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THE PLAN FOR THE

INVASION OF MALTA.

A study prepared by the  
Italian Air Ministry.

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## PLANS FOR THE OCCUPATION OF MALTA (OPERATION "C3").

During the first months of 1942, the Supreme Command began to plan a 'coup de main' for the surprise occupation of Malta which was already besieged from the sky and blockaded from the sea. The surprise attack of the Island's defences while in this critical position, was to be known as "Operation C3".

The plan was submitted to Hitler, who indicated that he fully agreed with a direct operation against the Island. If British landing attempts were not carried out in the West, which would have called for a concentration of forces, he promised the full co-operation of the German forces to ensure the success of the operation. Not only would Germany have put two battalions of parachutists at our disposal, but she would have supplied a certain number of cargo-gliders and a quantity of modern light tanks, which would have been especially suitable for this type of operation.

The duty of preparing the special aerial requirements for the operation devolved upon the Italian Air Force General Staff.

The following were essential for the success of the operation:-

1. Accurate preparations carried out with the maximum of secrecy.
2. Air and sea supremacy in the Central Mediterranean Sector.
3. Preliminary and continuous blockade of the Maltese Archipelago.
4. Continuous and heavy bombing attacks aimed at the enemy defences as much as possible, to be carried out without indicating in which area the landings were to be attempted.

The Italian Air Force and the Sicilian Air Force began their attacks on Malta from the first days of the War, with bombing operations and the intervention of fighter formations to meet the enemy. These operations were carried out with the aim of reducing the aerial strength of the Island, smashing its defences, airfield installations and administrative centres.

These methodically carried out operations kept the Island under continuous control and greatly checked the naval traffic which was attempting to bring supplies of men and munitions to Malta from Gibraltar and Alexandria.

With the transfer of the 2nd C.A.T. (German Air Corps) to Sicily, air operations were intensified and in addition dive bombers were used.

The increased strength of the Sicilian Air Force Command and the co-operation of the 2nd C.A.T., soon achieved the following results: the gradual but steady weakening of the air strength of the Island, with the destruction of airfields and unit H.Q.'s, the destruction of British aircraft in the air and on the ground and the annihilation of the Island's A.A. defences.

The intensified operations against the enemy convoys which were attempting to supply the Island led to the creation of an air and sea blockade, an indispensable condition for any future operations against the Malta defence system.

In April 1942, by which date it was considered that the defences would be disorganised and sufficiently weakened, the General Staff foresaw that the operation would assume certain characteristics and issued the following operational directives:-

1. Aim of the operation: the surprise occupation of Malta.
2. The operation, which would have the characteristics of a 'coup de main', was to be carried out with adequate forces in the estimated maximum period of ten days.

3. The occupation of the Island was to be carried out as follows:
  - (a) Night landings from the sea on the S.E. coasts of Malta with adequate forces for such a specialised operation.
  - (b) Night landings of paratroops in co-ordination with the sea landings, for the purpose of aiding their success and proceeding with the occupation of the principal airfields of the Island. All available paratroops to be employed.
  - (c) Air transport of units, as soon as the airfields were available for landings.
  - (d) Transport of units by sea, to land at a favourable moment at the same places used by the troops mentioned at (a), in order to counterbalance the effect of any possible delay in using air transport, due to unfavourable conditions on the airfields.
  - (e) Feint landings by means of M.T.B's. at as many coastal points as possible.
4. Direct naval support to be used for the following purposes:-
  - (a) minesweeping;
  - (b) protection of convoys;
  - (c) assistance in landings;
  - (d) clearing obstructions.
5. Indirect naval support to be used for the purpose of hampering the participation of enemy naval forces, and to engage them if necessary.
6. Air support, by both combat and transport aircraft to be given as laid down in directives to be issued later.

In order to implement the above directives, the General Staffs of the three Services were to establish a close liaison, to ensure that the operation would be carried out with all speed and efficiency.

These points, in particular, had to be borne in mind:-

- (a) The composition of the Expeditionary Corps in troops and material and their employment.
- (b) Maximum speed in the training and preparation of the paratroops and airborne units and daily supervision of the aircraft needed for their transport.
- (c) Speedy transfer of troops and materials of the Expeditionary Corps, from their bases to the air and naval take-off points.
- (d) Maintenance of troops in a constant state of readiness for transport by sea.

The Italian Air Staff put forward to the Chief of the General Staff the view that the capture of Malta was primarily an air operation and that the ground and naval operations were necessarily of a supporting nature.

The operation, according to the Italian Air Staff, was to be carried out as follows:-

/Phase 1

Phase 1 (Preliminary).

1. By means of destructive attacks the Air Force would provide the essential conditions for the possession of the Island.
2. The Air Force, with the aid of the information at its disposal, would select the time for the operation.

Phase 2.

The Air Force would prepare the landing of the paratroops, give them air cover and drop supplies, thus establishing a beachhead on the Island and a base for the air and sea landings.

Phase 3.

1. The artillery would take over the conduct of the ground operations on the Island.
2. The Air Force would maintain superiority in the air.
3. The Air Force would provide supplies and maintain liaison.

The conditions prevailing in Malta in April 1942, were due to the following factors:-

- (a) The precarious naval situation of the enemy in the Mediterranean (the almost complete absence of battle ships and the absence of aircraft carriers).
- (b) The wearing-down of the Island's defences by the besieging Axis forces and by the operations of the Axis Air Force which were being conducted on an ever-increasing scale.

Air Forces necessary for the operation.

It was assumed that a total force of not less than 1000 aircraft of all types would be needed in order to maintain strong and unceasing attacks and at the same time to carry out the following tasks, in co-operation with the Naval forces:-

1. Blockade of the Island.
2. Protection of transport.
3. Transport Operations.
4. Protection of naval forces.
5. Attacks on shipping.
6. Maintenance of liaison.

An essential condition for the success of the operation was the closest co-ordination between the Italian Air Force and O.B.S. (Southern Area Command of the Luftwaffe).

In view of the great importance of the operation, the Italian Air Force maintained that it was necessary to throw in all reserves available. The number of aircraft at its disposal would be approximately as follows:-

Fighters	3½ Stormi	240 aircraft
Bombers	5 Stormi	140 "
Torpedo-carriers	2 Gruppi	30 "

Dive Bombers	1 Gruppo	18 aircraft
Assault aircraft (CR. 42 with glider bombs)	1 Gruppo	30 "
Transport aircraft	4 Stormi	120 "

a total of about 578 aircraft which, with about 500 aircraft from Luftflotte 2, was considered adequate for the operation.

The Air Staff drew up for the Supreme Command the estimated order of battle of the flying units on 1st May and 1st June 1942. For each date, alternative plans were made, dependent on the various operational moves. The most favourable hypothesis was based on the assumption that the 2nd C.A.T. (Luftwaffe) would remain in Italy. This would be of great value in case Malta, although militarily weakened by the offensive still in progress, could succeed in regaining some of its strength, through air re-inforcements from England. If this hypothesis were correct, a constant force of Italian aircraft could be maintained in Sicily and the existing strength could be almost doubled by adding more fighters and torpedo-bombers.

Hypothesis No. 2 also assumed that the German forces would remain in Sicily, and dealt with the possibility of the Italian Air Force giving the maximum co-operation in the operations against Malta. In that case, the Sicilian forces would have been strengthened with a dive-bomber Gruppo from the reserves, in addition to a fighter Stormo and torpedo-bomber Stormo.

Hypothesis No. 3 foresaw the possibility of Malta being still capable of offensive and defensive action and the need for carrying out continuous attacks against her, with Italian Air Forces only. In that case, although it would not be possible to station a number of forces in Sicily, equal to the number of Italo-German forces already there, it would be necessary to retain certain units in order to keep Malta in a state of subjection and with limited offensive powers against our traffic with Libya and against our southern bases. For these tasks an addition of 4 bomber Gruppi, 1 dive bomber Gruppo and one fighter Gruppo was foreseen. Naturally such an increase would mean a loss for other requirements, and a drain on our reserves.

Hypothesis No. 4, which assumed that Malta had been occupied, dealt with the forces necessary for the defence of the Island, the defence of Sicily and the defence of our naval traffic against attacks from Alexandria and Gibraltar.

On the basis of the directives from the Supreme Command, the Italian Air Staff made a careful study for the execution of the 'coup de main', in particular of the possibilities of a night landing by paratroops. It was considered that such landings were not very practicable except in moonlight, because of the need for formation flying, the dropping of troops in different zones and for low level reconnaissance with crews well acquainted with the terrain.

Having regard to the fact that the take-off of aircraft and the landings of airborne troops could take place only in daylight, the following points had to be considered in order to establish the earliest and most effective time for these operations:-

- (a) The attack could have been launched at fifteen minutes after twilight.
- (b) Allowing thirty minutes for the assembly and take-off of one Gruppo of S.82's, which was sufficient to land a Battalion, the formation could have been 'en route' 45 mins. after twilight.
- (c) If the operation had been fixed for the end of May, the first attacks on the Island could have taken place at 07.05 hours.

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Bearing in mind the above factors, and the necessity of coinciding the naval landings with the dropping of paratroops, it was possible to formulate two alternative plans:-

1. Sea landings, followed by paratroop landings a few hours afterwards. Whilst the first would have had to take place during the night, the landing of paratroops would have been carried out during the hours of the day, thus enabling the defences to concentrate against the individual paratroop units.
2. Paratroops to land after daybreak, followed by a landing from the sea. This plan had the disadvantage of disclosing to the enemy the area where the complex action had to take place, would have brought up all the mobile reserves to the most threatened points and a large part of the enemy defences to bear on the paratroop landings; thus weakening them at the crucial moment. This grave disadvantage could have been offset by heavy and incessant machine-gun attacks in the landing areas.

Both plans presented great difficulties and considerable uncertainty. The ideal plan would have been to make the sea and air landings almost simultaneously, one during the last hours of darkness and the other in the first hours of daylight.

As the success of the operation depended largely on the airborne Divisions, it seemed a good idea to concentrate the paratroop descents at three points instead of six. These forces would aim at getting possession of the two airfields, in co-operation with the troops landed by sea. In this way the result of the attack on the airfields would have been more probable in spite of the very strong garrisons.

#### UNITS OF THE ITALIAN AIR FORCE TO BE USED IN THE OPERATION.

- 8 bomber Gruppi
- 2 torpedo-bomber Gruppi
- 1 dive-bomber Gruppo
- 2 assault Gruppi
- 5 fighter Gruppi

These units had the following duties: execution of offensive operations, during and after the 'coup de main' (including those of co-operation with the sea landings as foreseen by the Supreme Command); co-operation with the landed troops; emergency operations which may have been called for during the course of the operation.

#### OPERATIONAL TASKS OF THE AIR FORCE.

1. Preliminary Phase.
  - (a) Intense and systematic bombardment of the Island, the attacks to be distributed so as to avoid giving the enemy a chance of guessing the particular zones where the air and sea landings were to take place. The dive-bombing and machine-gunning attacks were to have been aimed at the defence fortifications, with special emphasis on the AA defences.
  - (b) Visual and photographic reconnaissance of the disembarkation zones.
  - (c) Sea reconnaissance over a large area, beginning from X Day-2 ("X day" was the date for the execution of the 'coup de main'), to ascertain enemy naval movements.

2. Operational Phase: Part 1. (Paratroop and naval landings and the formation of beachheads).

- (a) Intensified bomber operations on the points chosen for the landing of paratroops, with a brief pause, prior to the time fixed for landings. Actions on the adjacent areas and on those chosen for the sea landings immediately prior to the time (to be arranged with the Navy).

During the landings, low-level attacks to be carried out against the adjacent zones, and against any potential sources of danger to the air and sea operations.

- (b) Bombardment of the zone N.E. of the Rabat-Zebbug-Tarxi and en-Marsa Scala Group, as foreseen in the Supreme Command directives for the 'coup de main'.

- (c) At the same time, the following operations were to take place:-

- (i) delayed action bombs and delayed action bombs with self destroying fuses to be dropped on the lines of communication and the approach roads to the important objectives (centres of resistance, forts, pillboxes, etc.) so as to create blockages, inflict losses and hinder the movement and replacements of personnel.
  - (ii) incendiary bombs, to be dropped on objectives where the effect would be greatest;
  - (iii) feint attacks, co-ordinated with the other operations, for the purpose of diverting defences and to undermine morale;
  - (iv) smoke screen bombs to be dropped to hamper enemy observation and reaction against the low flying aircraft and paratroops;
  - (v) feint paratroop landings (from bombers) in areas other than those chosen for the actual sea and air landings so as to confuse the defences as to the true landing zones.
- (d) In addition to the above activities, fighter aircraft were to carry out attacks on defence positions, proposed landing areas and airfields; provide cover for the naval forces, air transport and bomber formations; and maintain air supremacy.

3. Operational Phase: Part 2.

This phase was to be characterized by the airborne landings, after the airfields had been made serviceable. The following operations were envisaged:-

- (a) Offensive actions (bombing, machine-gunning, anti-personnel bombs) on 'active' objectives, that is those capable of intervening against our ground elements.
- (b) Bombardment of the zone North of the 'Victoria' line.
- (c) Protection of transport aircraft.
- (d) Fighter operations in order to maintain full air superiority.

4. Operational Phase: Part 3.

Air transport of various supplies, (food, munitions etc.), to be carried out in accordance with the progress of the operation.

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the help of the Navy had to be enlisted in this task. This included the use of 5 or 6 submarines.

With the change in the situation on the Island, due to the transfer of fighters there and the supply of arms and munitions by the minelayer 'Manxman', the 'coup de main' plan was scrapped, and the possibilities of an attack in force were considered.

This operation would consist of a quick succession of violent attacks so as to gain a beachhead for the landing of the forces, afterwards developing into an operation leading to the possession of the whole Island. The number of paratroops available for the operation was considered adequate to resist for several hours so as to establish a good footing for further operations.

Assuming that our air and naval superiority would have overcome the enemy defences after a period of time, the gradual conquest of the Island was to be carried out in the following stages:-

1. Preliminary operations aimed at disorganizing and distracting the defences.
2. Occupation by paratroops of a zone offering good landing possibilities to light sea forces and airborne troops.
3. Sea landings of light forces in the above zone, together with sea and airborne landings in the main landing areas.
4. Extension of the occupation, after the conquest of the coastal strip for the main landings of troops and materials.
5. Main landing.
6. Capture of airfields.
7. Development of the operations on the Island for its final conquest.

It was decided that:-

- (a) the operation should take place at full moon and in favourable weather conditions;
- (b) the main landing should take place at Marsa Scirocco, the secondary landing of light forces, on the SW. coast of the Island;
- (c) the paratroops should land at 1600 hrs;
- (d) the 'coup de main' should take place in the Birzebuggia-Calafrana zone, that is in the part of the bay where the main disembarkation would occur;
- (e) the fast naval ships which were taking part in the 'coup de main' and the landing of small nuclei of troops along the SW. coast of the Island, would have to be in the area before twilight, when the naval landings were to take place;
- (f) the ships to take part in the main action were to leave Sicily at 1600 hrs. and the landing was to take place at night, as early as possible.

In order to combat the possible intervention of naval forces from Alexandria and Gibraltar, it was arranged that all the bomber and torpedo-bomber units, together with fighter and assault aircraft if necessary, which were stationed in Sardinia, Libya and the Aegean as well as the

/torpedo-



During all operational phases, torpedo-bombers were to stand by in order to take-off at any moment to engage enemy forces and ships transporting re-enforcements and supplies.

#### TRANSPORT OF PARATROOPS.

The number of S.32 aircraft necessary for transporting the paratroops was fixed at 140, to be allotted as follows:-

I	Paratroop Battalion, supported by one platoon of 47 men and one mortar platoon of 81 men	21 A/C
II	Paratroop Battalion, supported by 1 platoon of 47 men	19
III	Paratroop Battalion, supported by one mortar platoon of 81 men and one battery of 47 men	24
IV	Paratroop Battalion, supported by one mortar platoon of 81 men and two platoons of 47 men	23
V & VI	Paratroop Battalions, supported by 1 mortar platoon of 81 men and two batteries of 47 men	46
2	Paratroop Regiment Commands	6
	Paratroop Divisions Command	1
	Total	<u>140</u>

#### TRANSPORT OF AIRBORNE DIVISIONS.

All available aircraft were to be used (transport units and air lines, except flying boats) for these operations, including those already used for the dropping of paratroops. A number of the flying boats would have been adapted for air/sea rescue services.

It was clear that the complex operation could only be considered possible as long as the 2nd C.A.T. remained in Sicily, as the Italian Air Force was not strong enough to conduct such an operation itself.

Meanwhile, as it was certain that the British High Command would intervene with every naval and air means at their disposal in the Mediterranean or at nearby bases, should Operation C.3 be carried out, the Supreme Command deemed it necessary that every attempt to hamper the execution of the plan should be attacked by mass forces and with the utmost determination. The Supreme Command therefore ordered all the General Staffs concerned to make a careful study of any possibilities of enemy intervention and to take the necessary steps.

On the 9th May, 1942, the 2300 ton minelayer "Manxman" entered Malta and remained the whole of the following day. The ship immediately entered dock, where it was unloaded under the protection of a well placed smoke-screen. German and Italian aircraft attempted to hit the ship but were driven off by the increased number of Spitfires which had been sent to the Island and by the ground defences. (14 Axis aircraft were lost on that day and several others were damaged).

#### CHANGE OF PLANS.

It had always been apparent that the question of supplies to Malta was a vital one and every effort had been made to stop any kind of ship breaking the blockade. As the Air Force could not cover all the sea routes,

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2. It was realised that, in order to overcome such formidable defences, (including AA defences and the Island garrison), a large scale operation was necessary.

The maximum co-operation of the Air Force was needed, in order to compensate for our inferiority at sea and also to neutralise the defences.

3. It would be necessary to land all our forces within a few hours of the first embarkation, as owing to our weakness at sea, we could not count on landing re-inforcements during the succeeding days. On the other hand, in view of the difficulties in maintaining the troops, it was necessary to overcome the coastal and internal defences as soon as possible. The most important was the Victoria line (between Torre Maddalena and Ras ir Rahebi).

It was necessary for the attacking force to be roughly twice that of the defence, which was about 15,000 men. Allowing for the inevitable losses at sea, this meant a force of between 35 and 40 thousand men, excluding the paratroop units.

4. In order to carry out the disembarkation of personnel, a special type of landing craft was designed. This could take a cargo of 8 tons and was capable of holding 40 men in addition to the crew. The craft was fitted with two silent motors, capable of propelling it at a speed of 7 knots for 25 miles; it had a landing stage in the bow and one machine-gun. With a hundred of these landing-craft it would have been possible to attempt the landing of the first 4,000 men forming the vanguard of the expedition.

The tanks would have had to be carried on the larger craft, which were adapted for them, whilst there would have been a need for at least 160 - 180 barges, each holding 200 men. All would have had to be fitted with landing stages and armed with automatic weapons.

#### EXPEDITIONARY CORPS FOR THE OCCUPATION OF MALTA

The forces to be used for carrying out operation C.3 consisted of the following:-

##### - XXX Army Corps - General SOGNO

Friuli Infantry Division  
Livorno Infantry Division  
Superga Infantry Division

##### - XVI Army Corps - General ROSSI

Assietta Infantry Division  
Napoli Infantry Division

##### - Special landing troops

San Marco Regiment  
A Detachment of the Blackshirt Battalion

##### - Reinforcement Units

The following were also part of the Expeditionary Corps:-

##### - Airborne Army - General STUDENT

German Paratroop Division  
Italian Paratroop Division  
'La Spezia' Airborne Infantry Division

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torpedo-bomber units based on Sicily should attack these forces. The following units were available for these duties:

#### SARDINIA

36th Torpedo-bomber Stormo	- Cagliari
51st Bomber Gruppo	- Villacidro Alghero
24th fighter Gruppo	- Cagliari & Alghero

#### AEGEAN

104th Torpedo-bomber Gruppo	- Rhodes
41st Torpedo-bomber Gruppo	- Gadura
47th Bomber Stormo	- Gadura
161st Fighter Gruppo	- Rhodes

#### LIBYA

131st Torpedo-bomber Gruppo	- K.2
133rd Torpedo-bomber Gruppo	- K.2
35th Bomber Stormo	- Barco
50th Assault Stormo	- Derna
2nd Fighter Stormo	- Martuba
4th Fighter Stormo	- .....
150th Fighter Stormo	- K.3
3rd Fighter Gruppo	- K.2
12th Fighter Gruppo	- Castel Benito
160th Fighter Gruppo	- Sorman

#### SICILY

132nd Torpedo-bomber Gruppo	- Pantelleria
130th Torpedo-bomber Gruppo	- Pantelleria

Apart from the units mentioned above and those to be used for operation 'C.3', no other serviceable units were in existence. Thus the whole of the Italian Air Force in the Mediterranean sector was to be used, directly or indirectly. The forces which were to deal with enemy intervention (air & sea) in the Mediterranean, would have taken off either from Sicily, Sardinia, Libya or the Aegean according to the situation and the direction of the enemy threat, which would have been ascertained by means of systematic reconnaissance and co-operation between Superaereo, Supermarina and O.B.S.

On the 30th May, 1942, the Supreme Command issued an order that, in order to prepare for Operation 'C.3', all air transport with Italian N. Africa was to be suspended from 1st June, with the exception of the regular civil and postal air services.

The Naval Supreme Command, after a study of the proposed operation against Malta came to the following conclusions:-

1. The operation was, without doubt, one of great difficulty, because the defences could be considered one of the most highly concentrated in the World. It was estimated that the coastal defences of the Island consisted of - 85 naval batteries, including 19 of large calibre; various types of defensive obstructions in the most important bays, besides those in the port of Valetta; submerged barbed wire entanglements along the beaches; all kinds of defences (both active and passive), including high tension wire entanglements and mines on the beach. In addition, there were minefields encircling the Archipelago. As the batteries were either in caves or in well-protected gun emplacements, they were not very vulnerable either from the sea or the sky.

X + 1(day):

The advance from the beachhead would be carried out towards the North, in the direction of Birzebbugia and in co-operation with the 'Friuli' Division, with the aim of eliminating the defences on the lower coastal strip.

Continuation of the operation towards the North.

After having gained possession of the Marsa Scirocco Bay and having reached the Dingli, Shagra Tal Iskof, Sijuwi, Nicabba, Kirkop Gudia, Ashiak, Zeitun and Marsa Scala line, the operation would have proceeded from the Dingli - Sijuwi area towards the North, with the aim of capturing the Gargur and Tal Maddalena positions and dividing the Island in two, overcoming the defences of the Victoria line by attacking them from the rear, cutting off La Valetta and attacking it from all sides.

Night before X + N day

The 'Assietta' Division would disembark in the Famagosta area and afterwards in the Dingli - Shagra Tal Iskof area in order to replace the paratroop units.

X + N Day

The landing of the 'Napoli' Division and the AA artillery was to take place at Marsa Scirocco.

Night before X + N + 1 day

The Napoli Division would take up positions in the Aijuwi zone; the artillery of the Army Corps in the Dingli zone.

X + N + 1 day

- The XVI Army Corps, supported by the Armoured Group would attack, with the capture of the Gargur - Tal Maddalena positions as their objective;
- The 'Assietta' Division would attack the Rabat positions from Dingli, whilst the 'Napoli' Division would advance to Zebbuġ from Sijuwi.
  - One Rabat was occupied, part of the forces would face the Victoria line whilst the rest would turn towards Gargur - Tal Maddalena, from Rabat and Zebbuġ.
  - In the final phase, a regiment would be landed in the Saline bay, Cala S.Marco and Torre Maddalena area, supported by the 'Superga' Division coming from Gozo, in order to harass the Gargur - Tal Maddalena positions from the North as well.

PARATROOP OPERATIONS

The paratroop operations were aimed at forming a beachhead in the Southern Sector of the Island, which included Dingli, Zurrico and Bubakra, and of eliminating the enemy defences within the beachhead itself, in order to facilitate the sea-landings.

Troops to be used:

- Italian Paratroop Division
- 7th German Paratroop Division

The launching of the Divisions had to be carried out in three waves on the same day, the first in the morning, the second during the afternoon and the third a few hours before nightfall.

/First

The Command of the airborne forces would have been taken over by OBS (German C-in-C, Southern Area) just before the operation. General Carlo VECCHIARELLI, the Vice-Chief of Army Staff was to be in Command of the whole Expeditionary Corps.

The broad outline of the operation, as planned, by the Italian Army General Staff, was as follows:-

X day: Maximum intensification of air operations on any objectives capable of interfering with our paratroops. The Italian Paratroop Division and the 7th German Division would have been dropped in the Dingli-Zurricco zone (Famagosta zone) with the aim of forming a beachhead and to mop up the surviving defences in this area.

X + 1(night):

The XXX Army Corps would have begun landings in the Famagosta area, with the Friuli Division and Armoured group, and the 'Livorno' Division.

The landing of the larger units would be followed by special landing units, who would form small beach-heads.

X + 1(day)

Operations for the Conquest of Marsa Scirocco

Main operation: This was to be carried out in two phases, which in favourable conditions could follow one another without breaking the continuity and without the intervention of a second Division.

First Phase

The Friuli Division, the 10th Armoured Group and the German Paratroop Division had the task of extending the beach-head until they reached the line of: Ta Kandia - Tad Dual caves - Tas Salib - Ta Karach - Ta Klantun - the heights to the N and S of Wied Il Koton - Ras l'Artal.

Second Phase

With the entry of the 'Livorno' Division into the operation, the advance would proceed in the direction of Ashiak - Zeitun and the Bay of Marsa Scala for the occupation of Marsa Scirocco from the rear and the consequent elimination of the enemy defences between this line and the sea. (A detailed operation was also foreseen for the elimination of the Delimara Peninsula defences by means of naval action).

The protection of the Northern flank was entrusted to the Armoured Group which would co-operate with the German Paratroop Division coming from the area to the East of Nicabba. The paratroops had the task of extending the beach-head and then advancing to the conquest of Sijuwi.

Supplementary Operations.

X day: - At dusk airborne troops would land at Fort Benghaisa and in the area to the South of Calafra, with the duty of annihilating the defences of the Fort itself and of Calafra.

X + 1(night):

Landings of Infantry units and sappers to take place in the Fort Benghaisa area, with the aim of forming a small beachhead between Fort Benghaisa and Calafra and eliminating the existing defences. At the same time, assault groups were to land on the East coast, with a feint attack on the West coast of the Delimara peninsula.

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First wave

- Italian Division: 4 Battalions with 47/32 guns
- German Division: 6 Battalions with 4 gun detachments

Operational Tasks:

- (a) Occupation of the elevated plain of Dingli and the Eastern slopes so as to meet any enemy attacks from the North and forming a strong column for the naval beachhead;
- (b) Occupation of the Zurrico - Krendi area in order to gain possession of the coastal road of Zurrico and Bubakra (from which we could beat off the attacks from Torri Zurrick) and the Krendi zone; the occupation forces would advance immediately towards the West until they were in contact with the forces which landed at Jebel Chantar, at Tal Provvidenza.
- (c) Mopping-up operations from the rear, immediate control of the roads, from Tal Provvidenza to Ghar Lepsi and from Zurrico and Grandi to Torri Zurrick in order to hamper attacks on bridge constructions etc.

The launching of one Battalion of assault engineers, transported by gliders and with the duty of taking part in the elimination of the existing defences behind the line held by the paratroops and the formation of three small beachheads in co-operation with the troops to be transported by sea, was to take place at the same time as the launching of the first wave.

Second wave

- 2 Italian Paratroop Battalions with supporting elements;
- 3 German Battalions with artillery and heavy armament.

Operational tasks:

- (a) Re-inforcement of the occupied zone and completion of the mopping up operations.
- (b) Formation of reserves if possible, in order to meet any counter-attacks and to ensure unhampered fire by the batteries against the forces coming from Rabat.

Third wave

Other re-inforcing elements of the two divisions were to be launched in order to give full support to the organisation of the defences.

Mine-laying

In order to protect the beachhead, mine-fields had to be laid if possible, with the dropping of 4 Kg. delayed action bombs by the Air Force.

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EPILOGUE

The Libyan battle began on the 26th May, 1942. In accordance with orders from Field Marshal Rommel, a large scale offensive was carried out by Italian and German troops, which soon led to the breaking of the British lines of defence and the occupation of Tobruk. In view of the decision taken by the High Command to continue the advance in order to attempt the invasion of Egypt, it was necessary to put off operation 'C.3' in order to put all the available forces into the battle.

Subsequently, the tide of battle turned and the British counter-offensive which followed led to the occupation of Libya, Tripolitania and finally of Tunis. With the loss of this last bulwark of resistance in Africa, the plan for the invasion of Malta was finally abandoned.

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