at 07.00 hrs. from 165, 5 firstly to 171 right 3. Then after arrival of motorised corps to push on from there to 171,5 right 6,5.

(b) At 9.00 hrs. motorised corps with right flank of Trieste from 167 left 5 to 171 right 3, with left flank Ariete from 176 left 5 to 174,5 right 2. Sabratha covers area north of Agedabia against enemy from north.

(c) Africa Corps at 07.00 hrs. with left flank from Saunnu to Mn. el Grara. Bulk at 9.00 hrs. with right flank from 176, left 5 to 176 right 2. Units to hold Antelat and Saunnu. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit to leave reconnaissance of Msus and close gap between motorised corps and Africa Corps from day-break in the area of Bu Garbaa and eastwards.

(d) Marcks group and left flank of Africa Corps move to Chescem el Chebsc and then turn off in the direction of Gfiof el Matar.

3. Luftwaffe to attack in area defined in para.2 between 09.00 hrs. and 09.30 hrs.

4. Recogniton signals between own troops: Green flare. For aircraft: Smoke signal and national flag on radiator.

Appendix 609

From: Comando Supremo

23 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa

Strategy in Tripolitania is dependent on the situation in the Mediterranean. It is to be expected that as a result of the shortage of fuel, convoy traffic will be slowed or even interrupted from the middle of February. It is to be expected that the effectiveness of the intensified war against Malta will ease the movement, already in progress, of single ship along the western sea lane. In view of this it will be possible, with difficulty, to assure the normal supplies for the colony by this means; it will be impossible to bring over fresh troops or equipment.

The following possibilities must also be taken into consideration:

(a) Landing operations by British or de Gaulle troops on the Lybian coast and in Tunisia.

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(b) Advance of the enemy forces through the Lybian Sahara.

Therefore, in order to overcome this transport crisis, it is at least necessary to hold the forces on the east front together in order to rest the troops completely and not tax their strength as it may not be possible to rest them later. It is necessary, with the manpower and material available, to go through this period of crisis with the maximum of economy.

With the above in mind the Duce has ordered that until further notice:

- (1) Our defensive position to the east is the line Marsa el Brega - Marada; Marada is to be strengthened.
- (2) The general situation in the Mediterranean does not permit us to move our positions forward at the present time.
- (3) The defensive position mentioned in para.1 is to be held by infantry units. The motorised formations will carry out mobile warfare as set out in para.4.
- (4) In order to give our defensive tactics the appearance of intensive activity and in order to harass any enemy preparations for attack, the mobile forces may, if and when the necessity arises, carry out offensive operations against the enemy within restricted limits and when the enemy is within favourable distance. In these operations full air co-operation is essential.
- (5) The infantry must not be brought out of their defensive positions but must be given a complete rest.

The Duce reserves the right to amend these directions should a change in the general situation warrant such amendment.

By Order of the Duce  
Chief of Army General Staff  
Signed: Ugo Cavallero

Appendix 610

Report for 23 January 1942

1) On 23 January the retreat of enemy forces (units of 2nd Armoured Brigade, 1st Infantry Brigade and 200th Guards Brigade) to the north and north-east was prevented by the German - Italian armoured and motorised units, holding a line Agedabia - south of Antelat - Saunnu - Mn. el Grara. Attempts by the enemy to break through were repulsed with considerable losses to the enemy forces. In these attempts large number of enemy tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles were destroyed; numerous motor vehicles were captured. Details not yet known. Furthermore army units shot down or destroyed on the ground 11 aircraft.

2) Plans for 24 January 1942

Concentric attack by armoured and motorised formations to destroy enemy forces in area and south-east of Agedabia, whilst giving appropriate cover to the north.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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/24 January 1942

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24 January 1942

Situation

At 07.00 hrs. the Africa Corps and reinforced 33rd Reconnaissance Unit, and at 09.00 hrs. the motorised corps, launched a concentric attack against enemy forces still to be found in the area around Giof el Matar. The enemy suffered severe losses in the course of this operation, particularly during repeated attempts to break through in the direction of Saunnu and the south. The following were destroyed or captured:

117 tanks and armoured vehicles, 33 guns and a large number of soft vehicles; in addition about 1000 prisoners were taken.

Due to the size of the area, some enemy forces did succeed in breaking through into the area Msus and north-east of Antelat and escaping. A thrust by enemy tanks from the north-east was repulsed by 2nd Machine Gun Battalion.

In the afternoon Africa Corps and the motorised corps were brought back to their starting points and ordered to hold themselves in readiness for action to the north on 25 January.

33rd Reconnaissance Unit were brought into the area south-west of Antelat.

At 12.30 hrs the Marcks Battle Group, which had awaited in accordance with orders the arrival of the first troops of 21st Panzer Division at Mn.el Grara, then went on at 12.30 into el Haseiat area to clear it of enemy stragglers. Up to 16.30 hrs the group had not met up with any enemy forces and was recalled to Agedabia where it arrived at 21.00 hours.

Forward probing reconnaissance troops of 4th Indian Division coming from the Benghazi area, stopped in the area to the west and south-west of Beda Fomm. Strong reconnaissance forces of 4th Indian Division were located through wireless interception on a line Sceleidima - Soluch - Ghemines.

The Sabratha Division covered the area north of Agedabia, whilst X and XXI Army Corps, acting on orders of the Comando Supremo, began the construction of the Marada - Marsa el Brega position.

Appreciation

Enemy units had succeeded in escaping into the Msus area. On 25 January it was therefore necessary to take advantage of the successes achieved and of the enemy's supply difficulties and push on to Msus in an attempt to overtake the enemy or to cut off his possible retreat to the north.

Orders and reports are appendices 611 - 626.

Appendix 611

From: Motorised Corps

24 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

08.20 hrs.

Night passed quietly, no enemy activity. 08.00 hrs. enemy reconnaissance aircraft medium altitude. On being fired upon these aircraft flew off to the north-east. Losses on 23 January through artillery and air attacks: 5 killed, 10 wounded, 7 lorries.

Appendix 612

From: Africa Corps

24 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

09.10 hrs.

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Since 07.00 hrs. Division advancing southwards. Enemy battle group thrown back to south. Corps H.Q. at 09.00 hrs. 178 march southwards.

Appendix 613

From: Motorised Corps 24 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 09.15 hrs.

Motorised Corps gone into action with strong flanks at 09.00 hrs. Bulk of armour in centre. Corps H.Q. follows in centre about 173 left 5,5 on 172.

Appendix 614

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps and Motorised Corps 15.45 hrs.

At 06.00 hrs. on 25 January Africa Corps and Motorised Corps probably required to pursue strong enemy forces, lacking in P.O.L., in the direction of Msus. Tank up to maximum capacity. No day's rest for Africa Corps tanks. Detailed orders follow.

Appendix 615

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group 15.50 hrs.

Must reach Agedabia tonight. Report march off from Haseiat.

Appendix 616

From: Marcks Battle Group 24 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 16.50 hrs.

March off at 17.00 hrs. to Agedabia. Sufficient P.O.L. Arrangements made for fresh supplies P.O.L.

Appendix 617

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps 18.50 hrs.

- 1) On 25 January Army units to pursue strong enemy forces, apparently short of P.O.L., near Msus.
- 2) At 06.30 hrs. Africa Corps takes up pursuit starting from Saunna over 190 - B.el Melezz northwards Zt.Msus. Main force by shortest route to Msus. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit at once, 2nd Machine Gun Battalion to come forward at 08.00 hrs. on 25 January. Objective to attempt to cut off enemy retreat. Part armour may be left behind but is essential all A/Tk. be brought. Saunna and area south to be covered to east. Africa Corps to report when expect to reach starting line 197 - 190 left 6.
- 3) Reinforced 33rd Reconnaissance Unit (behind them Marcks Group) to arrive Antelat 06.30 hrs. via 182 left 7 - 185 left 9,5 - 190 left 10 will be put in by Army in direction of B.el Melezz.

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- 4) Motorised Corps will advance into area Antelat - B.Bu Feetah.
- 5) Marcks to reach Antelat morning of 25 January.
- 6) Luftwaffe to attack in waves and prevents enemy filtering out of area B.el Melezz - Zt.Msus. Attention to be drawn once again to drill for recognition by own aircraft.
- 7) Army H.Q. behind 33rd Reconnaissance Unit.

Appendix 618.

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group 19.50 hrs.

- 1) Africa Corps right and reinforced 33rd Reconnaissance Unit left take up pursuit at 06.30 hrs. on 25 January from Saunnu and Antelat of strong enemy forces near Msus.
- 2) Marcks to follow 33rd Reconnaissance Unit and to reach Antelat as quickly as possible on morning 25 January. There further orders will be given. Report when possible to reach Antelat.
- 3) Motorised Corps covers area beyond west of Antelat - Agedabia (excluded) and takes up position at 06.30 hrs. on 25 January.

Appendix 619

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: Motorised Corps 19.50 hrs.

- 1) Part of Africa Corps right and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit (reinforced) left, behind them Marcks Group, follow enemy short of P.O.L. in Msus area on 25 January.
- 2) At 08.00 hrs. on 25 January Motorised Corps with a reinforced battalion will take over the holding of position in Antelat and will cover the area Antelat - Agedabia (excluded) with main force to the west. Move to begin at 07.00 hrs. Deployment in such a manner that enemy has no view to the west.
- 3) Marcks passes through early 25 January through Trieste area to Antelat. The group had traffic priority.

Appendix 620

From: Africa Corps 24 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.55 hrs.

Africa Corps destroyed further enemy units breaking through north-east of Antelat. Intense enemy reconnaissance activity.

Attack by tanks beaten off by 2nd Machine Gun Battalion.

Success report separate. Battle H.Q. 20 km. west of Saunnu.

Appendix 621

From: Marcks Battle Group 24 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 21.15 hrs.

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First units of Marcks battle group arrived Agedabia at 21.00 hrs. Battle transport still in Mn. Grara due to lack of fuel. Tanks of soft vehicles also out of fuel. Doing everything possible to obtain fuel. Request, if possible, fuel be sent to Agedabia.

Signed: Marcks

Appendix 622

From: Marcks Battle Group 24 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.45 hrs.

During morning Marcks Battle Group prevented several attempts to break through at Mn. Grara. Enemy columns routed and deflected to south. During afternoon no contact with enemy during march forward as ordered.

Marcks Battle Group halted in Agedabia area with battle groups. Battle transport at Mn. Grara due to lack of fuel. Marcks Battle Group not ready to move at moment due to lack of fuel. Supplies will be pressed for.

Appendix 623

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: X and XXI Army Corps. 23.40 hrs.

1) Concentric attack by the German - Italian armoured formations in the area north-east of Agedabia met with complete success. From 21 January to 24 January at least 143 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles and 80 guns were captured or destroyed. 1000 prisoners were taken.

2) X and XXI Army Corps are to remain in their present positions and to consolidate these by every available means.

Appendix 624

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 24 January 1942  
To: 90th Light Division 23.42 hrs.

1) Concentric attack by the German - Italian armoured formations in the area north-east of Agedabia met with complete success. From 21 January to 24 January at least 143 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles and 80 guns were captured or destroyed. 1000 prisoners were taken.

2) Task of 90th Light Division remains the same. If not yet carried out (see situation map of 23 January midday) the units in the area north of B. el Ginn are to be withdrawn immediately. Burckhardt Battle group must be ready to move off in vehicles by early morning of 26 January.

3) Maps office 90th Light Division will be attached to Army H.Q. of Panzer Army from 26 January until further notice.

Appendix 625

From: The General commanding Africa Corps 24 January 1942  
To: C. in C. Panzer Army Africa

General Rommel

With regard to my order to 21st Panzer Division of 23 January 1942 to

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hold Saunnu which was not passed on to the division, I report as follows:

The General's order was passed on by me personally from Army Battle H.Q. five minutes after receipt to Ia according to text and I ordered that it be transmitted by wireless immediately. In fact, due to an error by a staff officer of Corps H.Q., the addressee was altered from 21st Panzer Division to Marcks Battle Group. It was not until some hours later when I gained the impression that a misunderstanding had arisen and asked for confirmation that the message had been passed on, that the above mistake came to light.

The delay in the occupation of Saunnu by 21st Panzer Division is therefore the fault of Corps H.Q.

The necessary steps have been taken.

Signed: Cruewell

Appendix 626

Daily report for 24 January 1942

1) Concentric attack against enemy in the area east-north-east of Agedabia on 24 January met with complete success. 117 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles, 33 guns and a large number of soft vehicles were either captured or destroyed. 1000 prisoners were taken. Thus, in the period from 21 to 24 January the enemy has lost a total of 143 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles and 80 guns. 14 aircraft were shot down or destroyed by ground troops.

1st Armoured Division retreated to the area Msus and south-west after having been severely mauled.

2) Plans for 25 January 1942.

Increased armed reconnaissance against enemy forces in the Msus area.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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25 January 1942

Situation

Africa Corps with 21st Panzer Division to the right and to the left 15th Panzer Division, started out from a line Saunnu - Antelat to pursue the enemy in the general direction of B.el Melezz. After a hard struggle, they succeeded in breaking down the enemy resistance, bitter at first and till 16.00 hrs. in gaining the area B.el Melezz. 96 tanks and armoured cars, 38 guns and 13 aircraft were either captured or destroyed. Several large workshop lorries, large quantities of fuel, ammunition and rations fell into our hands.

A certain amount of time had to be allowed to the Marcks Battle group to equip and reorganise its formations after the tremendous efforts of the past few days. On account of this the group did not leave Antelat until 11.00 hrs. to take up the pursuit at Msus which it reached at about 16.00 hrs. after repeated battles with enemy tanks and armoured reconnaissance cars.

Motorised Corps covered the relieving of units of Africa Corps still in the Antelat area by units of the Ariete armoured Division, in the Antelat and north-west of Agedabia areas, with its main forces concentrated to the north-west.

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90th Light Division was ordered to proceed on foot, or by leap-frogging its transport, to the area each side of the Via Balbia between 15 km. and 25 km. south-west of Agedabia and to place itself at the disposal of Africa Corps.

In view of the stubborn enemy resistance to the right flank of Africa Corps, the slow advance of reinforced 33rd Reconnaissance Unit and on account of the late arrival of the Marcks Battle group (the latter was delayed on account of its supply problem), small enemy forces succeeded in escaping to the north-east. These remaining forces of 1st Armoured Division showed extreme tenacity even though the estimated number of tanks at their disposal was only 35 and in spite of the fact that they had lost the bulk of their artillery and the majority of their supply forces. (For details of captured enemy material: see daily report).

The reconnaissance units of 4th Indian Division which had been on each side of Beda Fomm, retreated to the north, presumably as a result of the defeat inflicted upon 1st Armoured Division at Msus.

Appreciation

In the battles which took place from 21 to 25 January the British forces, which had been brought forward over Agedabia, were, if not completely destroyed, at least very badly mauled. Only parts of these forces managed to escape to the north and north-east. At the time the British General Staff had no large formations in Cyrenaica capable of taking the offensive. A further pursuit of 1st Armoured Division towards the north-east with strong forces was rendered impossible by the shortage of fuel. Africa Corps therefore remained in the area reached to re-equip and to salvage the abundance of captured material.

Orders and reports: See appendices 627 to 633.

Appendix 627

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 25 January 1942  
To: 90th Light Division 09.00 hrs.

1) 90th Light Division with Burckhardt Battle Group (minus Marade Battle Group) to proceed on foot and by leap-frogging transport to area each side of Via Balbia between 15 km. and 25 km. south-west of Agedabia and will be at disposal of Army H.Q. The allocation of additional transport by A.Q.M.G. may be expected. Report time of arrival and from when division will be at disposal of Army in appointed area.

2) According to air reconnaissance still a few grounded enemy aircraft with crews in area west of Rta. el Gtafia. To be taken immediately.

Appendix 628

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 25 January 1942  
To: All German and Italian troops 12.15 hrs.

In spite of the fact that I forbade it, valuable enemy captured materials have been destroyed. I will punish the culprits. Inform all commanders of this and stress once again that no captured material whatsoever may be destroyed. Confirm by wireless that this order has been complied with.

C. in C.

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Appendix 629

From: Africa Corps 25 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 16.15 hrs.

Divisions reached the area of Msus at noon after a number of sizeable engagements which began near Saunnu and, which by energetic action, the enemy was partly routed, partly destroyed. In order to cut off the enemy withdrawal west of Msus, encircling troops were put into position for the night. Results to date: at least 30 tanks shot up, 24 guns captured (some destroyed), 10 aircraft destroyed.

Signed: Cruewell

Appendix 630

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 25 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps - Marcks Battle Group 22.30 hrs.  
33rd Reconnaissance Unit - Commander Engineers  
Commander Signals - C.O. Air Liaison

1. Africa Corps, Marcks and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit remain on 26 January in area taken. Reconnoitre, consolidate, clean up and salvage captured material in accordance with previous instructions. Tank up vehicles and draw supplies.
2. On 27 January Marcks and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit to go into action to the north-west. Africa Corps to remain in present positions. Marcks will receive special instructions regarding ground reconnaissance.
3. Officers orders group at 14.00 hrs. on 26 January at Army Battle H.Q.

Appendix 631

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 25 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group - Copy to 33rd Reconnaissance Unit 22.35 hrs.

1. Enemy positions in area south of Benghazi on general line 180 left 25 - 185 left 22 - 187 left 15. Strength about 1 to 2 reconnaissance sections with A/Tk and artillery troops.
2. Proposed plans for 27 January: Marcks and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit to attack enemy rear.
3. Marcks in conjunction with 33rd Reconnaissance Unit to explore advance route and possibilities of attack. For camouflage purposes minimum reconnaissance force possible to be used. Detailed orders follow.

Appendix 632

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 25 January 1942  
To: X Army Corps - XXI Army Corps 22.40 hrs.  
Motorised Corps - 90th Light Division

1. On 25 January a thrust towards Msus beat the enemy once again. He fled northwards. As far as is yet known the following was captured today: 96 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles, 38 guns, 13 aircraft, large quantities of ammunition, a large number of soft vehicles and other war material.

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2. Africa Corps, Marcks and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit remain in the area captured around Msus.

3. The orders issued for X and XXI Army Corps, Motorised Corps and 90th Light Division remain in force.

Operations 90th Light Division to report morning 26 January to Army H.Q.

4. Officers Orders Group at 14.00 hrs. on 26 January at Army Battle H.Q.

Appendix 633

Daily report for 25 January 1942

1. In a tough engagement on 25 January, Panzer Army, using the bulk of Africa Corps and a German - Italian Battle Group, inflicted further severe losses on 1st Armoured Division which, already badly mauled, was retreating from the Msus area southwards. According to reports so far received the following were either captured or destroyed on 25 January: 96 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles (among which some American types built in 1941), 38 guns, a large number of soft vehicles, 13 aircraft, large quantities of ammunition and other war material. Enemy was retreating to the north and north-east.

2. The use of the German - Italian air force which had proved so effective during the previous days was prevented on 25 January, by heavy sand storms.

3. Plans for 26 January 1942. Consolidation in the Msus area by motorised formations and salvage of captured material.

4. Own losses during the present operations unusually small.

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26 January 1942

Situation

Africa Corps and Marcks Battle Group covered and carried out reconnaissance to the north-east and in the Msus area. They were subjected to several attacks by low flying enemy aircraft.

Motorised Corps covered the area between Antelat and Agedabia to the north-west. 90th Light Division placed units of 361st Africa Regiment and Burckhardt Battle Group in the area south and south-west of Agedabia.

The enemy retreated with the remainder of the 1st Armoured Division to the area Gr. Tecasis - el Abiar. Units of 4th Indian Division were pushed forward into a line Sceleidima - Solluch - Ghemines.

According to air reconnaissance the enemy has received reinforcements from Cyrenaica. For the first time the 1st Free French Light Division was identified in the area west of Derna. From wireless interception it was learnt that, in the event of further German advances in the direction of Mechili, the British planned a thrust from the Benghazi area in a southerly direction. One also assumed however from enemy wireless that there was considerable disagreement between British H.Q.'s on the future conduct of the campaign. An evacuation of Benghazi did not seem therefore to be ruled out.

Appreciation

The British command anticipated a continuation of the German offensive

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in the direction of Mechili. Such an offensive in a north-easterly direction would have given the enemy forces in the area of Benghazi and eastwards an opportunity to push southwards and endanger our own rear lines of communication. It was therefore more practical to turn against the 4th Indian Division in Benghazi area and cut off their main line of communication to the east. In this connection there was the possibility of surprising the enemy since an attack on Benghazi from the Msus area would hardly be expected on account of the difficult terrain. The C. in C. therefore decided to attack the 4th Indian Division in the Benghazi area on 28 January from the south, south-east and east. But in view of the shortage of P.O.L. the attack would be carried out by only a limited number of the forces available.

Orders and reports: See Appendices 634 to 640.

Appendix 634

From: Motorised Corps 26 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 15.30 hrs.

In the period from 21 January to 25 January the following were either captured or destroyed: 10 tanks, 7 armoured reconnaissance vehicles, 5 guns, 8 trucks, 3 aircraft, 18 prisoners taken.

Appendix 635

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 26 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps 16.30 hrs.

3rd Reconnaissance Unit with battery 8.8, 408 Heavy Artillery Sections and heavy Howitzer battery under command Marcks Group with immediate effect and to be despatched to Msus.

Appendix 636

From: Africa Corps 26 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.30 hrs.

Evening Report: Africa Corps moved to area around Msus to cover and seal up area. 15 km. east and 25 km. north of B.el Melezz isolated enemy patrols with tanks. Repeated low level attacks. Salvage of captured material in progress. Exact figures to follow.

Serviceable tanks: 13 II, 52 III, 10 IV, three armoured command vehicles.

Appendix 637

From: Africa Corps 26 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 23.10 hrs.

1. Casualties for 25 January: 1 officer killed (Lt.Hahn), 1 officer and 19 men wounded, 2 men missing.

2. Tank casualties: 1/III destroyed, 1/II, 12/III, 1/IV temporarily out of action.

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3. Vehicle casualties: 1 lorry, 2 cars, 1 m/c., 1 ambulance destroyed.
4. Gun casualties: 4 light field howitzers temporarily out of action, 2 A/tk. guns 38 and 2 long infantry guns destroyed.

Appendix 638

From: C. in C.  
Panzer Army Africa

26 January 1942

Army Order of the Day

Panzer Army Africa has inflicted a severe defeat upon the enemy from which he will not easily recover. This new feat of arms has re-echoed throughout the whole world and is an important contribution to the overall war effort.

I convey to all commands and troops my thanks and recognition for this outstanding accomplishment.

We shall continue to beat the enemy wherever he is to be found.

The Commander-in-Chief  
signed: ROMMEL  
General of Armoured Troops

Appendix 639

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

26 January 1942

To: All units

Army orders for attack on 28 January 1942

1. Enemy: The 1st British Armoured Division after being badly beaten on 25 January south of Msus, has apparently fallen back with its remnants to the line el Charuba - el Abiar. In this line are covering forces of 5th Indian Brigade which is in the area south of Barce (Strength: 2 battalions, 1 artillery regiment). From south of Benghazi 7th Indian Brigade (4 battalions, 1 tank battalion (infantry tanks), (2 - 3 artillery regiments) 2 reconnaissance units, 2 anti-tank battalions) has pushed two mobile battle groups forward into a line Sceleidima - Soluch - Ghemines.

According to air reconnaissance enemy reinforcements are being brought from Cyrenaica. Wireless intercepts on 25 January reported the first appearance of the 1st Free French Light Division in the area west of Derna. In the Mechili area only weak enemy groups have been located. From an intercepted wireless conversation it has been gathered that an enemy thrust from the Benghazi area in a south-easterly direction is to be expected in the event of further German advances in the direction of Mechili.

On the other hand there is much disagreement within the British commands over the recent defeats and the course of future operations. The possibility of an evacuation of Benghazi does not, therefore, appear to be ruled out.

2. At dawn on 28 January, Panzer Army Africa will attack, surprise and destroy the enemy forces in the area around and south of Benghazi. It is further proposed, if possible at the same time, to take Benghazi and to transport all stores and equipment found there into the Agedabia area.

3. Marcks Battle Group, 104 Artillery Command with units of Army artillery (H.Q. I/408, 2 batteries 10cm. guns, 1 battery 15cm. guns, 1 battery 17cm. guns, 1 mortar battery).

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3rd Reconnaissance Unit and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit under my command will attack at dawn on 28 January from an assembly area about 15 km. south-south-west of Regima and thrust forward under cover to the east via Coefia and Benina on to Benghazi. On 27 January at 18.30 hrs. Lt. Col. Marcks will lead his Battle Group as well as 3rd Reconnaissance Unit and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit and 104 Artillery Command Group from their present harbouring areas via Si. Moh. el Emeilet into an area about 8 km. east of Gr. el Bezem. From this point deployed advance with 3rd Reconnaissance Unit to the right Marcks Battle Group and 104 Artillery Command in the middle and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit on the left, to assembly area near and to the west of Zt. Umm esc Scechaneb. This assembly area is to be reached by 04.00 hrs. on 28 January. During this move there will be no lights on vehicles nor will there be any forward reconnaissance. The route will be marked by illuminated canisters. At this stage the forces will be directed into action by verbal instructions. The above-mentioned troops will each carry "4. V.S." fuel with them. (1. V.S. = 1 petrol issue for 100 km). Lt. Col. Marcks will brief C.Os. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit, 33rd Reconnaissance Unit and 408 Infantry Artillery Regiment verbally.

4. Motorised Corps will leave its present harbour at 18.30 hrs. on 27 January and proceed via Antelat to an area north-east and west of Cardusi el Oti. There the Corps will join the main armoured forces on the west flank and hold itself in readiness to go into action at daybreak on 28 January on both sides of Sceleidima against the flank and rear of the enemy forces in the line Sceleidima - Soluch - Ghemines. The object is to push the enemy forces towards the sea or to force them southwards and destroy them regardless of cost. The first objective of the attack is Sceleidima, the second objective is the Soluch area and the third Ghemines. On reaching the third objective, the Corps must make contact with the forces attacking Benghazi (see para.3) as well as with 90th Light Division advancing from the south (see para.5).

Sabratha Division has until 28 January to complete its occupation of the Antelat area and must then prepare itself for defence. Motorised Corps to report earliest date on which units will be ready for individual action and its plans for consolidation of position.

5. On 27 January 90th Light Division is to relieve Sabratha Division in its present position north of Agedabia and to place battle outposts in the area east of Zuetina. The division goes into action at daybreak on 28 January on a broad front advancing to the north and takes up a defensive position in an area to the south-west of Beda Fomm. This position is to run as follows: about 6 km. west of B.Bu. Hashasa - north of Si.Sueicher - B.el Agered. The division then takes the defensive measures outlined in the verbal instructions already given. 221st Artillery Regiment H.Q. with 3 batteries army artillery is under command of the division. Preparedness of units and consolidation of positions to be reported soonest.

6. The Africa Corps remains in area B.el Melezz - Abiar Bu Rabbuah and to the west - Balat el Megaz - Udet el Gedau to cover and reconnoitre area to the east and the north. On 27 and 28 January deceptive measures will be taken to give the enemy the impression of an intended advance by corps in the general direction of Mechili. The corps will be ready to move at one hour's notice with its fighting units to the north-west on 28 January. The corps will clean up the area B.el Melezz - east of Sceleidima - Antelat - Saunnu and will move all captured enemy material to a collection in the area south of Antelat. Rear formations of corps to be left in the area Saunnu - Bu Garbaa.

7. X and XI Army Corps will continue the building of defences of the Maaten Giofar and B.es Suera sectors in the Marada Marsa el Brega position.

8. On 27 January the Luftwaffe will attack the enemy in the area between Mechili and reconnoitre in force the area of Benghazi - Sceleidima - Ghemines. On 28 January the Luftwaffe will support ground operations and for this purpose will probably be called to carry out a raid on Benghazi

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at daybreak. Further use of air will be made according to the demands of the situation. Ample notice will be given.

9. C.O. Army Engineers is, in accordance with previous verbal instructions, preparing to mine the area east, north-east and south of Benghazi at a later date.
10. C.O. Army Signals will maintain communications between all corps, 90th Light Division, Marcks Battle Group, 3rd Reconnaissance Unit, 33rd Reconnaissance Unit and O.C. rear Army area.
11. It is once again to be pointed out to all troops that captured material must not be destroyed nor may captured vehicles be cannibalized. All captured material is the property of the Reich and therefore whoever misuses it renders himself liable to severe punishment.
12. Army Operational Department from afternoon 27 January at Msus. During the advance and attack I shall be with a fighting echelon (commanded by Major Hecht) of the Marcks Battle Group. All H.Q. Staffs and units under their command are reminded of the necessity of reporting every two hours.

The Commander-in-Chief  
Signed: ROMMEL  
General of Armoured Troops

Appendix 640

Daily Report for 26 January 1942

1. The 1st British Armoured Division, after being badly mauled on 25 January rear and south of Msus; has retreated with its remnants presumably to the north via the line Charruba - el Abiar. Covering forces of the 5th Indian Brigade from Barce area were put into this line. According to air reconnaissance reinforcements are being brought from Cyrenaica.

On 25 January wireless interception identified for the first time the 1st Free French Light Division in the area west of Derna. Other reconnaissance operations were made difficult by sandstorms.

2. Day passed quietly. According to figures so far available the following were either captured or destroyed in the course of operations from 21 to 25 January 1942:

283 tanks and armoured reconnaissance vehicles (among which models of Canadian origin made in 1941), 127 guns (including anti-tank), 583 soft vehicles, 28 aircraft, large quantities of P.O.L. and rations, as well as workshops, spares depots and other war material.

The bulk of the soft vehicles were either destroyed in battle or by the enemy themselves beforehand. The above figures do not take into account material destroyed by the Luftwaffe.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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27 January 1942

Situation

Africa Corps carried out reconnaissance in the Msus area. Units of 21st Panzer Division thrust east-northeastwards towards B.el Gerrari in order to give the British command the impression that the advance they expected on Mechili was

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in fact in progress. Wireless interception confirmed that the enemy did, in fact, expect such an attack.

The Marcks Battle Group, units of Army Artillery, 3rd Reconnaissance Unit and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit assembled during the afternoon in an area about 24 km. west of Msus, in preparation for the advance on to Benghazi. The camouflage of these preparations was greatly assisted by heavy sandstorms. At 19.00 hrs. the above-mentioned formations under the personal leadership of the C. in C., began their advance to the north-west. The sandstorms were followed by heavy rain.

By 20.00 hrs. Motorised Corps had reached a point about 20 km. south-west of Sceleidima and there held themselves ready to attack the rear and flanks of the enemy forces in the line Sceleidima - Soluch - Ghemines.

Sabratha Division took over the consolidation of the Antelat area. It was relieved north of Agedabia by 90th Light Division.

Appreciation

By evening, reconnaissance had failed to produce any indication from which it could be gathered that the enemy was aware of our intentions. It was therefore to be hoped that the element of surprise, so essential to the success of our attack on Benghazi, had been preserved.

Orders and reports see appendices 641 - 645.

Appendix 641

From: Marcks Group 27 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 17.30 hrs.

Evening report:

Day passed quietly. Captured: 1 armoured machine gun carrier, 2 motor cycles, 2 cars. In addition 33rd Reconnaissance Unit captured: 1 armoured car and 6 prisoners. Losses: 1 O.R. wounded, 1 O.R. missing. 2 O.Rs. returned from captivity.

Appendix 642

From: 90th Light Division 27 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.15 hrs.

At about 17.00 hrs. enemy armoured reconnaissance troops thrust from north-east towards Via Balbia at 226 left 39. From own troops, advancing behind fire shields put up by flak guns used as ground artillery, 12 mine lifters (sappers) and 8 infantry men fell into enemy hands. 1 O.R. with truck escaped.

Appendix 643

From: Africa Corps 27 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.20 hrs.

The Africa Corps advance in the direction of Mechili was camouflaged by the advance of 21st Panzer Division to the north-east. Enemy reconnaissance forces south-west of Bir el Gerrari withdrew. On 28 January advance will be

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continued to area 15 km. north-east of Gerrari. North of Msus weak enemy reconnaissance. Large stationary enemy column about 25 km. north-east of Bir el Melezz. Salvage work continues. Intense enemy air activity, particularly low flying aircraft.

Appendix 644

From: Africa Corps

27 January 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

22.05 hrs.

Losses on 26 January - 3 O.Rs killed, 14 wounded. Vehicle casualties: nil. Battleworthy tanks: 15/II, 48/III, 9/IV, 2 large armoured command vehicles.

Appendix 645

Daily report for 27 January 1942

1. According to wireless intercepts, the 11th Indian Brigade which to date had been in the area of Derna and west thereof; is since the evening of 26 January, in the area of Maraua - d'Annunzio and southwards. Otherwise enemy dispositions as on previous day.
2. With the exception of slight armoured reconnaissance activity on both sides in the area north and north-west of Msus, very little enemy activity. Bulk of troops dealt with supply problems and today carried on with salvage of captured material.
3. Plans for 28 January: Armed reconnaissance in force against enemy in area around and south of Benghazi.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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28 January 1942

Situation

The forces detailed for the attack on Benghazi (Marcks Battle Group, Army Artillery Units, 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance Units started their night march on to Benghazi under the personal leadership of the C. in C. This march was under the severest weather and terrain conditions - heavy rainstorms, cloudbursts and deep wadis - and at 11.00 hrs. the area east of Regima was reached. The approach to Fort Regima was rendered unusually difficult by extremely deep wadis and on this account it was not until 15.30 hrs. that the Indian company in occupation was overthrown and Regima taken. The advance on to Benina followed immediately and it was taken at 16.00 hrs. after a short encounter with enemy tanks.

At 18.00 hrs. 33rd Reconnaissance Unit reached Coefia and closed the Via Balbia to the west. The area between Coefia and Benina was also sealed off. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit, which had been carrying out reconnaissance in the Benghazi area, forced its way into the town in the evening and thereby cut off the British forces from their escape channel to the east. Attempts to break through during the night were repulsed.

At 15.00 hrs. the motorised corps occupied Sceleidima after overcoming strong enemy resistance. The divisions were then turned in the direction of Soluch. Difficult terrain delayed the advance of the divisions and it was not

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until 19.30 hrs. that the Ariete Armoured Division entered Soluch. A further immediate advance in the direction of Ghemines was not possible according to reports from Corps.

Africa Corps covered the area around Msus and units of 15th Panzer Division repulsed thrusts by enemy reconnaissance forces. Units of 21st Panzer Division started out on a deceptive move in the direction of Mechili and reached the area 15 km. north-east of B.el Gerrari.

90th Light Division advanced on both sides of the Via Balbia and covered the area north-west of Beda Fomm.

Appreciation

The rapid advance of the battle group under the personal command of the C. in C., cut off the retreat to the east of the enemy forces in Benghazi. On the other hand the slow rate of progress of the motorised corps moving against the enemy forces to the south of Benghazi made it appear probable that on the night 28/29th and during the day of the 29th the enemy would attempt to break through to the east; it was doubtful whether motorised corps would be able to stem this breakthrough.

Orders and reports: See appendices 646 - 652.

Appendix 646

From: Motorised Corps 28 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 08.30 hrs.

Motorised corps started out 07.00 hrs., forward units at 236. No contact with enemy yet.

Appendix 647

From: Panzer Army Africa 28 January 1942  
C. in C.  
To: Motorised Corps 11.05 hrs.

Attack immediately at 240 left 13. Units to 252 left 12,5. Marcks advancing on 252 left 6.

Appendix 648

From: Motorised Corps 28 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 13.15 hrs.

Reports submitted to date incorrect due to wrong orientation, lack of reconnaissance forces and partly inadequate signals communications. Line Sceleidima - Soluch occupied by enemy. Trieste reports strong forces in Sceleidima. Will be attacked. Forward units of Ariete at 236,5 left 2 attacking to north. At present under heavy artillery fire. Corps H.Q. 236,5 left 1.

Appendix 649

From: Motorised Corps 28 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 15.05 hrs.

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At 14.45 hrs. enemy forces in Sceleidima capitulated. Motorised Corps advances on to Soluch.

Appendix 650

From: Panzer Army Africa 28 January 1942  
C. in C.  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 16.35 hrs.

C. in C. at 252 left 8 at 16.30 hrs. All units under way.

Appendix 651

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 28 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps - Motorised Corps - Marcks Group - 17.50 hrs.  
90th Light Division

1. Marcks will advance from Benina to Benghazi. Strong enemy forces holding line Ghemines - Soluch and south-eastwards. Sceleidima taken by motorised corps.
2. Army will destroy enemy forces near and south of Benghazi on 29 January.
3. Marcks will close circle round Benghazi.
4. Motorised Corps will prevent enemy escaping from area Sceleidima and north towards east, north-east or south (Sabratha).
5. Africa Corps with Army Artillery in the area around Msus will be ready, as from dawn, to move as ordered either to the enemy east flank north of Sceleidima or to split into several groups and cover retreat routes to east and north-east.
6. I shall be in Benina.

C. in C.

Appendix 652

Daily report for 28 January 1942

1. In the course of armed reconnaissance against the enemy forces in the area around and south of Benghazi, one battle group pushed back the enemy forces near Sceleidima, and another battle group advancing from Msus, in a north-westerly direction thrust forward into the area 15 km. east of Benghazi. Enemy forces were identified again in area Soluch and Ghemines. Enemy reconnaissance thrust from the north-east on Africa Corps harbour was repulsed north-east of Msus.

2. Plan for 29 January 1942:

Continuation of armed reconnaissance in Benghazi area.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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29 January 1942

SITUATION

During the night of 28/29 January, units of 4th Indian Division from Benghazi, attempted a breakthrough to the north-east. Only a few tanks

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managed to escape in the darkness. The bulk of the forces piled up in front of the blocking line, particularly along the via Balbia where alone over 1,000 prisoners were taken and several hundred vehicles captured.

At around 10.00 hrs. units of Marcks Battle Group, led by the C. in C. and a small Ops. group pushed into to Benghazi and occupied the town. Here large quantities of ammunition, rations and some P.O.L. were captured. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit carried out reconnaissance along the Via Balbia to the south and spotted some stragglers.

Motorised Corps, with Ariete Armoured Division reached Benghazi by evening and covered area Benina to south and east. Trieste Division remained at Ghemines and covered area there.

Africa Corps with reinforced 2nd and 8th Machine Gun Battalions, should have prevented evasive action by the enemy forces in the Soluch - Ghemines area by blocking the slopes north of Sceleidima. The arrival of the machine-gun battalions was however delayed due to a breakdown in signal communications. Units of 5th and 7th Indian Brigades, which Motorised corps had not held down sufficiently on 28 January, therefore succeeded in escaping to the east during the night of 29/30 January.

Appreciation

With the capture of Benghazi the most important port in Cyrenaica, together with its extensive installations, was once again in our hands. Furthermore, since the bulk of 4th Indian Division had been defeated, there was a possibility that the enemy would make a fighting withdrawal from the whole of Cyrenaica. This would have to be established by thorough reconnaissance on 30 January. Further, the troops would have to draw fresh supplies and collect the extensive booty for immediate exploitation thus making up deficiencies in our own armament and equipment.

Orders and reports: see appendices 653 to 658.

Appendix 653

From: Africa Corps 29 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.15 hrs.

Evening report: 2nd Machine Gun Battalion blocking at Freia er Retem, 8th Machine Battalion at Buerat Bu Seif. 2nd Machine Gun Battalion 23 prisoners, otherwise no contact with enemy. North-west Africa Corps area slight armoured reconnaissance activity. Enemy reconnaissance officer and other ranks taken prisoner. Enemy column north-east of Agedabia evaded attack, 11 prisoners taken. Armed air reconnaissance.

Appendix 654

From: Marcks Battle Group 29 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 21.00 hrs.

Daily report: After some skirmishes during the night, this morning the enemy abandoned attempt to break through to the north-east. At 11.00 hrs. Benghazi was occupied. Afternoon battle in the dunes and west of Benghazi with remnants of enemy.

Captured: 900 prisoners, 300 soft vehicles, several light armoured cars, many anti-tank, flak and A.P. weapons.

Losses: 1 officer (Lt. Dominik) killed, 13 wounded.

/Appendix 655

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Appendix 655

From: Africa Corps 29 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.20 hrs.

Evening report:

1. Own casualties: 5 killed, 10 wounded.
2. Vehicle casualties: 3 lorries, 2 cars, 1 Kfz.23 (i.e. telephone car), 1 half-track. (All temporarily out of action).
3. 1 officer, 24 O.Rs. taken prisoner.
4. Tank situation: 19/II, 53/III, 8/iv, 4 command cars.

Appendix 656

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 29 January 1942  
To: Marcks Group 23.25 hrs.

Marcks to cover known line, collect and guard captured material. From noon tomorrow 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance to east. Orders for this follow.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

Appendix 657

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 29 January 1942  
To: Motorised Corps 23.25 hrs.

1. Marcks Battle Group will cover area around Benghazi.
2. Trieste covering lines of communication between Ghemines and Benghazi as well as between Ghemines and Si.el Agheila. Further area east of this line is to be cleared up. - Ariete to remain at point reached. Task of Trieste and Ariete for next few days is clearing up in whole area between Benghazi and Si. el Agheila.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

Appendix 658

Daily report for 29 January 1942.

1. As a result of the attack by the Marcks Battle Group on Benghazi and that of the Italian motorised corps over Sceleidima and Soluch on Ghemines, units of 4th Indian Division were beaten and routed. Isolated enemy groups succeeded in escaping to the north-east and east. From air reconnaissance and wireless intercepts, the impression has been gathered that those enemy forces which up to now were in the area east of Charruba (presumed to be remnants of 1st Armoured Division) have fallen back to Mechili. 11th Indian Brigade is still to be found in the area east of Barce.
2. With reference to the capture of Benghazi (see report to Army General Staff Operations Department of 29 January 13.50 hrs.), the following details are reported: The German-Italian Battle Group under the personal command of the C. in C. marched during the night in very difficult weather and ground conditions, from the Msus area and reached the north edge of Benghazi (via

/Regima

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Regima and Benina) on the evening of 28 January. At the same time the Via Balbia was blocked north-east of Benghazi near Coefia. Enemy attempts to break through from Benghazi to the east were pushed back during the night of 28/29 January. On the morning of 29 January Benghazi was taken. To date over 1,000 prisoners. The tremendous amount of captured material has not yet been properly classified but is composed of about 500 soft vehicles, a large number of S.P. guns, large quantities of ammunition and equipment, and large stocks of rations. The Italian and Arab population gave our occupying troops an enthusiastic welcome. On the night before, the enemy gave way to the north-east to Motorised Corps which reached Benghazi in the evening along with the Ariete Armoured Division. Trieste Division covered the area of Ghemines and towards the east. Africa Corps remained to close the slopes north of Sceleidima with the bulk of its forces collecting and guarding the captured enemy material in the Msus area. Sabratha and 90th Light Divisions occupied positions each side of and west of Antelat, whilst X and XXI Army Corps remained in the Marada - Marsa el Brega positions in accordance with the Duce's wishes.

3. Our losses from 27 to 29 January were quite small.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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30 January 1942

Situation

During the course of the day the enemy withdrew to the east. Remnants of 1st Armoured Division went back over Mechili. The bulk of the German - Italian motorised formations and armoured formations drew supplies and guarded the booty. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit occupied el Abiar without making contact with the enemy and from there carried out reconnaissance to the east.

At dusk Africa Corps sent off Geissler Battle Group (2 battalions, 2 batteries, 1 anti-tank section) to attack Maraua. Ariete Armoured Division took up covering positions with the bulk of its forces in the Benghazi area and units in the Tobra area.

The C. in C. of Panzer Army Africa, General Rommel, was promoted to full general (Generaloberst).

Appreciation

Further retreats by the enemy would tend to indicate that he intends to evacuate central Cyrenaica at least. It was therefore decided that on 31 January, the fast moving formations at least would pursue the retreating enemy forces in order to inflict the maximum possible losses upon them. There was also the possibility that with these small forces, the whole of Cyrenaica might be recaptured. An immediate thrust by the main force was made impossible by shortage of supplies, particularly P.O.L.

Orders and reports: see appendices 659 to 668.

Appendix 659

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

30 January 1942

To: 3rd Reconnaissance Unit

16.00 hrs.

3rd Reconnaissance Unit is ordered to occupy el Abiar, now free of enemy, and from there to reconnoitre towards the east.

/Appendix 660

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Appendix 660

From: 3rd Reconnaissance Unit 30 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.10 hrs.  
Position reached as ordered.

Appendix 661

From: 3rd Reconnaissance Unit 30 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.30 hrs.  
Position 15 km. east of el Abiar on track to Mechili.

Appendix 662

From: Africa Corps 30 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.40 hrs.

4 officers and 28 O.Rs. captured by 2nd Machine Gun Battalion. Otherwise no contact with enemy, slight recce. activity in progress in front of Africa Corps Battle Group Geissler towards Maraua and to the north. Own supply column attacked by Stukas north-east of Antelat.

Appendix 663

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 30 January 1942  
To: 3rd Reconnaissance Unit 20.00 hrs.

At 18.00 hrs. on 30 January a battle group of Africa Corps will leave area at point 245 and advance on Maraua. At 07.00 hrs. on 31 January 3rd Reconnaissance Unit will leave el Abiar and proceed via el Charruba to Maraua also. It will be placed under command of Africa Corps. Liaison to be made. Flak battery is under command Marcks Battle Group and will join this latter at Coefia (Via Balbia) by 07.30 hrs. on 31 January. 33rd Reconnaissance Unit will also leave Tocra at 07.00 hrs. on 31 January and will also proceed to Maraua via Barce.

Appendix 664

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 30 January 1942  
To: Africa Corps 20.00 hrs.

3rd Reconnaissance Unit, at present at el Abiar, will be placed under command of Africa Corps. Reconnaissance Unit has been ordered by Army to leave el Abiar at 07.00 hrs. on 31 January and to proceed via el Charruba to Maraua. 33rd Reconnaissance Unit will also move to Maraua, will leave Tocra at 07.00 hrs. and proceed to Maraua via Barce. It will be followed by Marcks Battle Group. Further operational use of troops after arrival is dependent on the time of arrival of individual units in Maraua and will be laid down by C. in C. Request report every two hours on location of Africa Corps battle group.

/Appendix 665

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Appendix 665

From: 3rd Reconnaissance Unit 30 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.10 hrs.

Since last rain no fresh tracks of vehicles on track to Mechili. Fresh tracks of lorries and tanks on track to Barce.

Appendix 666

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 30 January 1942  
To: Marcks Battle Group

Marcks will probably have to advance to Beda Littoria, Berta on 31 January. Prepare everything for move.

Appendix 667

From: G.H.Q. Forces in North Africa 30 January 1942  
To: All units

ORDER OF THE DAY TO ALL FIGHTING TROOPS IN LIBYA

As Commander-in-Chief of all Forces in North Africa I am proud of you and your feats of arms.

You have dealt the enemy a severe blow, you have wrenched from his hands the victory of which he was already boasting.

To the praises of your C.-in-C. Panzer Army Africa, who led you on to such a brilliant victory, I would like to add my best wishes.

You are soldiers of the Axis, tempered as hard as steel!

You will win every battle!

You will win the War!

General of the Army  
Commander in Chief of the forces in North Africa  
Signed: Ettore Bastico

Appendix 668

Daily report for 30 January 1942

1. Continued enemy ostensible withdrawal eastwards.
2. Day passed quietly. Reconnaissance forces, pushing eastwards, occupied el Abiar.
3. Plans for 31 January 1942. Reconnaissance in force in the direction of Maraua.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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/31 January 1942

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31 January 1942

Situation

Geissler Battle Group, after encountering difficult ground conditions, brought the bulk of its forces into the area south-west of Maraua by 11.00 hrs. Further advance by the group was delayed considerably by mine-fields and enemy resistance. About midday 2nd Machine Gun Battalion and 3rd Reconnaissance Unit were still north-west of el Charruba where they encountered rear-guards of 1st Armoured Division and it was not until the night of 31st January/1st February that they pushed through to Geissler Battle Group which meantime in spite of stiff resistance by 5th Indian Brigade had broken through the Marada positions in two places.

At 07.00 hrs. Marcks Battle Group started a pursuit along the Via Balbia in the direction of Tocra - Barce. 33rd Reconnaissance Unit operated in front of the group. Near Tocra the battle group received orders to dispatch forces to prevent reported enemy embarkations at Tolemaide. Due to an erroneous interpretation of this order, not only was a reinforced company switched over to the coast from Tocra to Tolemaide, but the remaining elements of the battle group, which had already reached Barce, were also diverted on to Tolemaide. These reached Tolemaide at 15.00 hrs. under difficult road conditions. The company which had been switched over from Tocra had already arrived and had captured a few stragglers. Embarkation did not take place. Thereupon the C. in C. ordered a further advance by the battle group over Maddelena - d'Annunzio on to Maraua. At dusk, between Maddelena and d'Annunzio, a number of defended minefields were taken and cleared. Motorised Corps put weak forces of Ariete Division forward, to cover the area of Tocra and Barce. Trieste Division continued to cover the Sceleidima - Solluch - Ghemines area.

Owing to a shortage of P.O.L. Africa Corps remained with the bulk of forces to cover the area and salvage enemy material still to be found around Msus. Units of 90th Light Division moved to Benghazi.

As a result of a conference between the C.-in-C. and Field Marshal Kesselring, it was decided that the Luftwaffe would not move up to Benghazi until the necessary reserves of fuel were available. These were not to be expected before 5 February. Until this date, in view of the ever increasing distance from air-fields, only limited support could be given to ground troops.

The Comando Supremo in Rome turned down a request to move the Italian infantry divisions of X and XXI Corps from the Marada - Marsa el Brega positions into the area of Agedabia.

Appreciation

The course of events during the day confirm the impression that the enemy, under cover of rearguard actions, was evacuating Cyrenaica. It was to be expected that, under severe pressure, the enemy would abandon his rearguard positions. The intention on 1st February was to throw the enemy out of the Maraua position and pursue him.

Orders and reports: see appendices 669 to 675.

Appendix 669

From:	The German General attached H.Q. Italian Army	31 January, 1942
To:	Panzer Army Africa Ia	13.00 hrs.

At a conference held today, at which General Gause also took part, Cavallero stated that the Duce still regards the area of Gialo - Agedabia -

/Marsa

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Marsa el Brega - Marada as the defence centre and that only mobile formations may be used in forward areas. The Italian infantry divisions will not be released for the present.

Appendix 670

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 31 January 1942  
To: Ariete (Copy to Motorised Corps) 14.00 hrs.

Ariete to occupy Barce and Tocra with one reinforced company in each. Coastal sector to be cleaned up. Occupation Benina cancelled.

Appendix 671

From: Motorised Corps 31 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.00 hrs.

In accordance with verbal instructions, Ariete has occupied the places ordered, one company each in Tocra and Barce.

Deployment of Sabratha around Saunne completed. Trieste in Sceleidima, Ghemines. Clearing up of zone, as ordered, still in progress. A platoon of 66th Infantry Regiment (Trieste), which was proceeding from Antelat to Sceleidima, has been missing since 28 January.

Battleworthy tanks: 80

Corps H.Q.: Benghazi

Signed: ZINGALES

Appendix 672

From: Africa Corps 31 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.05 hrs.

Evening report: After successful engagements north of el Charruba (40 prisoners, several soft vehicles and tanks), Geissler Battle Group sealed area west of Maraua. In the evening attack made on weak defences at Maraua. 2nd Machine Gun Battalion and 3rd Reconnaissance Unit not yet arrived. Patrol activity north-east of Msus. Slight fighter aircraft activity.

Appendix 673

From: Africa Corps 31 January 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.30 hrs.

Geissler Battle Group broken through mined and consolidated positions at two points. 2nd Machine Gun Battalion and 3rd Reconnaissance Unit will continue attack on 1 February. Contact with 33rd Reconnaissance Unit and Marcks Battle Group not yet established.

/Appendix 674

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Appendix 674

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

31 January 1942

To: Burckhardt Battle Group, Fliegerfuehrer Afrika,  
90th Light Division, Commander Army Engineers,  
Commander Army Supplies, A. Q. M. G.  
L.O. Major Fuchs, Ia, Ic

Orders for the taking of the Gialo Oasis

1. The Gialo oasis is held only by feeble enemy covering forces. Fires have been observed which suggest that an evacuation of the oasis is intended. Air photographs taken on 30 and 31 January can be seen at Fliegerfuehrer H.Q.

2. At dawn on 3 February, Burckhardt Group, taking a ground assault group of 50 men, will take the Gialo oasis and hold it.

Route to be taken: Agedabia, el Haseiat, Gr. es Sahabi. The tracks leading to the oasis are to be mined. Further, a thrust towards the supply depot 50 km. east of el Hamin (Air photos to be seen at Fliegerfuehrer) will be made.

3. The assault group is to be equipped with tracked vehicles in addition to the soft vehicles already supplied by A.Q.M.G. and thus made completely mobile.

4. The Gialo assault group will be under direct command of Panzer Army H.Q.

5. Fliegerfuehrer is requested to give fighter cover for the operation and, when the enemy is located, to give support to the operation with bombers. Also to supply T.E. fighters to harass attempts by the enemy to retreat along the tracks leading to Siwa.

6. Supplies: Rations for four days are to be taken. Further supplies will be brought up by transport aircraft. Fliegerfuehrer is requested to fly out supplies.

7. An adequate number of mines (see para.2) is to be flown out (Commander Army engineers to arrange for mines to be brought to Agedabia).

8. Signals documents: Commander Army Signals to ensure that codes and ciphers are available in Agedabia.

9. From 12.00 hrs. on 2 February Gialo assault group will report at least twice daily (morning and evening reports) to Army H.Q.

For Panzer Army H.Q.  
The Chief of General Staff  
p.p. signed: v. Mellenthin. Major G.S.

Appendix 675

Daily report for 31 January 1942

1. Under cover of rearguards, enemy appeared to be carrying out systematic evacuation of Cyrenaica.

2. On 31 January small Army battle groups probed to the south-west and west towards Maraua. Whilst German troops advancing from the south-west succeeded comparatively quickly in breaking down enemy resistance near el Charruba (about 110 km. east of Benghazi), other enemy forces near Maraua offered strong resistance to the German forces until evening. In the course of operations during 31 January, 11 tanks, 1 SP gun and a number of soft vehicles were either captured or destroyed. Over 100 prisoners were brought in.

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41.

3. Plans for 1 February 1942: Continue reconnaissance in the Maraua area.
4. During the period from 21 to 31 January over 3,000 prisoners have been brought in.
5. Army Battle H.Q.: Benghazi.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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1 February 1942

Situation

After the arrival of 2nd Machine Gun Battalion and 3rd Reconnaissance Unit, the Geissler Battle Group started its attack against the positions occupied by 5th Indian Brigade at Maraua. Maraua was taken at about 09.00 hrs. after tough enemy resistance had been broken down. After dealing with numerous minefields and road blocks, Marcks Battle Group pushed from d'Annunzio along the Via Balbia to 20 km. north of Maraua, then, in accordance with orders, turned southwards on to Maraua as the Via Balbia in the direction of Beda Littoria was blown at numerous points. On their arrival they found that Maraua had already been taken by the Geissler Battle Group. The C. in C. therefore ordered that the enemy be pursued immediately on to de Martino. After clearing further road blocks, the battle group reached the heights west of De Martino at about 16.00 hrs. and, from there, attacked strongly held enemy positions. A partial breakthrough could not be widened due to strong and accurate enemy artillery fire and the fact that sufficient of our own artillery had not yet arrived. Orders were given to attack de Martino early in the day on 2 February together with the Giessler Battle Group which had arrived at 18.00 hrs.

Owing to a shortage of P.O.L. the Africa Corps remained in the Msus area.

Of the motorised corps, Ariete Panzer Division continued to cover the area Benghazi, Tocra and Barce whilst Trieste Motorised Division cleaned up and covered the area Ghemines - Sceleidima and to the North. Sabratha Division covered Antelat and Saunnu.

90th Light Division started out for Benghazi.

The Chief of General Staff returned from Rome where, following his conference with the Fuehrer, he arranged for the accelerated delivery of increased supplies for Panzer Army.

Appreciation: Again on 1 February, engagements were fought with enemy rearguards whilst the bulk of 4th Indian Division and 1st Armoured Division retreated eastwards. After enemy resistance at de Martino had been broken down, the pursuit in the direction of Berta was to be continued on 2 February.

Orders and reports: See appendices 676 - 681.

Appendix 676

From: Marcks Battle Group

1 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

05.00 hrs.

Road blocks and minefields cleared, d'Annunzio reached at 04.30 hrs.

/Appendix 677

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Appendix 677

From: Motorised Corps 1 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.20 hrs.

Evening Report:

No tactical changes. 172 prisoners, including 2 officers, taken in Barce area.

Battleworthy tanks: 80

Appendix 678

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 1 February 1942  
To: German General at H.Q. Italian Army, Rome

It has just been brought to notice that the following message of 30 January 1942 was not sent off due to transmission difficulties. Message reads:

The use of Benghazi harbour for dealing with supplies has become an urgent necessity, and calls for the occupation of the area each side of Maraua. This will presumably be completed by German troops by 31 January. The following is the proposed grouping of the Army after this has been achieved:

- a) Flanking positions in the area north-east of Agedabia.
- b) Covering forces each side of Maraua.
- c) Motorised Corps to be equipped to act as a mobile force in the area between Agedabia and Benghazi.

In order to put the above into effect, it will be necessary to move the bulk of the Italian divisions into the area around Agedabia and one Italian division into Benghazi (as garrison troops). Please obtain Duce's approval of this action.

Appendix 679

From: Marcks Battle Group 1 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.30 hrs.

Daily Report:

II/104 which had been ordered to report with all equipment by 20.00 hrs., reported at Battle Group at 20.00 hrs. During advance it had encountered strong enemy resistance 7 km. from de Martino. Only partly successful attack necessitating organised preparations being made during night together with Geissler Battle Group. Attack to be resumed 06.30 hrs. Losses: 1 officer (Lt. Linke) killed, 10 N.C.Os. and privates wounded. Booty: 2 lorries, 1 4.7 anti-tank gun, 1 light anti-tank rifle, 26 prisoners from 7th Indian Brigade and 2nd Battalion Camerons.

Appendix 680

Daily report for 1 February 1942

1. On 1 February the enemy resumed the evacuation of Cyrenaica. He

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43.

attempted to hinder our advance by blowing roads at many points and by intensive mine laying.

2. After overcoming tough resistance near Maraua, the German battle groups pushed eastwards and, by evening, had reached the area south west of Cirene.

3. Plans for 2 February 1942: Further armed reconnaissance in the direction of Berta.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

Appendix 681

From: The German General at H.Q. Italian Army

1 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

On 1 February General Cavallero sent the following telegram to General Bastico:

I enclose herewith operational instructions for future operations, as laid down by the Duce.

The main object of all operational plans remains at all times the defence of Tripolitania by the German - Italian troops in Libya. From this standpoint the individual deployment will be made accordingly.

1. The defence of the area Agedabia - el Agheila - Marada will be maintained by Infantry Division. The present defensive line Marada - el Agheila will be maintained.
2. Permission to move a few of the larger infantry formations from the area around el Agheila into the vicinities of Agedabia and Antelat (with the exception of the Sabratha Division which has already moved forward) is granted; however, these units must be rested and re-equipped. Authority for move is granted subject to adequate transport being available. One division may be moved immediately. The defence line mentioned in para.1 must however be held by, at least, two divisions (exclusive of troops required for the occupation of Marada and eventually Gialo). The divisions remaining in the defence positions near el Agheila must be brought up to strength in those positions.
3. After the moves have been carried out, a forward supply base must be established which is covered by forward infantry divisions and will ensure the supplies for western Cyrenaica until such time as Benghazi harbour can be put into commission.
4. The object of capturing western Cyrenaica is to assure the protection of Benghazi and this is the task of permanent, or in this case motorised units which are not tied down to a definite spot.
5. The troops responsible for the covering of Benghazi will be supported by tank units whose freedom of movement will be subject to the instructions laid down in paragraphs 1 to 4.
6. In order to exploit the present situation, tanks may be granted extreme operational freedom in order to inflict losses on and capture the material of those enemy forces still in central Cyrenaica. On completion of this operation the forces taking part will assemble once again in accordance with the above instructions.
7. It is stressed that it is extremely difficult to bring in supplies by sea and will remain so particularly since stocks of fuel oil are almost exhausted.

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8. Close co-operation with the Luftwaffe is to be maintained on every possible development of the situation.

9. General Rommel is requested to inform the Italian H.Q. in North Africa of his intentions in the light of these instructions, particularly with regard to the use of formations referred to in para.3.

Signed: Cavallero

Postscript by German General at H.Q. Italian Army.

It is requested that intentions as per paragraph 9 be forwarded for transmission to Comando Supremo.

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2 February 1942

Situation

Reconnaissance carried out during the night by Marcks and Geissler Battle Groups, revealed that the enemy had evacuated his positions near de Martino. At 04.00 hrs. both battle groups took up the pursuit. Advancing rapidly to Acquaviva, then south of the Via Balbia, the Marcks Battle Group chased the evading enemy forces. In the afternoon the enemy was located near Gasr el Carmusa and severe losses were inflicted upon him. 200 prisoners were taken, 8 guns 8,76 cm. and several S.P. guns were captured. By evening, the enemy rear positions near Carmusa had been taken. Geissler Battle Group held the position with one battalion around de Martino and one around Berta and carried out reconnaissance against Mechili and Derna.

For the Africa Corps, Motorised Corps, X and XXI Army Corps the day passed quietly without any incident worthy of note. 90th Light Division continued their move to Benghazi and brought the Daumiller blocking force up from Marada.

The enemy continued to withdraw and appeared to have brought up forces into the area west of Tobruk.

Appreciation

The overall picture of the enemy situation suggested that it was probable that the enemy intended to set up a defence line in the area west of Tobruk. There was nothing to suggest an enemy counter-attack. The Panzer Army found itself faced with the choice of either attacking the defensive position that the enemy was building or confining its activities to the occupation of Cyrenaica. The enemy's weakness and low morale were favourable to a continuation of the attack, which could only be carried out by motorised and armoured formations. Stocks of P.O.L. in Africa were only 4 V.S., 1 V.S. = 1 fuel issue for 100 km). With such a limited amount of fuel continuation of the attack was impossible. The C. in C. therefore decided to defend Cyrenaica with weak mobile forces. For this purpose it was necessary to move Africa Corps and the Motorised Corps into the Benghazi area as mobile reserves, whilst the Italian infantry divisions would be used to prevent any possible enemy out-flanking movements along the line Chescem el Chebsc - Saunnu - Antelat - Sceleidima and the Benghazi garrison area. The only divisions available for this task were those in the Marsa el Brega positions; a fresh request was therefore sent by Army H.Q. for permission to move them up.

Orders and reports: see appendices 682 - 689.

/Appendix 682

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Appendix 682

From: Marcks Battle Group 2 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 04.25 hrs.  
Marcks set off at 04.00 hrs.

Appendix 683

From: Marcks Battle Group 2 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 07.55 hrs.

At 05.30 hrs. came up against road blocks and mines at 26 left 1.5.  
Detour will be found. Removal of obstacles will take about two hours.

Appendix 684

From: Marcks Battle Group 2 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 08.37 hrs.

Marcks Battle Group halted at 27,5 left 1,3 as cannot find track.

Appendix 685

From: Marcks Battle Group 2 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 17.20 hrs.

Presumed location at 17.15 hrs. - 33,5 right 3,2. (north-west of Mghebra).

Appendix 686

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 2 February 1942  
To: Africa Corps 19.40 hrs.

Most forward own units area 25 km. south-south-west of Derna. Africa Corps remains in old area.

Appendix 687

From: Marcks Battle Group 2 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.30 hrs.

Large quantities booty not yet sorted, among which 8 guns 8,7 cm., several SP. Guns and 200 prisoners from 4th Indian Division.

Losses: 5 Killed and 3 wounded.

Appendix 688

From: Africa Corps 2 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.45 hrs.

Africa Corps has sufficient fuel to reach Gazala.

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Appendix 689

Daily report 2 February 1942

1. On 2 February, 11th Indian Brigade was pushed back from de Martino and retreated in the direction of Derna.

Further south 5th Indian Brigade, retreating to Martuba, was attacked on the afternoon of 2 February by German battle groups west of Gasr el Carmusa (20 km. south west of Derna). In this engagement 200 prisoners were taken, 8 guns, several S.P. guns and large quantities of other equipment were captured.

1st Armoured Division appear to be still in the area of Mechili. Wireless intercepts revealed that a brigade of the 1st South African Division and 150th Brigade (until now at Marsa Matruh) had been brought up into the area west of Tobruk.

2. Fliegerfuehrer has brought bulk of units to Benghazi, and one close combat group to Maraua.

3. Intentions for 3 February are to take the Gialo oasis, which is apparently still held by enemy rearguards, with weak German forces.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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3 February 1942

Situation

Marcks Battle Group threw back the rearguards of 4th Indian division (5th Indian Brigade) over Martuba - Umm er Rzem and, by evening, reached the vicinity of Tmimi.

At 10.00 hrs. 33rd Reconnaissance Unit reported Derna free of enemy. Geissler Battle Group which had been ordered on to Derna was held up by fuel shortage and did not leave Berta until the afternoon; it was evening before it arrived and occupied the town. The serpentine stretches of the Via Balbia west and east of Derna were blown and made the road impassable for some time.

Remnants of the enemy 1st Armoured Division (Mechili) and 4th Indian Division (Via Balbia) were pushed back further eastwards. The impression that a defence front was being established in the triangle B.Hacheim - Ain el Gazala - Tobruk grew stronger.

The C. in C. ordered the pursuit to be resumed on 4 February 1942 as follows:

- a) Marcks Battle Group to attack the enemy at 06.00 hrs. 8 km. south of Tmimi.
- b) Geissler Battle Group to cover line de Martino - Martuba to the south and east.

Africa Corps and Motorised Corps remain in their present positions. First units of 90th Light Division arrived south of Benghazi.

After receipt of authorisation from the Duce, the move was begun of XXI Corps H.Q. with Trento and Pavia divisions out of the Marsa el Brega positions into the Agedabia area.

Appreciation

The guaranteed retention of recaptured Cyrenaica could only be assured by

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a general line running B.Tengeder - North Segnali - Tmimi. For this purpose it was necessary to use all the Italian infantry divisions whilst the motorised formations would have been held in readiness behind the front as mobile reserve. A mobile defence of the south-east border of Cyrenaica with motorised units alone was impossible. Should the Comando Supremo fail to agree to the release of infantry divisions for use on the south-east border of Cyrenaica, we would have to forgo our hopes of holding the whole of Cyrenaica. In this case we would have to limit ourselves to a defence of strongpoints in western Cyrenaica from the heights of Maraua, the main task being the covering of the area around Benghazi and Benghazi harbour itself.

H.Q. Panzer Army gave preference to the first solution as it had the advantage of offering a better starting point for future operations. In a further demand to Comando Supremo permission was requested to use the divisions of X and XXI Army Corps on the south-east border of Cyrenaica. A move of XXI Corps into the Agedabia area would be insufficient.

Orders and reports: see appendices 690 to 698.

Appendix 690

From: German General at H.Q. Italian Army 3 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 00.30 hrs.

Had already, prior to arrival of your wireless message of 1 February, requested from Comando Supremo release of two Italian infantry divisions for use forward as was mentioned in our wireless message No.5007/42 g.Kdos transmitting instructions. Will also press Comando Supremo for 2nd Division (see paragraph 2 of Comando Supremo directive).

Appendix 691

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 3 February 1942  
To: XXI Army Corps 14.50 hrs.

Duce has granted authority for further divisions to be brought forward. XXI Army Corps will dispatch two divisions to Agedabia immediately using all available convoy space. First one division and then the other will move forward.

Corps Commander to Army Battle H.Q. Benghazi beforehand.

Appendix 692

From: XXI Army Corps 3 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 18.00 hrs.

Report that division will proceed to Balbia on foot. Stores and equipment will be moved by limited transport available and be completed by evening of 4 February. Have requested supply authorities to make available 100 heavy trucks in order that move of Army Corps units may be completed in two journeys. Could commence on morning of 5 February.

Appendix 693

From: Italian Motorised Corps 3 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 18.30 hrs.

/Evening



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48.

Evening report: 18.00 hrs. no tactical change. In the course of mopping up operations, 180 prisoners taken. Battleworthy tanks: 80.

Signed: General Zingales

Appendix 694

From: Marcks Battle Group 3 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa 18.45 hrs.

C. in C.

Marcks 7 km. north of Tmimi.

Appendix 695

From: 90th Light Division 3 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.10 hrs.

Evening report: 3rd Battalion of 347th Infantry Regiment and units of Burckhardt Battle Group arrived in Barce. Otherwise nothing of note.

Appendix 696

From: C. in C. 3 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 21.00 hrs.

Most forward units Marcks at 50 right 13,5. - C. in C. will return about noon.

Appendix 697

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 3 February 1942

To: H.Q. Italian Army in North Africa

An appreciation of the situation given today by Lt. Col. Westphal, General Staff, at a conference with Excellence Gambaro, is confirmed as follows:

By the afternoon of 3 February 1942 the enemy had had to evacuate Cyrenaica almost completely. The following alternatives for further operations in the immediate future arise from this situation:

1. A firm hold on the whole of Cyrenaica requiring
  - a) the deployment of the infantry divisions on a general line running Tengeder - Segnali - Ain el Gazala.
  - b) Motorised Corps held in readiness as a mobile force behind the southern flank of this position, roughly in the area of south-east Cyrenaica.
2. The covering of Benghazi harbour by a position each side of Maraua with covering forces on the south slopes of the heights. This alternative would require:
  - a) One infantry division to be brought into the Benghazi area as garrison troops.

/b)

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- b) The bulk of the infantry divisions to be brought into the Agedabia area.
- c) Motorised Corps held in readiness for mobile operations in the area between Agedabia and Benghazi.

For obvious reasons H.Q. Panzer Army gives preference to the first alternative. This alternative would also hold special advantages from an air warfare standpoint. H.Q. Panzer Army therefore requests the Comando Supremo to release all infantry divisions and permit their being brought up into the positions outlined in para. 1.a).

For Army H.Q.  
The Chief of General Staff  
signed: Westphal

Appendix 698

Daily report for February 1942

1. On 3 February 1942 4th Indian Division retreated, under cover from rear-guards near Gasr el Carmusa, Martuba and Umm er Rzem, via Derna and south towards Tmimi. Air reconnaissance showed that units of 1st Armoured Division had withdrawn from Mechili about 40 km. eastwards. In the triangle Tobruk - Ain el Gazala - B. Hacheim a British defence line appears to be in the process of being set up. For this the enemy has available the badly mauled 1st Armoured and 4th Indian Divisions, 1st Polish Brigade, one brigade of 1st South African Division, 150th Brigade, 1st French Light Brigade, 22nd Armoured Brigade (latter being rested) and 70th Division with remnants of 32nd Army Armoured Brigade. - 2nd South African Division is assumed to be tied down on the Bardia - Sollum front.
2. On 3 February the German battle groups pushed to the Via Balbia near Martuba and resumed the pursuit as far as the area south of Umm er Rzem.
3. No report has yet been received from the forces sent to Gialo.
4. Plans for 4 February 1942: Resumption of the pursuit in the direction of Ain el Gazala.

Battleworthy tanks:-

- a) German: 27/II, 65/III, 10/IV, 4 heavy armoured command vehicles.
- b) Italian: 80

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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4 February 1942

Situation

Starting out at 06.30 hrs., the Marcks Battle Group took the enemy rear-guard positions south of Tmimi after a short engagement. Leaving covering forces in the Tmimi area and the main force along the Via Balbia, the group chased the enemy and by evening reached the area 15 km. north-west of Ain el Gazala. Strong enemy forces were identified in the Gazala position.

Geissler Battle Group covered a general line de Martino - Martuba.

Weak forces of Airborne "Lehrtruppe XI" (Burckhardt Battle Group) occupied the Gialo oasis which had been evacuated by the enemy.

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Africa Corps and Motorised Corps remained in their present positions. 90th Light Division continued its move to Benghazi.

XXI Corps started moving to Agedabia.

In January 1942, 3,300 prisoners were taken. Captured or destroyed were: 337 tanks and armoured cars and other armoured vehicles, 192 guns, and 1,220 soft vehicles.

There were also 50 aircraft shot down or destroyed by army units.

Appreciation

The enemy appears to be reforming for defence with the bulk of his forces in a line north of B.Hacheim - Acroma - west of Tobruk, whilst units of 1st Armoured Division and reconnaissance units are covering the building of the position along a general line B.Hacheim - Ain el Gazala.

The enemy had been badly mauled and therefore an attack in the immediate future was not anticipated. Since our own P.O.L. did not permit us to move our forces forward and since the infantry divisions were not available, the Army could only cover the south-east border of Cyrenaica with small groups.

Orders and reports: See appendices 699 - 703.

Appendix 699

From: 90th Light Division 4 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 06.30 hrs.

Africa Artillery Battery and remaining units of Burckhardt being transferred to Barce, otherwise nothing to report.

Appendix 700

From: Marcks Battle Group 4 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 17.10 hrs.

Kilometer 75 before Tobruk and track Tmimi - Halegh el Eleba free of enemy. Ghibli (type of sandstorm).

Appendix 701

From: German General at H.Q. Italian Army 4 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.10 hrs.

Comando Supremo awaiting suggestions from Panzer Army as requested in paragraph 9 of directive of 1 February. One Army Corps will have to remain in rear positions at Marsa el Brega, which is to be made into a defence line.

Appendix 702

From: Marcks Battle Group 4 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.30 hrs.

Daily Report: At daybreak advanced to 51,5 right 17 without making

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contact with enemy. Reconnaissance in direction of Tobruk and Mechili. At 53,5 right 21, 33rd Reconnaissance Unit shot up an enemy reconnaissance car. There, there was at 18.00 hrs. slight enemy artillery fire. At 18.30 hrs. approximately 100 soft vehicles 15 km. south of own covering line travelling from west eastwards. Booty: 4 armoured reconnaissance cars, 2 light lorries, 9 medium lorries, 1 car, 1 motor cycle, 1 trailer, 2 armoured machine gun carriers, 2 anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns. Losses: none. Prisoners: 6.

Appendix 703

Daily report for 4 February 1942

1. Enemy reconnaissance around and south of Ain el Gazala covered the withdrawal of 4th Indian Division to area around Acroma. 1st Armoured Division withdrew each side of the Trigh el Abd to the area of B. el Harmat.

Behind a screen of covering forces along a line Mteifel el Chebir - Ain el Gazala, the enemy appears to be establishing a defensive position west of Tobruk between B. Hechaim - Acroma and to the north.

2. Chasing the enemy, the German battle groups reached the area west of Ain el Gazala on 4 February. Derna was taken on the evening of 3 February, Tmimi was taken on 4 February. In January 1942 the following were either captured or destroyed:

377 tanks and armoured cars and other armoured vehicles,  
192 guns,  
1220 soft vehicles (mostly destroyed),  
50 aircraft (destroyed or shot down by army units),  
3,300 prisoners were brought in.

Luftwaffe successes are not included in these figures.

3. Plans for 5 February and days following: Holding of captured area by weak German forces.

Use of the Italian infantry divisions cannot be made in Cyrenaica since the Comando Supremo has, so far, only granted authority for 2 infantry divisions to be brought forward into the Agedabia area.

Panzer Army Africa

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5 February 1942

Situation

Marcks Battle Group covered the area taken and carried out reconnaissance to the east and south. Geissler Battle Group put units into Mechili and from there carried out reconnaissance to the south-east.

A reinforced Bersaglieri Regiment of Motorised Corps arrived in Mechili in order to block the area near Mechili with its main force and B. Tengeder with forward units.

Main force of Motorised Corps and Africa Corps remained in present area.

Units of 90th Light Division reached Barce.

XXI Army Corps continued its move to Agedabia.

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The enemy carried out strong reconnaissance against Marcks Battle Group and repeated low level air attacks against both groups. As a result of these attacks considerable vehicle losses were sustained. Own fighter cover was not possible since the ground organisation in Martuba could not function before midday on 6 February at the earliest.

Appreciation

On 5 February the enemy was on the defensive. As long as there was no change it was possible to hold Cyrenaica with partial forces. One had to realise however that the enemy would probe forward with stronger forces, when he became sure of the weakness of the German forces. To meet such an emergency it was necessary to bring the bulk of the motorised units forward. The P.O.L. situation caused this step to be put off until some later date.

Orders and reports: see appendices 704 - 718.

Appendix 704

From: Geissler Battle Group 5 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 11.35 hrs.

Own location since evening of 4 February was a crossroads at tracks Derna - Mechili, Martuba - Via Balbia track. Here consolidated group. No contact with enemy. 3rd Reconnaissance Unit 7 km. east of own location. Reconnaissance on track Martuba towards Mechili in progress. Anti-tank patrol returned without making contact with enemy, large mine-field located. Request location Marcks Group and further instructions.

Appendix 705

From: Geissler Battle Group 5 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 14.30 hrs.

Own reconnaissance found Mechili free of enemy. Own covering forces in Mechili.

Appendix 706

From: Marcks Battle Group 5 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 18.15 hrs.

During whole day enemy low-level air attacks on the Via Balbia in Sector held by group. At least 40 vehicles hit of which at least 12 burnt out. Require urgently constant fighter cover from early morning tomorrow as supply line is endangered.

Appendix 707

From: Geissler Battle Group 5 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.20 hrs.

Own location still crossroads Derna - Mechili, Martuba - Via Balbia track. Strong covering forces put into Mechili. One listening patrol en route for Mechili - during the day 4 enemy reconnaissance cars about 3 km. south-east of

/Mechili

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Mechili. Evening withdrew to north. Four low-level air attacks on group, two bombing raids, otherwise no enemy observation.

Appendix 708

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 5 February 1942

To: Marcks Battle Group - 33rd Reconnaissance Unit 19.25 hrs.

Current orders remain in force. Geissler has task of covering Martuba track from Berta to intersection of road Derna - Mechili. Within the next few days the groups in action near Derna and Tmimi will return under command of Africa Corps.

Appendix 709

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 5 February 1942

To: Geissler Group 19.30 hrs.

Task remains the same, i.e. covering of Martuba track from Berta to intersection of road Derna - Mechili and clearing up area north of this track. Within the next few days the groups in action around Derna and Tmimi will return under command of Africa Corps.

Appendix 710

From: Africa Corps 5 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 19.30 hrs.

No enemy armoured reconnaissance or air activity.

Tank situation: 26/II, 68/III, 10/IV, 4 armoured command vehicles.

Appendix 711

From: Marcks Battle Group 5 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.00 hrs.

Daily Report: Improvement and consolidation of strong points. Intensive enemy low-level air activity, considerable losses in vehicles and supplies. Since midday enemy vehicle traffic in both directions along track 47 right 20 towards 52 right 20,5. At dusk large transport columns heading southwestwards. Reconnaissance in force along 53,5 right 19,5, enemy entrenchments located. Possible enemy building defensive position at this point. Request urgently with effect from 6 February fighter cover over operational area and bombers over track 47 right 20 to 52 right 20,5. Losses through enemy low-level air attacks about 15 soft vehicles, detailed losses not yet assessed.

Appendix 712

From: XXI Army Corps 5 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 20.30 hrs.

From 20.00 hrs. on 5 February new Battle H.Q. Agedabia. 1st Regiment and Trento section have reached point ordered. Supply transport not yet arrived.

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Appendix 713

From: German General at H.Q. Italian Army, Rome  
To: C. in C. Panzer Army Africa

Montezemolo leaves by plane on 6 February. Duce annoyed that report in accordance with paragraph 9 of Comando Supremo instructions of 1 February not yet to hand and that the meeting with Bastico has not yet taken place. X Army Corps to remain at Marsa el Brega; OKW in agreement. In other respects Cavallero retains the same conception of future deployment as that given to Gause on 31 January.

Appendix 714

From: Motorised Corps 5 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 22.00 hrs.

9th Bersaglieri Regiment reinforced by one artillery section and one company of engineers en route for Mechili. Issues and laying of mines arranged with commander engineers. In the area of Sceleidima 14 English 8,8 cm. guns have been found, 8 of which are in working order.

Signed: Zingales

Appendix 715

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 5 February 1942  
To: All Units

Ref: H.Q. Panzer Army Africa Ia signal of 5 February 1942.

135th Flak Regiment will take over the regrouping and reforming of the German anti-aircraft forces of the Army. For this purpose the following immediate regrouping is ordered:

1. I/33 Flak leaves the Army to be sent home to re-form. Its available equipment and transport will be handed over to I/18 Flak and it will move in a body to Tripoli for onward shipment to Germany. Commencing on 8 February, 4 and 5/33 will be taken out of their present positions and be sent off to Benghazi to 135th Flak Regiment.
2. I/18 Flak will form from the personnel and equipment available 2 heavy and 2 light batteries, which will be given special orders for their operational use after they have been formed.
3. The six 2 cm. guns of 114 Reserve Flak Battery, at present with 90th Light Division, are to be sent to Benghazi on 8 February for the defence of the town, from 8 February 6/25 returns to its parent unit.
4. 135th Flak Regiment will issue special instructions for 606 Flak Battery.
5. The move up of I/Flak 43 after its arrival in Tripoli will be arranged by 135 Flak Regiment.

For Army H.Q., Chief of General Staff  
Signed: GAUSE

Appendix 716

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 5 February 1942  
To: All units

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/Army

Army Orders for Future Operations

1. The enemy has been thrown back to the east and out of Cyrenaica. Suffering great losses he has fled via Mechili and Derna into the area west of Tobruk. It would appear that he intends to make a defensive stand in the area B.Hacheim - Acroma - Tobruk. Reconnaissance forces are covering a line Mteifel el Chebir - Ain el Gazala.

2. Units of Panzer Army Africa will hold the south-east border of Cyrenaica and cover the area east of Agedabia - Benghazi. Motorised Corps will remain in readiness in the areas around Barce and south of Benghazi in order to ward off any enemy attempt to advance or counter attack. Weak forces will hold Gialo.

3. Motorised Corps and Africa Corps:

a) Motorised Corps on the right and Africa Corps on the left will cover the south-east border of Cyrenaica by each placing one reinforced regiment as covering forces in a line B. Tengeder - Segnali - B. Temrad - west of Ain el Gazala. The main forces are to be held in the area around Mechili and on the heights north of Tmimi. In the event of an attack by superior enemy forces the covering forces are to be withdrawn to these main force positions. The area around Mechili and north of Tmimi is to be held. In this connection the object is, among other things, to prevent any enemy attempt to seize the airfields at Mechili and Martuba. Dividing line between the Mechili and Tmimi sectors: B. Hamuda - B. Halegh el Eleba - Si. Breghisc - Mteifel el Chebir (all included in the Mechili groups area). Motorised Corps will dispatch the Mechili group immediately. An engineer company of X Army Corps is available for obstacle construction. This company will be brought up by Motorised Corps. Reports will be rendered when sectors are taken over. Africa Corps will relieve soonest those forces at present in the area south-west of Tmimi, i.e. Marcks Battle Group, Geissler Battle Group, 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance Units. Reports will be made when relief has been completed. When relieved, Marcks Battle Group, Geissler Battle Group, 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance Unit will return under the command of Africa Corps and 90th Light Division. Corps will maintain regular wireless contact with the Mechili and Tmimi sectors and report continuously to Army H.Q. about the situation in these sectors. The troops in the Mechili and Tmimi sectors will be relieved at regular intervals.

b) The main force of Motorised Corps will remain in the area Soluch - south Benghazi - Ghemines. Main force of Africa Corps will move into the area Borgo Torelli - Tolemaide - Tocra - east of el Abiar by 15 February.

Motorised Corps and Africa Corps will rest and train their formations in the above-mentioned areas. Both corps will mop up British stragglers in their respective areas.

4. 90th Light Division takes over as holding force in western Cyrenaica. In this connection the division will use XI Fliegerkorps demonstration para-troop unit and 288th Special Formation to occupy a blocking point in the south, east and north-east of Maraua in accordance with verbal instructions. Exact course of this position is to be reported. The bulk of the division will rest and train in the area of Maraua - d'Annunzio. 155th Lorried Infantry Regiment and 361st Africa Regiment are to be equipped with enemy captured vehicles as quickly as possible.

5. XXI Army Corps (Trento, Pavia and Sabratha Divisions) will hold the area east and north-east of Agedabia with its main force and will put units into Benghazi garrison. For this purpose corps will be deployed as follows:

Trento Division on a general line Chescem el Chebsc - Mn. el Grara - Saunnu.

/Sabratha



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56.

Sabratha Division's main force in the Antelat area. Units on the heights between Antelat and Sceleidima (inclusive) as blocking forces.

Pavia Division as Benghazi garrison troops in area Regima - Coefia - approx. 10 km. south of Benghazi. The division will also place units on the heights north of Sceleidima (exclusive) as blocking forces.

6. Of X Army Corps the following remain in the Marada - Marsa el Brega position: 1 reinforced battalion in Marada, 1 reinforced battalion near Maaten Giofer, 1 reinforced battalion near Marsa el Brega. The remaining units of X Army Corps will be moved into an area each side of the Via Balbia between Marsa el Brega and Agheila to facilitate supply distribution. X Army Corps will rest and train. One engineer company is detached to Motorised Corps (see paragraph 3).

7. Commander 104th Artillery and Commander Italian Army Artillery Nicolini will gather together the German and Italian artillery troops for rest and training as follows:

German artillery in the area north-east and south-east of Benghazi (Si. Frag - Benina - Berca - S. el Bazzar).

8. In support of Benghazi, 135th Flak Regiment will carry through the re-organisation of the German anti-aircraft formations in accordance with special instructions. The resting of the Italian anti-aircraft forces is the responsibility of the Italian Army Artillery C.O. Nicolini working in conjunction with 135th Flak Regiment.

9. Commander Army Engineers will arrange establishment of engineer obstructions in accordance with verbal instructions received in:

- a) the blocking position on the south-east border of Cyrenaica,
- b) the Maraua position,
- c) XXI Army Corps sector.

Commander Army Engineers is responsible that all H.Q. staffs are kept informed with regard to locations of minefields.

10. Fliegerfuehrer Afrika will carry out air reconnaissance and provide bomber forces according to the demands of Army H.Q. The main force of Fliegerfuehrer is, at the moment, in the area Maraua - Benghazi. Units will be moved into the area of Tmimi - Martuba - Derna as soon as possible. Further, it is intended to use Mechili as an advanced landing field.

11. Training: In the case of all units not engaged in operations, training and the strengthening of discipline are the main considerations. A special order on this subject will follow.

12. With regard to the salvage of captured enemy material, a special order will be issued by Army H.Q. (Chief Q.M.).

13. Lines of attack: from 12.00 hrs. on 8 February 1942 the following new lines of attack come into force:

a) Crossroads Acquaviva - crossroads B. el Gubi. Line of attack begins near Acquaviva at zero line 50.

b) Cross tracks Giof el Matar - Regima. Line of attack begins near Giof el Matar at Zero line 175.

14. Commander Army Signals will maintain wireless communications to the various

/corps,

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57.

corps, 90th Light Division, C.O. Rear Army and German General in Rome, and telephone communications to Motorised Corps and Fliegerfuehrer Afrika. Telephone communications to Africa Corps, XXI Army Corps and 90th Light Division are to be set up soonest. In this connection H.Q. staffs of formations concerned will report locations of permanent battle H.Q.'s.

From 12.00 hrs. on 8 February 1942 the following new flare signals come into effect:

a) Flare Cartridges:

Red	=	We are here (Own F.D.L.)
Green	=	Enemy attacking (artillery support required)
White	=	We are advancing - Lift artillery fire

b) Hand smoke signals:

Red	=	Own tanks
Blue or violet	=	Tank warning

15. Army Battle H.Q.: Benghazi

The C. in C.  
Signed: Rommel,  
General

Appendix 717

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

5 February 1942

To: All units

A) Enemy grouping

1. British 13. Army Corps having withdrawn from Cyrenaica has again established a front west of Tobruk. In a line B.Hacheim - B.el Harmat - Acroma and to the north there appears to be a defensive line with 1st Armoured Division between B.Hacheim and B.el Harmat, 150th Brigade north of B.el Harmat, 1st South African Division south of Acroma, and 4th Indian Division have 5th Indian Brigade near Acroma and 11th Brigade joining up on each side of the Via Balbia.

This new enemy front is protected by covering forces of 6th and 7th South African reconnaissance units along a line Mteifel el Chebir - Ain el Gazala. A reconnaissance section of 1st Armoured Division (probably 11th Hussars) is still in the vicinity of Segnali and to the south.

13 Army Corps has at its disposal, in addition to the Tobruk force, - reinforced 70th Division with remnants of 32nd Armoured Brigade, 1st French Light Brigade (brigade strength) and Polish Brigade.

2. British 30 Army Corps, formerly in Tobruk, has moved its H.Q. to Bardia. It has under command the 2nd South African Division in the area of Sollum - Bardia - Capuzzo and the remainder of 1st Armoured Regiment and 22nd Armoured Brigade which is presumably resting in the Gambut area.

3. In western Egypt and the Nile Delta the following formations are held down as occupation forces: 7th, 12th, and two thirds of 50th British Divisions, units of 5th Indian and two Greek Brigades.

Of the 7th Armoured Division which has presumably been withdrawn to Cairo to rest, one armoured brigade will be ready for action at the beginning of February.

/B)

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58.

B). Short assessment of enemy situation in  
North Africa

From the forces operationally engaged in Marmarica, 2 divisions are tied down as occupation forces in Tobruk and on the Bardia - Sollum front. Of the troops stationed in Egypt, only one armoured brigade is battleworthy. Therefore there are at the moment battleworthy and available 4 - 5 semi-motorised infantry divisions, 150 cruiser tanks and about 90 Mark I tanks. These forces are not in a position to wage anything but a defensive war.

It is not yet clear to what extent the enemy's position will be improved (as OKH thinks) by the arrival in the course of the next few months of a slow and steady flow of divisions from U.K. as it is not yet certain whether these divisions are destined for the middle or the far east. In any event it is to be anticipated that fresh troop transports will be sent out to relieve the British formations which have been in action since the beginning of the offensive in North Africa and have been badly mauled and partly destroyed.

To sum up it has been established from many captured enemy documents that as late as mid-January it was the British intention to continue the offensive in Tripolitania, until this was completely frustrated by the German - Italian counter-offensive. A new British offensive will not be possible until a large number of fresh formations has been brought in and a new supply base has been established.

Appendix 718

Daily report 5 February 1942

1. Enemy and own situation unchanged.
2. In accordance with instructions from Comando Supremo on 1 February the following has been ordered for future operations:
  - a) The blocking of the eastern border of Cyrenaica by a reinforced regiment each from Motorised Corps and Africa Corps with main forces in Mechili and Tmimi respectively.
  - b) Covering of the area around Maraua by 90th Light Division.
  - c) The use of two divisions (Trento, Sabratha) of XXI Army Corps on a line Chescem el Chebsc - Saunnu - Antelat - Sceleidima and a further division (Pavia) to cover the area of Benghazi (including the Jebel foothills north of Sceleidima).
  - d) The concentration of Africa Corps in the area around Barce and motorised corps in the area Soluch - Benghazi south - Ghemines.
  - e) The leaving of X Army Corps in the Marada - Marsa el Brega position.

Trento, Pavia and 90th Light Divisions have started to move up into their new areas.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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6 February 1942

Situation

In front of the Marcks Battle Group sector there was intense reconnaissance activity by both sides, concentrated mainly in the area North Segnali -

/B.Temrad

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G.334617/EFT/9/52/60

B. Temrad. In the afternoon 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance Units were placed under command of the battle group for the advance on B. Temrad. The reconnaissance units threw back strong enemy reconnaissance forces and in the evening took B. Temrad and covered the area to the south and east.

Geissler Battle Group covered the area Gasr el Carmusa and Mechili. In the evening the units in Mechili were relieved by a reinforced Bersaglieri Regiment of Motorised Corps.

Main forces Motorised Corps and Africa Corps remained in their present areas.

XXI Army Corps and 90th Light Africa Division continued to move their units into the areas of Agedabia and Maraua.

Covered by forces in the line B. Hacheim - Ain el Gazala, the enemy continued preparation of the defensive positions in the sector of B. Hacheim - Acroma and to the north. A reconnaissance section of 1st Armoured Division carried out reconnaissance over north Segnali and Mechili.

Appreciation

The German counter-attack had ended. It has not only led to the recapture of Cyrenaica but had also inflicted such punishment on the enemy that he had been forced to switch over to the defensive. The British Command was not in a position to take up the offensive again until such time as formations had been rested and fresh troops brought in. This could not be effected in less than 6 to 8 weeks.

On the other hand Panzer Army had achieved its success with comparatively slight losses. It was now time to make good the losses we had suffered in Marmarica and to restore the Army to its original fighting strength.

Orders and reports: see Appendices 719 - 727.

Appendix 719

From: XXI Army Corps 6 February 1942  
To: Panzer Army Africa Ia 08.00 hrs.

Move of Trento will be continued. Otherwise nothing to report.

Appendix 720

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia 6 February 1942  
To: German General at H.Q. Italian Army, Rome 08.55 hrs.

With reference to your wireless conversation of 5 February you are informed that:

1. Comando Supremo instructions of 1 February were not transmitted by Bastico until night of 4/5 February. Report concerning intentions in accordance with paragraph 9 was sent by courier to Bastico and to German General by wireless on 5 February.

2. Meeting with Bastico did not take place due to the fact that C. in C. was forward on 3 February and could not be spared and that owing to lack of time Bastico turned down a suggestion that they should meet half-way between the front and Benghazi. Further, on 1 February the C. in C. waited in vain in Benghazi for Bastico who cancelled the appointment at the last minute.

/Appendix 721

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60.

Appendix 721

From: Marcks Battle Group

6 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

16.30 hrs.

3rd Reconnaissance Unit arrived 15.00 hrs. 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance started off at 16.00 hrs.

Appendix 722

From: Marcks Battle Group

6 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

19.10 hrs.

Daily Report: Improvement of positions and reconnaissance. Several minor demolitions, probably in connection with construction of positions at 153,5 right 20 and to the immediate south. In front of these positions screen of enemy covering forces with armoured cars. From there increased enemy artillery activity. One armoured car of 33rd Reconnaissance damaged.

Since 16.00 hrs. 3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance Units en route to 149 right 20. Several vehicles knocked out by low-level air attack among which was one half of Batterie Riecken transport. One 8,8 flak gun and one 2 cm. flak gun arrived. 2,5 V.S. held.

Appendix 723

From: 90th Light Division

6 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

19.30 hrs.

Burckhardt Battle Group less 1 anti-tank company, 2 companies and special equipment, arrived in Agheila, Agedabia and Barce.

Search for position carried out. Low-level air attack near Annunzio on 155th Lorried Infantry Regiment. 1 dead, 3 seriously wounded, 2 slightly wounded.

Appendix 724

From: Panzer Army Africa Ia

6 February 1942

To: Geissler Group & Motorised Corps

20.05 hrs.

By late evening of 6th one reinforced regiment of Motorised Corps will arrive to take over covering in B. Tengeder - Segnali sector with main force in Mechili. After hand over, Geissler Group will be withdrawn.

Appendix 725

From: Africa Corps

6 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa

20.30 hrs.

Evening report: No enemy reconnaissance activity, slight air activity. Tank situation: 62/II, 88/III (plus 6 at present still without crews, at 8th Armoured Regiment), 14/IV, 5 large armoured command vehicles.

/Appendix 726

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61.

Appendix 726

From: Marcks Battle Group

6 February 1942

To: Panzer Army Africa Ia

21.00 hrs.

3rd and 33rd Reconnaissance Units reached Bir. Temrad at 20.00 hrs, track blocked. No enemy traffic.

12 enemy armoured vehicles and a few S.P. guns were taken, south of units on the edge of the Jebel.

Appendix 727

Daily report 6 February 1942

1. Day passed quietly.
2. Gialo oasis occupied by weak German forces.
3. During the night of 5/6 February enemy air attacks on Benghazi and Tripoli. In Tripoli direct hits were scored on Army vehicle park and caused much damage to vehicles.

Panzer Army Africa Ia

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CONCLUSION

The objective of the British autumn offensive of 1941 was to destroy the Axis forces in North Africa, to occupy Libya and thereby establish contact with the de Gaullists in North Africa in order ultimately to take possession of the entire North African coast as a basis for an attack on southern Europe. Thus, the offensive was based on far-reaching military and political aims.

During several months of preparation the British command had assembled all available forces in the Middle East Command area to ensure the success of the offensive. In addition, battle-experienced formations already operating in Libya were not only fully replenished, but were also reinforced on an appreciable scale, particularly with artillery. Three infantry divisions and an armoured division - likewise extensively equipped with artillery - were also brought up. At the beginning of the offensive the British Eighth Army was superior to the Axis forces in tanks by about 75%, in armoured cars by about 750% and in light artillery by about 180%. Only in infantry battalions and heavy artillery was its superiority slighter, amounting to only 30%. The R.A.F. had been brought up to an unprecedented strength and had a superiority of about 200% in fighters and about 50% in both bombers and reconnaissance aircraft. The Mediterranean Fleet, including a number of heavy units, was standing by at Alexandria ready to support the Army's operations. Later it escorted transports carrying troops and material along the coasts of Egypt and Libya and participated in the operations in the Tobruk - Bardia area and at Halfaya without the possibility of being exposed to any effective counter-measures.

The assembly of all the formations for the offensive was skilfully camouflaged (including wireless deception measures) and was favoured by the weather. Thus, the enemy succeeded in retaining the element of surprise. Although the British command showed skill and foresight in preparing the offensive, it was less fortunate in carrying out the actual attack. Contrary to the principle of bringing all available forces to bear at the decisive point, only elements

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62.

of the Eighth Army attacked on 18 and 19 November. The result was that these individual formations were so heavily hit that some of them had to be withdrawn as no longer fit for action while fighting was still in progress. At no time or place during the battle in Libya did the British command operate with all its forces concentrated at the decisive point. This basic error in command was one of the reasons why the British operations did not result in success.

The following observations were made:-

The British command was intent on exploiting previous operational experience. It was aware of its inferiority to the German command and therefore attempted to learn from the latter. However, in practice it hardly deviated from the former unwieldy and methodical type of command. The issue of orders followed a routine pattern and covered every detail, thus allowing little freedom of action at formation and unit level. The command was usually very slow to grasp any situation which arose with the development of operations.

In general the British soldier fought well, although the German offensive spirit was never achieved. The officers were brave and self-sacrificing, but showed a certain amount of reluctance in taking independent action. The non-commissioned officers were thoroughly good.

The ground reconnaissance units, which were strong in numbers and extremely effective owing to their being equipped with self-propelled artillery, carried out their tasks with great skill.

Attacks were usually launched with several spearheads, and frequently with a large number of spearheads, thus appreciably reducing their effect. They were very strongly supported by artillery, at times on the scale of five or six artillery regiments per division. This was apparently intended to compensate for the inferiority of the British armour to the German tanks.

When on the defensive, the enemy preferred reverse slope positions. These were always covered by a strong screen of armoured cars, in which the enemy possessed great superiority.

Unusual features were provided by the Long Range Desert Group - a formation trained and equipped for long-range reconnaissance and harassing operations in rear areas - and the Commandos who carried out sabotage and raids behind the lines.

Panzer Army operations were directed with the objective of concentrating the numerically inferior forces at its disposal at the decisive point for offensive operations whenever possible. This aim was limited to a certain extent by the difficulties arising from warfare conducted by Allies and by the supply situation, which was at times critical. However, it was always maintained that because we were in fact numerically inferior, only offensive action could lead to success. Thus, even when defensive operations were necessary, these were carried out on a mobile basis. In carrying out this principle the command's exclusive aim was to attack and, if possible, to destroy the enemy. The retention or capture of territory was of no importance. Thus, as far as the outcome of the operation as a whole was concerned, it made no difference if Marmarica or Cyrenaica were temporarily occupied by the enemy. On the contrary, it was of decisive importance to maintain the Axis forces intact so that a counter-attack might be launched at the right moment. The recapture of territory given up earlier was the natural result of a successful counter-attack.

The German forces fought with distinction throughout the operations, which lasted nearly three months. The command and officers of all ranks, who were given maximum responsibility and frequently left to act on their own initiative, made an important contribution to the success of the operations by acting independently. The courage of the German soldier in Africa faced with

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a better-equipped and acclimatised enemy will always deserve mention. Even when retreating, the German troops never lose the feeling of superiority over the enemy. The confidence of the troops is shown by photographs of German prisoners in Cairo. Their bearing proves that the German soldier can endure with dignity the hard fate of captivity as well as heavy fighting.

Co-operation between Panzer Army and Fliegerfuehrer Africa was good and was strengthened and further improved by the frequent visits of Field Marshal Kesselring, who took a particular interest in the constant personal contact with Panzer Army Headquarters. Although the enemy's air superiority was very great at times the Luftwaffe formations always provided excellent support for Panzer Army's operations, except when supply difficulties severely restricted air activity. The absolute superiority of the Germans over the British was also evident in the air. In addition to the notable successes of the German fighters, the indefatigable operations of the reconnaissance aircraft deserve special mention. Working under the most difficult conditions, these aircraft always provided the command with valuable information.

The usual problems of warfare conducted by allies arose in the matter of co-operation with the Italian Armed Forces. However, initial difficulties were soon overcome. Co-operation between German and Italian formations underwent a decisive improvement after all Italian troops in the theatre of operations had been subordinated to Panzer Army. After a time most of the different conceptions of command were replaced by German methods. However, the rigidity and denial of initiative to be found throughout the Italian command could not be removed completely. The performance of the Italian soldier was reduced by the deficiencies of his command. Care must always be taken not to employ Italian troops in particularly dangerous positions, as they find it very difficult to withstand critical situations and being badly outflanked. The individual Italian soldier had certain good qualities and was always unassuming and willing to help.

The losses inflicted on the enemy - primarily by German forces - between 18 November 1941 and 6 February 1942 were very heavy and clearly show the extent of the British defeat. Twelve thousand prisoners were taken and, according to their own statements, enemy casualties amounted approximately to a further ten thousand men. This figure is probably higher. During the battle the following were captured or destroyed:

- a) 1623 tanks, armoured cars and other armoured vehicles (excluding those destroyed by the Luftwaffe),
- b) about 2,500 vehicles (excluding those destroyed by the Luftwaffe),
- c) 329 aircraft.

However, Axis losses were also comparatively heavy, as follows:

1. Casualties:

	<u>German</u>	<u>Italian</u>
a) Officers:		
Killed	104 = 7%	85 = 3%
Wounded	144 = 8.5%	155 = 4%
Missing	201 = 10.5%	1,172 = 34%
b) NCOs and Men:		
Killed	1,032 = 7%	951 = 1.5%
Wounded	3,339 = 7%	1,967 = 3%
Missing	9,940 = 20%	17,382 = 30%
	(inc. 4,500 at Bardia-Halfaya)	(inc. 8,000 at Bardia-Halfaya)
	14,311 = 29%	20,300 = 38%
	14,760 = 33%	21,712 = 40%



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64.

	<u>German</u>	<u>Italian</u>
2. Tanks	220 = 85%	120 = 80%
3. Guns	42 = 40%	181 = 48%
4. Aircraft	170 = 160%	105 = 150%

The political effect of the battle in Libya followed the course of the fighting. British influence in the Mediterranean increased when the enemy advanced into Libya, approximately at the same time as the Russian winter offensive was launched. If the offensive had resulted in the occupation of Libya, French North and West Africa would undoubtedly have become British spheres of influence. Thus, the entire North African coast would have become an Anglo-American front, Europe would have been completely cut off from Africa and the blockade in the south would have been narrowed down and made extremely effective. The creation of this "Second Front", which has always been demanded by the Soviet Union and would have had an unforeseeable effect on the course of the war, was prevented by the successful outcome of the three-month battle in Libya.

The Axis victory in North Africa helped to raise and strengthen the morale

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of the German people at a time when they were influenced by the severe winter battles in Russia. The morale of the Italian people also improved considerably.

When making a critical appreciation, the battle in Libya, which began with the British attack on 18 November 1941 and ended with the recapture of Cyrenaica by Axis forces on 6 February 1942, must be considered and assessed as a whole. The decisive military outcome was that the British Eighth Army was so heavily hit that it was incapable of conducting any major operation for months. On the other hand Panzer Army Africa, in spite of its much more difficult supply situation, was completely ready for further action after the conclusion of the British offensive. The political effect of the British reverse cannot yet be fully appreciated. However, it is already clear that British prestige has suffered another severe blow, while the position of Germany, and particularly of Italy, in the Mediterranean has been further strengthened.

A.H.B.6 Distribution

Same as Translation VII/104

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