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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION VII/112

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21ST PANZER DIVISION REPORT

on the

BATTLE OF ALAMEIN

and the

RETREAT TO MARSA EL BREGA

23rd October - 20th November, 1942

TRANSLATED BY

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21st Panzer Division
Abt. Ia Ref: 15

Divisional Battle Headquarters,
27 November, 1942

Ref:- Africa Corps Signal dated 22 November, 1942

Summarised Battle Report for the Period
23 October to 20 November, 1942

23 October

The division is located in the area specified by Army and its formations are mixed with those of the Ariete Division in the southern sector behind the divisions of Italian 10 Corps.

During the day there was occasional artillery fire in the area between 10 Corps and the German positions and on advanced elements of the division.

At 20.30 hours heavy artillery fire suddenly opened up some distance north of the divisional sector and continued throughout the night. There was intensive air activity and bombing attacks over the divisional area. Owing to this, the division ordered increased alertness during the night.

24 October

At 06.30 hours Italian 10 Corps reported that about 20 tanks had penetrated into the mine box between points 103 and 115 (south of Deir el Munassib); there were a further 100 tanks still east of the mine boxes; Himeimat was being attacked by an enemy battalion.

At 07.00 hours this report was confirmed by 5th Panzer Regiment observers.

At 09.15 hours Africa Corps ordered that by reason of the Panzer Army Headquarters order, the enemy would have to be thrown back again beyond the eastern edge of the minefield by nightfall. Action would be taken against the enemy force which had made the penetration by concentrated fire from the divisional artillery, Army artillery and Italian batteries. An effort would be made to force the enemy out of the mine boxes by means of artillery fire. This having been done, Italian troops could then re-occupy the mine box evacuated by the enemy.

As a result of this order, II/155th Artillery Regiment was instructed to move up into the area west or south of II/115th Artillery Regiment (Army artillery) and make preparations for the concentration with the other artillery units. In addition, II/5th Panzer Regiment was assembled west of the right flank of Battle Group South to be sent in to counter-attack in the event of an enemy breakthrough.

At 11.40 hours infantry was put into the enemy-occupied mine box.

The division had meanwhile discussed with 10 Corps the measures to be taken for the attack.

At 13.20 hours 10 Corps requested that the artillery concentration be fired at 14.30 hours, but at 14.15 hours the Corps reported that the infantry for the counter-attack group could not arrive before 16.30 hours.

The division pointed out that this time was extraordinarily late, and would probably lead to the attack continuing after nightfall. However, in addition to all available artillery, all S.P. heavy field howitzers 13, 5/ and 8/5th Panzer Regiment, 1/39th Anti-Tank Abteilung (S.P.), 2/200th Panzer

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Engineer Battalion and the assault artillery batteries of the Ariete Division were assembled.

The artillery concentration, which opened up at 16.30 hours, was well placed and good effects were observed.

The elements of Battle Group South brought up to go in with and support the Italian infantry attacked, but the divisional commander who had come forward in person to watch the attack observed that the 10 Corps infantry (1 battalion of Pavia Division) had not reached the specified start line. A search for the battalion revealed that it had been dropped about 2.5 km away from the front and thus it could no longer be expected to arrive.

The supporting attack by elements of Battle Group South came to a halt about 300 metres in front of the western minefield as Italian infantry and engineers had not attacked. German engineers were committed just as it was getting dark.

The division therefore decided not to enter the mine box while it was dark, and withdrew the elements of Battle Group South to a reverse slope position about 1,200 metres west of the minefield, while the two Panzer companies were taken back 3,000 metres to be held in readiness again as reserves.

At 20.00 hours infantry of the Folgore Division moved up again to the western edge of the mine box.

At about the same time Italian 20 Corps ordered the Bersaglieri Battalion operating with Battle Group South to the el Himeimat area so that this corner-stone could be held in any event. The gap thus caused in the Battle Group's position was inadequately filled by 2nd Battalion 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment.

During the day the enemy reinforced the tank force which had made the penetration to about 80 - 100.

25 October

Moderate artillery fire during the night.

In the penetration area the enemy attempted to cross the western mine belt, but was repulsed. The battle group located west of the mine box came under heavy artillery fire during the morning and consequently sustained losses.

At 13.00 hours, therefore, the division decided to take advanced elements back about another 500 - 1,000 metres to escape this fire.

Enemy aircraft were very active over the divisional sector throughout the day.

26 October

Apart from artillery harassing fire in the Battle Group South area, there was no enemy activity in the divisional sector during the morning.

At 14.20 hours a concentration by II/155th Artillery Regiment on an assembly of enemy infantry of battalion strength in the Trig. Point 585 area was so effective that the enemy did not attack.

At 15.10 hours German elements of Battle Group North were subordinated to Africa Corps and were ordered to move across the Ariete track, past Corps Battle Headquarters to the west, and into the northern sector of the Army front.

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The commander was instructed to precede his group and report at Africa Corps.

6 tanks were knocked out during the day. For the past two days about 30 tanks have remained stationary in the mine box, and it was believed that these had been so badly damaged that they had been abandoned by their crews.

At 21.00 hours an order was received, instructing the division to move to the Point 39 area in the northern sector of the Army front. As no warning order had been received and the troops could not be taken out of their positions at night in the specified time without first making preparations, the division moved off northwards across the Ariete track west of Corps Headquarters at 22.45 hours.

During the move Ia established contact with Africa Corps and received instructions.

27 October

The division arrived in the specified area at about 09.00 hours. Owing to the unfavourable terrain and enemy air attacks, the divisional column was widely dispersed. III/155th Artillery Regiment and II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had not yet arrived.

At about 10.00 hours the division was informed that it should be ready to attack in an easterly direction as from 15.00 hours to throw back the enemy force which had advanced between mine boxes L and I in the direction of the Otto track.

Subordinate commanders were called in for briefing at 12.30 hours. Shortly after this had begun the G.O.C. arrived and interrupted the proceedings, so that the commanders could not be released to their units until 14.15 hours.

After assembly in the Trig. Point 426 area, the G.O.C. ordered the attack to be launched at 15.00 hours.

The right flank of the attack was sent in along the line Trig. Point 426 - easternmost point of the Otto track - north of Trig. Point 453 - Trig. Point 495.

After a brief artillery bombardment, 5th Panzer Regiment attacked in waves at 15.00 hours. At first the enemy appeared to be taken by surprise and the advanced unit succeeded in reaching the Otto track area. At this point the attack was halted as a result of strong fire on the flanks from anti-tank guns and dug-in Pilot tanks in the vicinity of Trig. Points 406 and 453. The regiment sent in the second wave in an encircling movement to the right to eliminate the threat to the flank, but the defensive effort of the extremely well dug-in enemy against the advanced wave remained undiminished. Thereupon 5th Panzer Regiment decided at 16.00 hours to take out the second wave and let it advance on the left of the first wave. It moved forward as far as the advanced wave, but was also halted by flanking fire from the north and north-east.

The 5th Panzer Regiment task - to push through to Trig. Point 495 with the advanced wave while the second wave turned northwards to facilitate the advance by 15th Panzer Division infantry - could not be achieved.

The 15th Panzer Division report that the infantry to the north had reached the Alarm track area (Trig. Point 407) was later found to be incorrect.

The replacement of unit commanders of the Panzer Regiment ordered in the evening on the basis of this report was consequently cancelled.

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As II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment had still not arrived, 5th Panzer Regiment had to be left in the front.

In the course of the attack 80 enemy infantrymen were taken prisoner on the northern flank and a number of tanks were knocked out along the front.

28 October

During the night 27/28 October the enemy penetrated the 15th Panzer Division front in the Trig Point 33 area.

An Abteilung of 5th Panzer Regiment was thereupon taken out of the front and at dawn was sent in to attack in the direction of Trig. Point 33, where the situation was soon restored. In so doing, the Abteilung established contact with I/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment which was still in this area and constituted the remainder of the former Battle Group North. The other units of this battle group were ordered back to division during the night and reached the division in the morning.

The commander of I/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment made a direct report to Africa Corps on the enemy penetration at Trig Point 33. He was thereupon called to account for this action by the G.O.C., and it was explained that when moving round the penetration area to reach his other companies he had without knowing it reached the 164th Infantry Division telephone terminal and had used this opportunity to send off the report. On being reproached that the battalion was not allowed to report directly to Africa Corps, it was discovered that an order changing the subordination of the remaining units of Battle Group North had not arrived, and whether and by whom this order had been issued could not be ascertained by division.

After restoring the situation, I/5th Panzer Regiment returned to the regiment which remained at the front throughout the day.

An armoured group advancing south-westwards from mine box I at 08.00 hours was attacked on the flank by 5th Panzer Regiment, acting on its own initiative, and after losing several tanks the enemy was forced back in a north-easterly direction.

Between 10.00 and 11.00 hours the commander of 15th Panzer Division reported that the division had launched an attack on Trig. Points 406 and 453 and that 8th Panzer Regiment had already taken Trig. Point 453.

The division thereupon decided to attack again immediately to reach the objective specified on the previous day. Unfortunately it was found that the reason for the continuation of the attack was based on an error; 8th Panzer Regiment had not yet taken Trig. Points 406 and 453 and enemy defensive fire from this area against 5th Panzer Regiment was undiminished.

The division subsequently decided to discontinue the attack at 14.00 hours and to send in II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and 200th Panzer Engineer Battalion reinforced by 617th AA Battalion and 2/39th Anti-Tank Abteilung to relieve 5th Panzer Regiment.

At dusk the Panzer Regiment was withdrawn from the line. Infantry took over the positions and advanced level with the foremost tanks during the course of the night. Advanced elements of the division came under very heavy artillery fire while the relief was in progress.

III/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and 1/39th Anti-Tank Abteilung, which had remained in the Battle Group South area, were subordinated to the division again during the day and were instructed to reach the area Trig. Point 417 - 419 in a night march with the task of crossing the minefields through the lane at

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Trig. Point 460. As a result of a misunderstanding, the battalion did not go through this lane but circled round to the west across the Ariete track, and consequently did not arrive until noon the following day.

Successes achieved during the day: 8 tanks
 14 anti-tank guns } destroyed
 3 carriers

2 trucks and 60 men taken prisoner.

Enemy aircraft were very active during the day, and 11 bombing attacks were made on the divisional area.

29 October

The reconnaissance officers of Trieste Division arrived at divisional headquarters during the morning. Trieste Division had been ordered to relieve 200th Panzer Engineer Battalion on the right flank of the division and I/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment at Trig. Point 33 in the 15th Panzer Division's sector. II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was to remain in its positions until its relief could be effected by the release of units from other parts of the front.

The Trieste Division reconnaissance officers carried out their work in the twilight and during the night. The main body of Trieste Division was to reach the Telegraph track by 14.00 hours on 30 October, and would then be brought forward from there to the specified areas.

During the day there were heavy artillery concentrations, particularly on the sector held by II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and enemy aircraft were very active during the morning and between 13.30 and 16.30 hours.

Successes: 16 tanks and 8 anti-tank guns destroyed.
 180 prisoners taken.

30 October

Although enemy air activity over the divisional area was limited to one fighter-bomber attack, the enemy maintained unusually heavy artillery harassing fire throughout the day along the entire divisional front and on the unit adjoining its left flank (III/115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment).

During the morning patrol activity indicated that the enemy had made a slight withdrawal to the east. II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was thereupon ordered to establish direct contact on the left with III/115th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and to reach the old positions directly east of the Otto track. The battalion carried out reconnaissance for this during the day and moved forward into the specified positions at dusk.

The front was thus shortened considerably.

Contrary to the arrangement, the relieving battalions of Trieste Division did not arrive at the Telegraph track until about 16.00 hours. The relief could therefore not be carried out during the evening as planned, but had to take place during the night.

However, the units of the division to be relieved were brought out before dawn on 31 October.

31 October

After daybreak the division reached the area about 1,000 metres west of

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Trig. Point 506, where it remained at the disposal of Africa Corps. II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment remained in the old positions.

At the same time as the transfer into the new area, a battle group under the command of Major Pfeiffer and comprising a tank Abteilung, the S.P. guns of 39th Anti-Tank Abteilung, a company of 617th AA Battalion and 1 heavy field howitzer and 2 light field howitzer batteries was despatched to Sidi Abd el Rahman to be placed at the disposal of Army Headquarters.

The battle group was subordinated to Africa Corps, and carried out an attack between the railway and road in a south-easterly direction to block a penetration which had been made there.

An Engineer company was sent in to lay mines in front of II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which had meanwhile been placed under command of 164th Infantry Division.

A number of bombing attacks were made in the vicinity, but none affected the divisional area.

1 November

The division remained in the area 1,000 metres west of Trig. Point 506. Apart from reconnaissance, there was no enemy air activity.

Divisional units (II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and elements of 155th Artillery Regiment) which had remained in the forward positions came under occasional artillery harassing fire.

Battle Group Pfeiffer remained under direct command of Africa Corps during 1 November.

2 November

During the night 1/2 November the enemy made a deep penetration west of mine box J and shortly before dawn his forward elements had apparently reached the telegraph track.

At 02.50 hours the division received orders to counter-attack and restore the situation.

In view of the obscure situation, the division decided to reach the Trig. Point 509 area by dawn and, after establishing contact and being briefed by 15th Panzer Division, to attack the penetration area frontally or to circle round to the north and attack on the flank.

Contact was established with 15th Panzer Division on arrival at Trig. Point 509 at about 05.00 hours. The commander of 15th Panzer Division briefed the divisional commander on the situation, which was still somewhat obscure.

With the consent of the 15th Panzer Division commander, the division decided to attack the enemy penetration in an outflanking movement from the north, first of all advancing parallel to the Telegraph track and taking Monolith Hill, then turning east and after reaching the Otto track, attack in a south-easterly or southerly direction.

While the movement to the north was in progress, a number of enemy tanks penetrated into the Trig. Point 509 area to observe II/155th Artillery Regiment moving into position. After 6 tanks had been destroyed by direct fire, the attack was repulsed once more. The division reached Monolith shortly before 06.00 hours and was about to turn into the attack when an Africa Corps order arrived (sent at 05.40 hours): "Halt immediately", and shortly afterwards (sent

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at 06.00 hours, arrived at 06.19 hours): "Request report on position".

This appeared to be a very favourable moment for the attack: in the mist it was possible to make out enemy tanks, which apparently had not yet observed the division's outflanking movement and were still maintaining an east-west advance.

The division had to decide whether or not to attack in spite of the order. However, as it had not been informed of the situation as a whole and there was the possibility that the enemy penetration, which the division had been sent to attack, could be blocked, while immediate intervention at another point appeared necessary, the division decided not to attack in accordance with the Africa Corps order. The division received no reply to its repeated query: "Why has a halt been called?"

Instead, an order arrived at 06.50 hours (sent at 06.30 hours): "First clarify situation. Is this the main enemy force?", and at 07.02 hours (sent at 06.45 hours) "Single enemy tanks in and north of the Deir el Murra area - to be destroyed by anti-tank squads".

The division could not carry out this last order, as it needed all available forces for the impending attack.

Thus the element of surprise in the morning mist, which showed promise of success, could not be exploited.

By about 07.00 hours the enemy had observed the division's disposition and had moved strong armoured forces to cover his northern flank.

The attack was held back because the Corps Commander - as he stated after his arrival at division in reply to a question put by the divisional commander - was not aware of the division's location, although the division had reported its intention at 05.15 hours (received 05.28 hours).

Under these circumstances the attack for which permission was given at 07.00 hours (received 07.12 hours) could no longer result in a success. The attack broke down approximately on the line Trig. Point 546 - Trig. Point 411 in face of extremely heavy and superior tank and anti-tank gun fire.

After the Corps Commander stated that the 5th Panzer Regiment reports did not check and, according to his own observation, there were "no longer any enemy forces facing it", 5th Panzer Regiment was again ordered to press the attack.

The Corps Commander himself sent in 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment to attack over the tank line. Owing to the heavy defensive fire, the attack did not get beyond the start line and broke down. Meanwhile, at about 11.00 hours, 5th Panzer Regiment reported that the enemy:

- 1) was bringing up fresh armoured forces and
- 2) the arrival of further forces on the eastern flank could be identified.

5th Panzer Regiment requested that cover be provided for its left flank. However, owing to the defensive fire, the S.P. anti-tank guns sent in for this purpose were forced to remain echeloned north-west of the eastern flank of 5th Panzer Regiment.

The Corps Commander also intervened in this instance and ordered the S.P. guns - again with his personal assurance that he had observed no enemy forces - to move up to the left flank of 5th Panzer Regiment. After about 30 minutes the heavy S.P. anti-tank guns carrying out this order had been put out of action by the superior enemy armoured force.

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Meanwhile Pfeiffer Battle Group had again been placed at the disposal of the division. This group had also sustained considerable losses.

II/5th Panzer Regiment, the first unit of Battle Group Pfeiffer to arrive at division, consisted of only 10 tanks. This unit was sent up to 5th Panzer Regiment.

After several more attempts during the afternoon the attack was found to be no longer practicable. Owing to the superior enemy fire power, 5th Panzer Regiment could neither be transferred nor withdrawn. However, the deep enemy penetration had been contained.

A considerable number of enemy tanks and anti-tank guns had been destroyed, but German forces had also suffered heavy losses. Before dusk came on the division decided to put its infantry and, owing to the absence of II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, the Panzer Engineer Battalion into defensive positions between the right flank of 15th Panzer Division (about 1,200 metres south-west of Trig. Point 546) and the left flank of 90th Light Division (in the Monolith area) and to withdraw the tanks from the front line and assemble them as a counter-attack reserve north of Trig. Point 509.

The movements were carried out during the night 2/3 November.

However, as elements of 15th Panzer Division were still in position in the sector to be occupied by the division, the commander of III/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment decided to go into position south of the 15th Panzer Division units instead of linking up with his regiment. The battalion therefore took up positions in the Tell el Aqqair area instead of to the north of it.

By order of Africa Corps, 53 trucks were sent to the area during the night 2/3 November to bring out units of 164th Infantry Division.

3 November

During the day the division remained in the positions it had taken up during the night 2/3 November. Apart from a number of artillery concentrations, the movement forward of enemy infantry to about 400 - 800 metres from the German lines and occasional tentative advances by isolated enemy armoured groups, there was no direct enemy attack on the division's front.

However, in the late afternoon enemy tanks attacked and overran II/33 Artillery Regiment which had moved into position again in the area east-south-east of Trig. Point 509 by order of the Corps Commander after moving back about 1,000 metres with its infantry covering force after the infantry had been taken back. The attack was held by 5th Panzer Regiment, which had been waiting in readiness north of Trig. Point 509.

At about 16,00 hours a Corps order was received, instructing the divisions to move back to rearward positions during the night 3/4 November - 21st Panzer Division to the line Tell el Mansara - left flank of 90th Light Division strong point in the Tell el Gora area.

The division succeeded in disengaging from the enemy during the night without incurring losses. II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which was still subordinated to 164th Infantry Division, was also able to move back, and reached the division at dawn on 4 November.

4 November

The battalions did not begin to arrive in the new positions until after dawn. By 08.00 hours the main body of the division was occupying the positions. By that time single enemy armoured cars had felt their way forward to

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the front line. At about 09.00 hours 155th Artillery Regiment reported that enemy armoured forces had crossed the Telegraph track in the area east of Trig. Point 509 and were advancing on both sides of the telegraph line leading to el Daba.

During the morning the enemy armoured forces approached to within effective range of the division. Towards midday the forward positions came under heavy artillery and tank gun fire.

At first the main enemy effort was made on the right flank of the division (200th Panzer Engineer Battalion). Africa Corps battle echelon on the right which, together with 5/18 AA had been ordered into position on the forward slope by the Corps Commander, suffered heavy losses and was practically wiped out. This constituted a threat to the right flank of the division. However, the enemy was intercepted and halted by 5th Panzer Regiment, which had with foresight been moved to the right.

Towards 14.00 hours the enemy made another penetration north of the Telegraph track into the positions held by II/104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. Owing to a panic within this formation a critical situation existed for a time, but this was soon restored when 3rd Battalion 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment was sent in.

During the rest of the afternoon there was only artillery fire on the forward positions, and the enemy made no further attacks in earnest.

Upon receiving the order for a further withdrawal to the area south-east of Fuka, the division disengaged and moved off at 21.15 hours.

Shortly after nightfall the officer sent out with the transport column to 164th Infantry Division arrived back at division, but brought only one anti-tank section with him. He knew nothing about the whereabouts of the other vehicles or the units which were to have been brought up.

5 November

Towards 09.00 hours the division reached the specified area at Trig. Point 613 (17 km south-west of Fuka) and, protected by covering parties of the Reconnaissance Unit, the division took up defensive positions with front facing east. Contact with 15 Panzer Division to the South was not established.

During the morning and early afternoon gradually increasing enemy forces felt their way forward towards the division. The enemy's effort to outflank the division in the south and force his way in between the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions was particularly noticeable.

Shortly before nightfall the enemy attacked the southern flank of the division, advancing in a northerly direction from the edge of the Gebel.

The attack was halted by the immediate transfer of 5th Panzer Regiment and artillery fire, and the enemy made a slight withdrawal to the south.

The fuel situation had meanwhile become extremely unfavourable; there was only 0.6 V.S. available for the division.

15th Panzer Division, which had meanwhile been brought up to the north again, reached the area west of 21st Panzer Division during the afternoon.

Upon receiving a report that enemy elements had after all forced their way in between the two divisions during the attack in the late afternoon, Africa Corps decided to move back together with Corps Headquarters and 21st Panzer Division in the direction of Mersa Matruh, picking up the Army artillery

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group about 20 km north-west of the division's positions, instead of moving in a westerly direction as originally planned. The division formed a rearguard to prevent a breakthrough and moved off at 00.01 hours.

6 November

The division did not encounter any enemy forces during the night march.

The Alam Minagi area was reached by dawn and the division decided to take up a reverse slope position with front facing south and south-east behind the edge of the Gebel south of Alam Minagi, as fuel stocks were no longer sufficient for the move to be continued, particularly in the case of the tanks.

The position was taken up at about 09.00 hours. The left flank of the division was bent back slightly so that contact with Africa Corps Battle Echelon to the north could be established.

Late in the morning enemy armoured forces in strength from the south-south-east began to feel their way forwards towards the division. At first the enemy was repulsed. The main threat to the position came from the east, but it appeared that this could be dealt with as long as the bent-back left flank and Africa Corps Battle Echelon remained in position in this area. Unfortunately, Corps Headquarters and the Battle Echelon moved off to the west - taking an unsuitable route across the plateau, which could be observed by the enemy from some distance - without informing the division.

The enemy was very quick to observe this movement and exploited it immediately with an outflanking move. Tanks on the right flank which still had fuel were brought across to the left and shortly before nightfall our forces were successful in preventing the enemy from breaking through the extended bent-back left flank.

The division awaited the arrival of fuel throughout the day. However, the vehicles sent out to Mersa Matruh were halted at Kilometre 20 south-east of the town by elements of 90th Light Division and not allowed to pass. Instead, they were sent back again west of Mersa Matruh. The supply services fuel column with 15th Panzer Division did not arrive owing to road congestion.

Shortly before nightfall the situation appeared untenable to the division. The enemy sent in 50 - 60 heavy tanks for a final attack.

As a result of the immobility of German tanks owing to lack of fuel, the enemy succeeded in breaking through the left flank and penetrating as far as the artillery positions. The artillery drove off the attack with direct fire, but the loss of two batteries could not be prevented.

The division decided to blow up all immobilised tanks and retire westwards along the Telegraph track which leads to Khaldia from Kilometre 20. From this point it would move northwards to reach Mersa Matruh, where it hoped to be able to refuel.

The rain which continued throughout the day and the following night made the area west of Alam Minagi very swampy, and the division could cross this area only with the greatest difficulty and the loss of a large number of vehicles.

As the action had been lost and the enemy was consequently expected to follow up, all vehicles which fell out owing to lack of fuel or terrain difficulties had to be destroyed.

Unfortunately, the few tanks still serviceable could not be saved and, in addition the vehicle with most of the war diary documents covering the period 28 July to 6 November broke down and was destroyed by the driver and his mate.

7 November

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7 November

During the night mobile elements of the division reached the track at Kilometre 20 south-east of Mersa Matruh - Khalda.

In pouring rain troops worked until dawn pulling vehicles out of the swampy area.

Upon receiving a 90th Light Division report that its covering parties would be withdrawn from the Garawla area at dawn, the division decided at midnight to move along the coastal road with elements which had already been withdrawn to ensure that the fuel ordered was brought up.

The division reached the coastal road at about 03.00 hours and encountered the last 90th Light Division covering parties, which were about to move off.

The last company of 90th Light Division succeeded in crossing a rather flooded area on the road in the Kilometre 20 area just before the road was cut at this point by an unusually heavy cloudburst which occurred about 15 minutes beforehand.

There was no fuel at Kilometre 20.

90th Light Division covering parties reported that they had halted the fuel trucks in the late afternoon of 6 November and, in view of the order for the withdrawal, had sent them back again to the road fork south-west of Mersa Matruh.

Apart from a few cubic metres in cans and barrels, the Army fuel dump at Mersa Matruh was found to be empty. With much effort small amounts of fuel left at the hospital and other Army installations were collected in dumps and vehicles were issued with enough fuel to allow them to reach the road fork south-west of Mersa Matruh.

By dawn a way had been found round the flooded area. The division continued its move along the road in the direction of the road fork south-west of Mersa Matruh. Shortly before reaching the road fork, it encountered elements of 90th Light Division moving eastwards again. These units alleged that they had received orders to continue holding Mersa Matruh.

The division thereupon decided to deploy its formations forwards in the direction of Garawla, instead of to the rear, with the intention of moving forward into the marsh area again from this point during the day to salvage more vehicles and equipment.

However, the divisional commander who personally went forward to reconnoitre in the direction of Garawla observed enemy forces already advancing along the road in the Garawla area. The previous order for assembly in Garawla was consequently amended again to assembly of the division in the area 10 km west of the road fork south-west of Mersa Matruh. The division assembled in this area during the day and brought up the fuel dumped in the vicinity of the road fork south-west of Mersa Matruh.

The following elements of the division assembled:

104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment	at first about 1 battalion with a few anti-tank guns
5th Panzer Regiment	4 tanks
155th Artillery Regiment	3 light and 2 heavy troops (troops not up to full strength)

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39th Anti-Tank Abteilung	only headquarters (1st company, which became separated on 5 November and joined up with 15th Panzer Division, returned to division with 5 guns)
200th Panzer Engineer Battalion	headquarters and one company
200th Signals Battalion	at first only one wireless station; another was taken from the Anti-Tank Abteilung
617 AA Battalion	3 serviceable guns
I/18th AA	only low personnel strengths

In the afternoon the Africa Corps Ia arrived with an order instructing the division to move along the road to Kilometre 45 west of Mersa Matruh, and then approximately along the railway line to reach the Mingar el Ahmar area.

This order was amended shortly after the division moved off; the division was instructed to move about 60 km along the road and then rest until further orders were received.

II/155th Artillery Regiment, which had lost its guns, was sent on ahead to Tobruk to be re-equipped.

8 November

At dawn the division reached the specified rest area, where it received orders to move on together with Corps Headquarters and reach the area south-west of Sidi Barrani. The move proceeded without incident, and the division reached the Alam el Dab area (south-west of Sidi Barrani) towards 09.00 hours. The division was then ordered to move off behind Corps Headquarters at midday and reach the Buqbuq area. On the way, the division was instructed to take up defensive positions with front facing east and south-east in the Alam Samalus area (south-east of Buqbuq) as movement through Sollum was still uncertain owing to the congestion there, and it might prove necessary to move across the edge of the Gebel in the south at Sofafi. The division reached the specified area by nightfall and established contact with 20 Italian Corps and 3rd Reconnaissance Unit which were moving southwards.

9 November

A column commander who arrived at division at 09.00 hours reported that Halfaya Pass would be clear tomorrow, and this report was passed on to Africa Corps.

At 10.13 hours the division received an order from Africa Corps (despatched at 09.45 hours) instructing it to move along the coastal road to the Azeiz area at 13.00 hours.

The division moved off in the direction of Buqbuq at 12.15 hours, but could not get on to the road until 13.30 hours as it was occupied by Corps Headquarters until that time.

Owing to frequent stoppages, only slow progress was made. 15th Panzer Division, which was moving on ahead, was subjected to a heavy air attack.

At 19.00 hours the division reached the Sollum serpentine and proceeded to the area of the Capuzzo railway station without further air attacks. On reaching Capuzzo railway station the air attacks on Sollum and Halfaya began and, as the enemy was apparently carrying out free-lance operations and trying to locate

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the Sollum - Capuzzo road with parachute flares, the division decided to halt and disperse immediately, thus diminishing the effect of the enemy air attacks. As a result of this action, the enemy aircraft were not able to locate the division's columns and attacked Capuzzo instead.

10 November

Moving off at dawn, the division reached the area west of Hagfet Uaar (about half-way between Capuzzo and Azeiz). At first contact could not be established with 15th Panzer Division, as the main body of 20 Italian Corps was still between the two divisions.

There was no contact with the enemy during the day.

At 22.20 hours (dispatched at 19.25 hours) the division received orders to move off along Trigh Capuzzo to the Gasr el Arid area at 04.00 hours ahead of Corps Headquarters and 15th Panzer Division.

During the day a company was formed from remnants of 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment which were leading the retreat, and was brought up to the regiment.

11 November

In accordance with orders the division moved off at 04.00 hours, but shortly afterwards was held up until 06.00 hours. It reached the Gasr el Arid area at about 09.00 hours and was in the act of taking up defensive positions facing south-east and south when an order arrived at 09.15 hours instructing it to move along Trigh Capuzzo to El Adem.

On the way Africa Corps ordered the division to reach Hill 177 south-east of el Adem and take up defensive positions facing south and south-east.

The division thereupon decided to move south of the edge of the Gabel and reached the specified area shortly after midday, but at 16.00 hours orders were received to move along the el Adem axis road to the Gasr el Clecha area.

After the division, which had just taken up positions, had assembled to continue the withdrawal it received orders to hold its present positions, but this order was cancelled about an hour later.

As it was then too late to reconnoitre the minefields properly, the division decided to wait until the lane through the minefields had been extended and moved on shortly after midnight.

12 November

South of el Adem the division came across a German minefield blocking the el Adem - Bir el Gubi track. As parts of this minefield had been laid in a way to prevent clearing operations, these were made more difficult and the withdrawal had to be held up until dawn.

The division reached the specified area at about 08.00 hours.

Scouts sent on ahead to Hagiag er Raml reported an enemy patrol retiring southwards to the south of them.

Following Africa Corps instructions that the move would probably be continued through Acroma in a westerly direction during the night 12/13 November, 200th Panzer Engineer Battalion was sent on ahead to find and clear minefields along the route. Towards midday Africa Corps received orders to form a strong

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bridgehead on the western edge of the Gazala position minefields so that these could be passed through in the event of an enemy outflanking move from the south.

In view of this order Battle Group Pfeiffer (2 battalions 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 1 light troop and 200th Panzer Engineer Battalion, which had already started) was sent on ahead as bridgehead force. At nightfall the division prepared to move on. It received the order "Move off immediately" at 15.40 hours and did so at 16.30 hours. After crossing several minefields west of Acroma, the division made unimpeded progress during the night.

13 November

Towards 03.00 hours the division established contact with Battle Group Pfeiffer, which had caught up with 200th Panzer Engineer Battalion.

200th Panzer Engineer Battalion was located in front of the eastern mine belt of the Gazala position. The Ia and battalion commander, who had driven on to the formation, reconnoitred the minefield together, but it was some time before its position was definitely known.

It appeared that the minefields on the eastern and western limits of the Gazala position were not so extensive as had originally been believed.

By dawn a lane had been driven through the eastern minefield, and the division moved into the area which was formerly the British Gazala position.

The division took up positions in the Got er Regem area, covering to the south and south-west,

On orders from Africa Corps the front was extended westwards during the morning by putting a battalion into the Dahar el Meruch area.

Reconnaissance sent out in the direction of Bir Chesceua observed enemy armoured cars approaching the eastern mine belt. Shortly afterwards the divisional area came under sporadic sweeping and searching fire from enemy long range artillery.

Contrary to Africa Corps instructions to prepare to hold the present position on 14 November, an order arrived shortly after 20.00 hours informing the division to be ready to move off as from 04.30 hours on 14 November.

14 November

At 02.00 hours division received an order (dispatched at 00.35 hours) to move off for the Maraua area at 04.45 hours, following the route Bir Temrad - B. Halegh el Eleba - Gsur et Tuazil - cross-roads west of Martuba. The division was to form the rearguard until the cross-roads west of Martuba were reached.

The division reached the cross-roads west of Martuba at about 14.00 hours and halted for an hour to refuel. Apart from three low-level attacks there was no contact with the enemy. At 15.00 hours the division moved off along the bypass in the direction of Aqua Viva and, on reaching the road fork (at about 19.00 hours) east of Aqua Viva, halted for two hours to take over fuel from a column which had come up.

During the night the division moved on without incident into the area north-east of Maraua, which was reached by the head of the column just before dawn.

15 November

During the night the division received orders to move on behind 15th Panzer

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Division and reach the Sidi Giadalla area (south-west of Barce) by nightfall.

The division moved off at 12.00 hours, but at about 15.30 hours it encountered rear elements of 15th Panzer Division, which had halted on the edge of the Gebel north of Barce owing to congestion on the "serpentine".

As the heavily congested serpentine was still not clear at nightfall and the fuel dumped at its foot could therefore not be brought up, the division remained on the Gebel during the night and did not move off towards Barce until dawn on 16 November.

16 November

On passing through Barce it was observed that the terrain between Barce and Sidi Giadalla had become so swampy as a result of the rainfall that most of the division might be held up. The head of the division was therefore halted in Barce for the time being.

The division found accommodation in and around Barce while 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, reinforced by an Artillery Abteilung, acted as rearguard and covered the serpentine on the edge of the Gebel until relieved by elements of 90th Light Division.

17 November

The head of the division moved off from Barce behind Corps Headquarters and, following the route Tocra - Benghazi, reached the area 10 km north of Ghemines at 06.30 hours.

Reconnaissance sent out through Solluch towards Sceleidima established contact with 33rd Reconnaissance Unit located in Sceleidima; the latter had had contact with occasional enemy patrols to the east.

18 November

Africa Corps ordered the division to move up closer to 15th Panzer Division which was located in the Magrun area.

The division was to go into position on both sides of Ghemines with front facing east.

The move was continued during the morning. There was no contact with the enemy.

19 November

According to an Africa Corps order, the division was to move off along the road 2 hours after 15th Panzer Division and occupy the sector of road from the bend 15 km north of Agedabia to the bend east of Zuetina.

As 15th Panzer Division did not report its starting time as promised, the division was half an hour late in moving off.

The division reached the Ridotta area on the road bend 19 km. north of Agedabia at about 13.00 hours, organised for defence with front facing east and north-east and established contact with the left flank of 15th Panzer Division.

In the evening the division received an order to reach the area on both sides of the road between Agedabia and 10 km to the south-west during the morning of 20 November and remain at the disposal of Africa Corps.

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20 November

The division moved off at 09,00 hours and reached the specified area at about 11,00 hours.

There was no contact with the enemy during the day.

Appendix to the 21st Panzer Division Battle
Report for the Period 23 October-20 November, 1942

Replies to Queries raised in the Order

An exact, corroborative numerical statement cannot be submitted as the relevant documents were destroyed on the night of 6/7 November.

To a) 1) Strength of Enemy Armoured Operations:

- aa) The enemy sent in approximately one armoured division on the southern sector of the Alamein position. The following were observed:

about 80 tanks in the mine box, 40 of them Pilots. In addition, the light types also appeared: the British Mark IV and the American Mark III. There were also about 60 - 70 tanks east of the mine box, again with 20 - 30 Pilots among them. Between these two groups there were about 30 - 40 armoured cars, but most of these were believed to be acting as armoured O.P's for the artillery.

- bb) In the sector of attack east of Trig. Point 426 the following were observed:

15 - 20 Pilot tanks dug in in the area Trig. Points 406 - 453,

30 - 40 Pilots accompanied by about 10 lighter tanks opposite the front.

- cc) The enemy sent in about 60 Pilots, an equal number of American Mark III's and a few British Mark IV's on 5th Panzer Regiment front against the German counter-attack through Monolith on 2 November.

5th Panzer Regiment and elements of 90th Light Division were attacked on the flank by about 40 - 50 tanks, of which about 75% were Pilots.

- dd) In the position south-east of el Daba the division and the Africa Corps Battle Echelon were attacked by about 150 enemy tanks, of which about 120 were Pilots. There were also about 30 - 40 armoured cars.

- ee) The attack on the position south-west of Fuka was carried out by 30 - 50 tanks, most of them lighter types, accompanied by a large number of armoured cars.

- ff) The position at Alam Minagi was apparently attacked by the same enemy force as in ee), but there were twice as many tanks, including about 50 - 60 Pilots.

In all other instances only single tanks appeared, but it was noticeable that several tanks were always allocated even to the smallest enemy group. According to captured enemy documents, the following armoured strengths were apparently involved:

in aa) one armoured division,

cc) and dd) 1 - 2 armoured divisions,

/ee) and

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ee) and ff) a reconnaissance formation reinforced by tanks.

2) Strength of Enemy Artillery Fire

There was a general impression that, with the exception of cc) and dd), the number of batteries at the enemy's disposal was no greater than our own. However, he was in a considerably superior position as regards ammunition. On the southern sector of the Alamein position the enemy fired up to 7,000 rounds on sectors 1,200 metres long in a bombardment lasting $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours. It is estimated that a similar number of rounds were fired in concentrations on 2nd Battalion 104th Panzer Grenadier Regiment east of Trig. Point 426. In the counter-attack south of Monolith enemy artillery fire was not so strong, but was still greatly superior to the German artillery in ammunition expenditure. The concentrations in the attack south-east of el Daba were extremely intensive, but were of much shorter duration than those at Alamein. The enemy apparently intended to repeat the process attempted in World War I of effectively destroying enemy positions before the attack commenced.

3) Strength of Enemy Air Operations

aa) During the days preceding the offensive the division frequently observed (up to four times a day) a close formation of 18 - 24 Flying Fortresses flying over in a westerly direction. Heavy bombers attacked the divisional area for the first time on 24 October. The bomber formations were strongly escorted by fighters (60 - 80 aircraft accompanied the formation in stepped-up echelon).

The division and the whole of the southern sector were also frequently attacked by fighter-bombers and low-level aircraft from 20 October. These operations were carried out by groups of 12 - 20 fighters. In addition, extensive reconnaissance operations were carried out over the southern sector.

It was noticeable that on 23 October there was absolutely no enemy air activity, apart from occasional reconnaissance aircraft over the southern sector.

At night-time enemy operations over the southern sector were limited to dropping flares to assist nuisance bombing attacks on supply tracks. However, during the night 23/24 October there was incessant flare-dropping and bombing activity over the southern sector, and these operations apparently had the artillery as their objective.

During the previous nights only the passing of aircraft in an east-west direction was identified.

bb) While the division was in the northern sector of the Alamein position continual daylight attacks were carried out by heavy bombers (18 - 24 aircraft) which carried out pattern bombing in the vicinity of the Telegraph track.

Attacks continued throughout the night.

Artillery and AA positions were always the main objectives.

cc) Only occasional attacks were made on the division during the retreat across the desert and later along the Via Balbia, but it was observed that nearby formations and the coastal road in particular were heavily attacked by the enemy. During the day fighter attacks were carried out by formations of up to 20 aircraft and bomber attacks by the usual formations of up to 20 aircraft and bomber attacks by the usual formations of about 20 aircraft escorted by 20 - 60 fighters, while at night 5 - 10 aircraft circled simultaneously over the target areas.

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Moreover, in night attacks it was often observed that aircraft flew in pairs, the first dropping parachute flares and target markers, while the second dropped the bombs.

To b) see supplement

To c) Enemy Battle Tactics

After destroying enemy positions by a maximum artillery effort, the enemy endeavoured to bring up his heavy tanks near enough to the positions for them to be able to support the advancing infantry by destroying centres of resistance which were still intact, while at the same time remaining out of range of the inferior German defensive weapons. The enemy made marked use of "massed-material" tactics.

His infantry usually advanced in massed groups and took cover immediately the defence opened up. There were practically no close combat actions. Attacks by carrier-borne infantry after artillery preparation, which were nearly always carried out at night, constituted a new type of tactics. The British followed the French principle of advancing cautiously in stages. The enemy did not follow up actions which showed promise of success with a strategic breakthrough, nor did he engage in running tank battles at close range.

The British nearly always made use of smoke in tactical actions.

To d) 1) Effectiveness of German Tanks

Apart from operations against Pilot tanks, the effectiveness of German tanks has not changed.

Against Pilot tanks the long-barrelled Pz.Kw. IV tank was effective up to 1,500 - 1,600 metres, while the long-barrelled Pz.Kw. III produced results up to 500 - 600 metres. Concerted fire by several long-barrelled Pz.Kw. III tanks or short-barrelled Pz.Kw. IVs against one Pilot tank was effective.

2) Effectiveness of German Anti-Tank Weapons

- | | |
|---|---|
| a) Anti-tank rifle | unsuccessful against tanks |
| b) 3.7 cm anti-tank gun | " " " |
| c) 5 cm anti-tank gun | very effective in concerted fire against Pilots up to 500 - 600 metres, otherwise same as before |
| d) 7.62 anti-tank gun
(Russian - S.P.) | effective against Pilots up to 1,600 metres; effective against all other types of enemy tanks |
| e) 7.5 cm anti-tank gun | as yet hardly ever used by the division |
| f) mines of all types | effective at least against the tracks of all tanks (most effective: the German Teller mine) |
| g) pole charges of demolition units | good effect if demolition squad approaches near enough to tanks |
| h) Artillery | 'Red' Shells (anti-tank ammunition) effective against Pilots up to 600 metres; effect as before against other types |

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10 cm gun effective against Pilots up to 800 - 1,000 metres, otherwise as before.

- i) 8.8 cm AA gun effective against Pilots up to 2,000 metres (sometimes also up to 2,500 metres), otherwise as before
- k) 2 cm AA gun no effect against Pilots and new types of armoured cars; otherwise as before.

3) Effectiveness of Enemy Tanks

- a) No appreciable change observed in known types of enemy tanks.
- b) The "Pilot" Tank.
 - aa) As far as can be ascertained from types available, the effect of the machine gun and smaller gun is the same as that of similarly equipped tanks.
 - bb) 7.5 cm Gun:

Maximum range at which the Pilot operates: 2,500 metres. At this range its armour-piercing shells penetrate all types of German tank. However, at this range its trajectory is so curved that German tanks very quickly disappear from visible range or, at shorter range on the same ground level, are no longer in the danger zone. However, the tanks are apparently equipped with an outstanding sight which permits the guns to register on a target very quickly and with accuracy, thus compensating for this factor.

The H.E. shell has the same effect as all others of the same calibre.

- cc) No further details can be given of the 10.5 cm guns which were occasionally observed.

It was noticed, however, that tanks equipped with this gun remained about another 500 metres away from the enemy without reducing their effectiveness against German tanks.

The effect of H.E. shells from this gun could not be accurately observed.

4) Effectiveness of Enemy Anti-Tank Weapons

- a) All calibres up to 6 cm. as before.
- b) A medium calibre (probably 7.5 cm) was identified for the first time. Its effectiveness corresponded approximately to that of the German 7.5 cm or 7.62 cm anti-tank gun.
- c) The British produced for the first time a heavy anti-tank - AA gun with an increased rate of fire. Its effect corresponded approximately to that of German single-purpose anti-tank guns of the same calibre.

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Supplement to Appendix to 21st Panzer Division Battle
Report for the Period 23 October - 20 November, 1942

To b Enemy Ammunition Expenditure

See Appendix to 21st Panzer Division Battle Report for the period
23 October - 20 November, 1942 - to a, section 2.

German Ammunition Expenditure

1) Artillery expenditure of rounds available at any given time.

<u>Date</u>	<u>In Action</u>	<u>Expenditure in %</u>
24 October	1 light Abt.	32%
25 October	1 light Abt.	16%
26 October	very low expenditure	
27 October	2 light Abt.	20% each
28 October	2 light Abt.	32% and 15%
	heavy Abt.	4%
29 October	2 light Abt.	2% and 10%
	heavy Abt.	5%
30 October	2 light Abt.	4% and 10%
	heavy Abt.	6%
31 October	2 light Abt.	2% (in support of 2nd Bn 104th Pz. Gren. Rgt.) and 15% (Battle Gp. Pfeiffer)
1 November	2 light Abt.	40% (Battle Gp. Pfeiffer) and 32% (support of front)
2 November	2 light Abt.	60% and 18%
	heavy Abt.	40%
3 November	2 light Abt.	45% and 30%
4 November	2 light Abt.	50% and 12%
	heavy Abt.	8%
5 November	2 light Abt.	55% and 8%
6 November	2 light Abt.	35% and 12%
	heavy Abt.	10%

There was hardly any expenditure on days following.

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- 2) Details of AA ammunition expenditure cannot be given as I/18th AA which was subordinate to the division during the period concerned was disbanded and the division's documents were destroyed.

I/18th AA had already exhausted its ammunition by the afternoon of 6 November (the action at Alam Minagi).

- 3) 5th Panzer Regiment's expenditure of available ammunition was as follows:

on 24 October	about 20% of units in action (1 Abt.)
on 27 and 28 October	100% of an issue to Panzer Regiment at its strength at that time.
on 2 November	about 80% of an issue to Panzer Regiment at its strength at that time.
on 4 November	about 60% of an issue to Panzer Regiment at its strength at that time.
on 5 November	10% of an issue to Panzer Regiment at its strength at that time.
on 6 November	100% of available ammunition.

No expenditure on days following.

- 4) Ammunition expenditure by infantry (not anti-tank) and light AA remained within replaceable limits.

- 5) Anti-Tank Ammunition Expenditure:

on 24 October	about 80% of supplies held by units in action.
on 27 and 28 October	about 40% " " " " " " "
on 4 November	about 96% of supplies held by all a.t. units.
on 6 November	90% " " " " " " "

- 6) In giving the above figures it should be explained that:

- a) The figures indicate expenditure of the ammunition stock available at any given time. This stock does not correspond to one ammunition issue. The division was not able to maintain ammunition supplies at 1 issue after initial expenditure, and stocks decreased steadily owing to the inadequate rate of supply. Ammunition supplies were brought up to maintain the division's stocks at a percentage of one ammunition issue according to its strength:

on 25 October	to about 89%
on 31 October	to about 64%, tanks to about 100% of strength at that time.
on 3 November	to about 55%, tanks to about 90% of strength at that time.
on 4 November	to about 50%, including tanks.

From then on no more ammunition supplies were brought up until the division arrived at Capuzzo.

- b) The steady decrease in ammunition stocks necessitated a strict control of expenditure.

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For this reason the proper amount of ammunition required to influence an action could never be released, as a certain emergency reserve had to be maintained. Ammunition could be expended only in relation to the amount of supplies expected.

Consequently, amounts of ammunition available in the final actions were extremely limited.

For this reason it was also not possible to comply with repeated orders for intensive ammunition expenditure.

A.H.B.6 Distribution
Same as Translation VII/104.

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