

~~RESTRICTED~~

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION NO. VII/81

**RESTRICTED**

HIGH LEVEL REPORTS AND DIRECTIVES

DEALING WITH THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN, 1941

TRANSLATED BY

AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6

19TH NOVEMBER, 1948

G.219129/EFB/11/48

CONTENTS

<u>DATE</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
9th January	German Military Attache in Rome	C.-in-C. Army	General Guzzoni's memorandum on the situation in Libya.
9th January	OKH	C.-in-C. Army	Comment on General Guzzoni's memorandum.
17th January	G.O.C. Chemical Warfare Units	Army General Staff, Operations Division	Use of poison gas by the Italians.
22nd January	Halder	OKW	Use of poison gas.
29th January	von Rintelen	OKW and OKH	General Guzzoni on situation in Albania and Libya.
1st February	Chief of OKW	von Rintelen	Questionnaire to Italian High Command on operations in North Africa.
2nd February	General Staff of Italian Armed Forces	Army General Staff, Operations Division	Use of chemical war materials.
3rd February	German Military Attache in Rome	OKH	General Guzzoni's reply to questionnaire.
5th February	Hitler	OKW Operations Staff	Conduct of German troops in Italian theatres of operations.
6th February	Keitel, Chief of OKW	C.-in-C. Army	Operation Sonnenblume.
11th February	G.O.C. Chemical Warfare Units	Army General Staff, Operations Division	Use of poison gas.
12th February	von Rintelen	OKH Operations Division	Mussolini's directive on conduct of operations in Tripolitania.
16th February	Rommel	C.-in-C. Italian troops in Libya, General Gariboldi	Suggestions for defence.
19th February	Chief of OKW	C.-in-C. Army	Decisions made by Hitler.
1st March	Halder, Chief of General Staff	Field Marshal Keitel	Shortage of vehicles.
3rd April	Keitel, Chief of OKW	Army General Staff, Operations Division	Operation Sonnenblume.

<u>DATE</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>
14th April	German General at Comando Supremo.	OKH Operations Staff	Operations in Libya.
14th April	German General at Comando Supremo	Army General Staff, Operations Division	Africa Corps' radio message.
15th April	Chief of OKW	German General at Comando Supremo	OKW interpretation of situation in North Africa.
5th May	Jodl	German General at Comando Supremo	Plans for attack on Corsica.
20th May	Keitel, Chief of OKW	C.-in-C. Army	Transport situation in North Africa.
14th June	von Rintelen	Field Marshal Keitel	Conduct of war in North Africa: Cavallero's reply to Hitler's suggestions.
16th July	Mussolini	C.-in-C. Armed Forces in North Africa	Directive on defence.
3rd December	Chief of OKW	German General at Comando Supremo	Supply problems.
8th December	Comando Supremo	General Bastico	Instructions for conduct of operations in North Africa.
8th December	German General at Comando Supremo	OKW Operations Staff	Cavallero's statements on North Africa.

9th January, 1941

To:- C.-in-C. Army

General Guzzoni's memorandum  
on the situation in Libya

The situation on land:

After the loss of Bardia approximately the following forces are still in Libya:- 5 infantry divisions, panzer forces en route in strength of a further division, as well as other units of different branches, which are not composed into divisions.

These forces are deployed as follows:-

In Tobruk: 1 division with several other units (27,000 men) and 300 guns.  
In the Derna - Berta - Mechili area: 1 division reinforced by artillery units and 1 panzer brigade with a total of 20,000 men, 250 guns and 60 medium tanks.  
In the Barce - Benghazi - Agodabia area: Weak forces with little artillery.  
In the Tripoli area: 3 divisions not up to full strength, and 1 armoured division in formation.

British forces in Egypt can be estimated at 350,000 men. Of these there are 2 armoured divisions and 3 infantry divisions in the Bardia area, between Sollum, Sidi Omar, Bir el Hamza, Bir Belefara and Marsa Luch. Units have been pushed forward towards Tobruk.

The attack on all three land fronts would seem to be going on. 2 divisions in Buq Buq, 2 divisions in Mersa Matruh, 1 division 100 km. east of Mersa Matruh, and the remainder still in Egypt.

Even if the supply of these units is difficult, there is still the possibility that this situation will be relieved for the British after the fall of Tobruk, so that their advance in Cyrenaica may be slowed down, but can be halted only with difficulty.

In spite of this it is not improbable that the British will be forced to interrupt their advance at Tobruk or perhaps at Benghazi, owing to the considerable lengthening of their supply lines. Difficulties would be increased by a wide stretch of desert (about 600 km. from Agodabia to Misutata) as well as by the lack of harbours between Benghazi and Tripoli, harbours which would be indispensable for supply by sea.

Even if the British intended to continue their advance via Benghazi without delay, they would be forced to pause for some time owing to terrain and supply difficulties.

At the moment adequate supplies are arriving in Tripoli to reinforce the 3 divisions there and to supply the panzer division. In a few days the transport of a further armoured division (Ariete - equipped only with light tanks) and a motorised division (Trento) will begin, and these units can be assembled about February 20th. We will then dispose of sufficient reserves to enable us to attack the British, whether they have halted in Cyrenaica or continued their advance against Tripolitania. Furthermore, this reserve will enable us to prevent the British linking up with forces in Tunis, should these forces have broken away from Vichy.

As a whole, the situation is serious, but not so serious as to be impossible.

The situation at sea:

The loss of Bardia and the probably loss of Tobruk will naturally make the strategic situation at sea more unfavourable for us in the Mediterranean. Even if Tobruk is of no great importance, it will still be an intermediary station between Malta and Alexandria and a link in communication between Malta and Crete. Tobruk would also make it easier for the British to communicate with the Gibraltar fleet.

/In

In spite of everything, our Air Force must be taken into consideration in further estimates of the great possibilities which have arisen for the British fleet. With the assistance of Fliegerkorpe X operating from Tripoli, Sicily and if possible Pantellaria, it will still make life difficult for the British fleet in its harbours, and will be able to limit its freedom of movement.

Although our strategic inferiority at sea forces us to yield the initiative to the British, traffic through the Sicilian Narrows must still be considered possible, even though it is continually endangered and subject to certain limitations.

Our situation will improve after our two battleships are in action again in March or April, and especially if it should be possible to occupy Gibraltar, which would naturally cause a complete change in our position.

The situation in the air:

Existing airfields in Tripolitania and those still under construction, the numerical reinforcement of our Air Force by the arrival of the German Fliegerkorps, and the return of the Italian air unit will enable our Air Force to hold up the advance of armoured forces and to interrupt the construction of advanced British supply bases. This will incur a considerable expenditure, which can be met however, by increased production, so that on the whole the strategic situation in the air will not suffer.

The situation is, as has already been said, serious if not desperate, but it is not so desperate that the occupation of Cyrenaica and perhaps Tripolitania also at a later date should be taken as a foregone conclusion. It is indeed difficult to predict when this will happen. In any case it would be expedient for OKW to order the Panzer Corps to be prepared at once. Final dispatch would depend on the situation in a month's time. This period should be adequate for the preparation of the Corps. Should the situation improve and the Panzer Corps or at least 1 division be prepared before this time, its transport could be arranged between that of the above-mentioned Ariete Armoured Division and that of the Trento Motorised Division. This would be the quickest method of building up an armoured formation of such strength that it could oppose the British.

8th January, 1941

General Guzzoni

General Guzzoni made the verbal addition to the report, that the Duce would be as grateful for an event which would render the operation of the Panzer Corps unnecessary as he would for its preparation, and this contingency might still be expected even today. General Guzzoni repeated that the obligation to operate in any case should by no means arise from mere preparation.

German Military Attaché in Rome

9th January, 1941

To:- C.-in-C. Army

OKH Comment on General Guzzoni's memorandum

The estimate of the situation in the memorandum of the Under Secretary of State of the War Ministry, General Guzzoni, does not differ essentially from the estimate of the situation issued on 6th January, 1941.

However, the disposition of forces in North Africa is different,

/according

according to General Guzzoni, and is indeed less favourable than that issued to the Military Attaché in Rome and that estimated in No. 24/41 Secret Orders of 6th January, 1941. Apparently General Guzzoni had not been correctly informed regarding the actual disposition of forces. The figure of 550 guns named for Tobruk and the area around Derna probably includes numerous anti-tank, anti-aircraft and infantry guns. The figure of 60 medium tanks around Derna cannot be accurate. It should be at least 150, unless in opposition to earlier Italian reports, heavy Italian losses have been sustained.

According to earlier reports there are not 3 (incomplete) divisions in Tripolitania, but 4 divisions. If one of these 4 divisions had been transferred to Cyrenaica, then one more division should appear there. 1 armoured division in the process of formation was reported by the Italian Army General Staff Military Attaché in Rome (on 26th December, 1940 and 2nd January, 1941), and not as General Guzzoni said in the process of formation in the Tripoli area. Furthermore, the Italian General Staff reported 1 mixed division in the Derna area on 20th December, 1940, which is not mentioned in General Guzzoni's report.

General Guzzoni's description of enemy forces is correct on the whole. However, the British have only 1 armoured division. 2 British reconnaissance régiments (armoured reconnaissance cars) have probably been taken as the second armoured division by the Italians.

Air Force:

It appears that a reinforcement of the Libyan air force by 300 aircraft (estimated 150 - 200 available) is not possible owing to accommodation, repair and equipment difficulties in Tripolitania. A large number of the aircraft already operational in Libya will probably be replaced and reinforced to a certain extent.

According to British radio reports it appears possible that for the time being the British offensive in Libya will not extend to Cyrenaica, but that the next large scale operation will be directed against Italian East Africa.

H.Q., 17th January, 1941

To:- Army General Staff, Operations Division

Subject:- Use of poison gas by the Italians

During the Abyssinian War the Italians owed the greater part of their success against the natives to the use of gas, especially mustard gas.

I do not know whether the Italians are at present considering using this weapon, especially if Abyssinia and Italian East Africa are threatened by the British.

The former Director of Italian Chemical Warfare, General Ricchetti, hinted quite bluntly in service conferences that Italy had used gas to great advantage in Africa and was preparing to proceed similarly in a future war.

In view of the extent of the present war, however, the use of gas in Africa would doubtless result in considerable complications, which would hardly limit themselves to Africa.

It is therefore suggested that Italian intentions concerning this subject be clarified and that OKW be approached in any event.

G.O.C. Chemical Warfare Units

22nd January, 1941

To: OKW

In view of the increasingly close cooperation between the German and Italian forces, OKH considers necessary an understanding with Italy about the possible use of chemical war materials.

If Italy should decide to use gas - perhaps in East Africa - limitation to this theatre of operations cannot be expected, rather would the consequence be a general use of chemical war materials by both sides.

A provisional understanding with Italy is therefore suggested.

In the opinion of OKH the Italians should be allowed to use gas only when the German armed forces have been given similar orders.

Halder

29th January, 1941

To: OKW and OKH

Report from Rome:

At midday on 29th January General Guzzoni made the following statements to me:

1. Albania: The situation has further improved so that I can state that the danger of a Greek breakthrough no longer exists. We now have enough reserves to permit us to undertake counter-attacks with limited objectives in places. If, however, the possibility of further successes should arise from these small scale attacks we will exploit the opportunity and, if occasion arises, take the offensive in the centre of the front, where the majority of reinforcements are situated, in accordance with the plan developed at Obersalzberg. It is also possible to reach Korca via Ponte Berati. The arrival in March of a German Mountain Division is still desirable to us in every way; it is all the more welcome now that it is not required in order to repel a breakthrough, but to fight in the same theatre of operations in the coming offensive. I have been expressly authorised to make this statement.

2. In Libya: The British are attacking our fortifications at Derna and to the south. We must not have any illusions and hope for a successful defence, since the British with their numerous motorised forces can encircle the position from the south and capture it. It appears very doubtful whether any part of these forces can be saved for the defence of Tripolitania which is being organised at present. With the present forces we can only defend a fortified camp (Campo Trincerato) at the city of Tripoli. The fortifications which face west and which extend up to the line Nalut - Zuara, are included in this camp, while towards the east only a much smaller sector can be reinforced with field fortifications. To my question whether there was no provision made on the western border of the Sirte Desert for the defence of Tripolitania, General Guzzoni replied that there were naturally a few advanced units there, but that these too were threatened with encirclement from the south, so that everything depended on the defence of Tripoli Oasis. I then pointed out that this would not prevent the British passing Tripoli to the south and reaching the Tunisian border, thus establishing contact with French North Africa. General Guzzoni thereupon expounded the following train of thought: once the British have occupied Cyrenaica they may either be satisfied with this and cease further thrusts to the west, or continue the offensive, which will naturally be all the more difficult the stronger the organisation of the defence of Tripoli. I am of the opinion that it is not possible for the British to carry the

/offensive

offensive through the Sirte Desert to Tripolitania without large scale preparations, so that there is still time to improve the defence of Tripolitania. I do not know yet the details of Marshal Graziani's plan for the defence of Tripolitania. I will inform you as soon as these plans have been submitted. Hitherto there has only been a plan to defend Tripolitania from the west, as we had not expected a British attack from the east. Almost all of the Ariete Armoured Division has arrived, but at present disposes of only light 3 T tanks. All completed medium tanks will be sent to this division to improve its efficiency. General Guzzoni furthermore expressed his great regret that the two German steamships (Ingo and Duisburg) had fallen victim to a British air and torpedo attack, while only one Italian steamship carrying food had been sunk. As soon as he had been informed of this British attack he had immediately discussed with the Chief of Naval Staff and the Chief of Air Force General Staff methods by which transports could be more efficiently safeguarded. The difficulty of providing cover for transports is due to the fact that the range of fighters based on Pantellaria does not overlap with that of fighters based on Tripoli, so that there is an area between the two which cannot be covered by fighters. In future, transport movements will be arranged so that shipping will pass through this especially dangerous zone only at night.

It appeared to him most important that Malta should be continuously attacked from the air during the next few days with a view to inflicting damage on the British air force and naval units based there, so rendering air and sea attacks from Malta more difficult.

The German High Command may rest assured that the Italians will make every effort to safeguard transports.

My attitude to these points is as follows:

1. I agree with the opinion that the situation in Albania has further improved. Apparently an extensive success is hoped for from the counter-attacks in the centre of the front, and this has been intimated during the last two days by heavy air operations.
2. If the British are not content with the conquest of Cyrenaica, but also wish to take Tripolitania, it will be most favourable for them to continue the offensive as soon as the supply situation permits, as they know that there are only weak forces in Tripolitania at present and that if they wait for any length of time the hot season will prevent large scale operations in North Africa. For an effective defence of Tripolitania a mobile unit, capable of taking offensive action, is necessary. This unit must be able to seek out and attack British forces attempting to encircle the Italian defence from the south.

Defence of the city of Tripoli alone has little value for the further conduct of the war and does not justify operations by German forces.

Rintelen

1st February, 1941

To:- General von Rintelen, Rome

Funk's oral report on the situation and plans in North Africa makes it appear doubtful whether there is still any sense at all in sending the defence force to Tripoli.

If Marshal Graziani is only in a position to defend Tripoli itself with his forces, then an additional German unit would be useless. Tripoli alone cannot be held for any length of time, as sea communication will be interrupted and the Italian Air Force will lose their bases in North Africa. The condition for German assistance on land is therefore existence of the

/intention

intention and possibility of holding Tripolitania. If the Funk defence force is not adequate for this and if, in the opinion of the Italian High Command, a panzer unit is necessary, consideration must be given to the fact that this unit cannot be in Tripoli before the end of April.

The Italian High Command is therefore required to submit written answers to the following questions so that the Fuehrer may make his decisions:

1. What instructions has Marshal Graziani for the further conduct of operations, and how does he intend to carry them out?
2. For how long does Marshal Graziani think he will be able to hold out in Cyrenaica, if British pressure continues?
3. When can a reinforcement worth mentioning be expected for the Italian Air Force in North Africa, which at present is supposed to have only 80 - 100 serviceable aircraft?
4. Is there any intention of delaying a further advance of the British base along the coast by using naval forces?
5. If the British have still not broken into Tripolitania by the time the Ariete and Trento Divisions and the Funk defence force are ready for action, will these forces be adequate for the defence of Tripolitania, or is this impossible without strong panzer forces?

An immediate answer to these questions is required, first in brief by teleprinter, and then a written reply with comments by General von Rintelen personally.

Chief of OKW

2nd February, 1941

To:- Army General Staff, Operations Division

The General Staff of the Italian Armed Forces reports that at present there is no intention of using chemical war materials.

3rd February, 1941

To:- OKH

Report from Military Attaché in Rome:

Summary of General Guzzoni's reply to questions of Chief of OKW -

1. In face of threatened encirclement from the south, Graziani will withdraw his forces from Cyrenaica.
2. It is not possible to put up resistance for any length of time.
3. The (Italian) Air Force has already been reinforced and will receive further aircraft (present strength is 90 bombers and 130 fighters).
4. No.
5. Considers defence possible with forces hitherto provided.

I have requested that the reply to 1. be expanded to include Tripolitania and am still waiting for this answer. General Guzzoni is with the Duce in Apulia; Graziani will set out from Cyrenaica to Sirte today.

Field H.Q.

5th February, 1941

To:- OKW Operations Staff

Subject:- The conduct of German troops in Italian theatres of operations.

The German troops fighting shoulder to shoulder with our allies in the Mediterranean must realise their great military and political duty.

They are destined to give valuable military and psychological assistance to our allies who are fighting against strong enemy superiority in all theatres and who are, owing to the limited Italian war economy, inadequately equipped with modern weapons.

Although justifiably proud of their worth and efficiency, they must not display any kind of hurtful arrogance whatsoever. They must gain the respect and recognition of our allies solely by their deeds, by their model discipline and bravery and by their military capabilities.

In agreement with the Italian Armed Services General Staff the following principles regarding the operation of German troops are in force:

1. The German troops in Libya (and if occasion arises, in Albania) are tactically directly subordinate to the present Italian Commander in Chief in this theatre. In other respects they are subordinate to the Commander in Chief of the Army, who will maintain contact with the local Italian commanders through liaison officers.
2. They may be used only as one unit of at least a division. Exceptions are permissible only if, in the opinion of the German commander, the German troops are directly threatened before complete assembly, or if a crisis should arise which, if not settled, could result in the loss of the entire theatre of operations.
3. If the German unit is sent into action according to plan, it must be as a unit under the orders of the German commander and may not be distributed over various sectors of the battle front.
4. If the German forces should be given an order, the execution of which in the opinion of their commander would lead only to failure and would thus prejudice the reputation of the German forces, it is the German commander's right and duty to obtain my decision through the Commander in Chief of the Army, by informing the German general at Comando Supremo.
5. Fliegerkorps X remains subordinated to the Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe, Reichsmarschall Goering, and will carry out its orders in accordance with his directions in close cooperation with all relevant Italian authorities.

Adolf Hitler

Field H.Q., 6th February, 1941

To:- C. in C. Army

Subject:- Operation Sonnenblume

The Fuehrer has made the following decisions:

1. In order to support the Italians' defensive battle in Libya before the arrival of German army units, and in addition to eliminating the R.A.F. in Malta, the Luftwaffe will carry out the following tasks with forces available in Southern Italy, in accordance with more detailed instructions from C. in C. Luftwaffe:

/(a)

G.219129/EFE/11/48

- (a) Attack British supply transports along the North African coast.
- (b) Attack enemy forces advancing to the west in Cyrenaica.
- (c) Destroy by using all possible forces and the heaviest bombs concentrations of enemy armoured and motorised units moving in, and advancing across western Cyrenaica.

Luftwaffe units with their own fighter and flak defence forces may be transferred to North Africa for this operation - if necessary formations operating against England may also be withdrawn. The necessary transports will be incorporated into the present transport service according to developments in the situation, so that the defence force may be brought over.

2. The Luftwaffe, in cooperation with the Italian Air Force and the Italian Naval C. in C. Catania, has the further task of protecting German sea transport (including embarkation and disembarkation) against enemy air and naval forces. Air defence units of the German defence force will temporarily participate in this operation.

C. in C. Navy and C. in C. Luftwaffe will make direct arrangements for the equipment of transport vessels with A.A. weapons.

In order to prevent confusion between British and Italian submarines, the German General at Comando Supremo will make arrangements so that Italian submarines keep clear of this sea area for the duration of the sea transport operation. He will also suggest to Italian Command that the Naval C. in C. Catania have greater freedom in operating his forces (Fliegerkorps X propose this to make cooperation between Italian naval forces and the Luftwaffe easier).

3. Transport of the army units being sent to Libya is to be begun and carried out as quickly as possible. The unit is to come under the command of a German general for the purpose of later incorporation with Italian fast-moving forces, and is to be reinforced with panzer forces (about 1 regiment to begin with) until such incorporation. Later reinforcement of the unit by a panzer division strengthened by defence forces is intended.

C. in C. Luftwaffe is making preparations for the Luftwaffe to give direct support to the operations later.

4. C. in C. Luftwaffe is requested to make preparations for the possibility that sea transports to Tripoli may of necessity be replaced by available Luftwaffe transport units. The withdrawal of III/K.G.z.b.V. 1 from operations in Albania is explained to the Italian Command.

5. The German general at Comando Supremo is empowered to make the necessary local decisions regarding the commencement and sequence of the transport of German forces from Southern Italy to North Africa within the bounds of orders issued and according to the development of the situation.

Army unit commands will detach the requisite liaison officers for this work if the necessity arises.

All measures taken are to be reported.

Keitel,  
Chief of OKW

11th February, 1941

To:- Army General Staff, Operations Division

The report that the General Staff of the Italian Armed Forces "has no

/intention

intention at present" of using chemical war materials is not adequate. It is therefore suggested that we demand that Italy will in no circumstances use gas without informing us in time, so that simultaneous German measures may be possible.

In view of the alliance between Germany and Italy any use of gas by one partner will effect the other.

If therefore gas should be used, this use must be settled by mutual agreement, so that a decisive victory may be gained. Otherwise only pin-pricks will be achieved, which will not result in any sort of advantage for the homeland.

G.O.C. Chemical Warfare Units

12th February, 1941

To:- OKH Operations Division

On the evening of the 10th General Gandin showed me the Duce's directive regarding the conduct of operations in Tripolitania, which I summarise as follows:

- "1. The defence of Tripolitania must not be carried out in the Tripoli area, but as far forward as possible, so that our airfields may be protected and the British held as far away as possible from our supply harbour. Operations must be carried out in positions at a sufficient distance from Tripoli to compel the British to fight with the desert in the rear.
2. Leave a few units (border patrol and non-mobile formations) in Tripoli itself to safeguard the west front. Send in infantry units to defend positions selected by you and to block the coastal road and its exits.
3. German and Italian motorised units must be used as far as possible as a single division, and for the time being will carry out offensive delaying operations in the Sirte area. Every opportunity to go over to the offensive and to cause the British as heavy losses as possible is to be exploited. In the second phase of the action these units are to be used as reserves in positions selected by you so that they may act upon the enemy flank and rear.
4. The importance of the Zella and Secna oases in the Sirte area must be taken into account, as British encircling movements from this region could result in our forces being trapped.
5. I consider the probability of active participation by forces from Tunis and the south as slight. In view of the whole internal situation in France and in consideration of the pressure which Germany and Italy can bring to bear on French soil, I consider it improbable that the de Gaullists will undertake large scale attacks against you. However, should sizeable attacks be made by de Gaullist troops - and only in this instance - you may use part of the motorised forces (still as one unit) to carry out an effective defence.
6. I direct your attention to the possibility of British landings. It is essential that measures for coastal surveillance be taken and that minefields be provided for coastal defence, especially in the Misurata - Homs area.
7. Air Force attacks on important Cyrenaican naval bases must be continued in the greatest possible strength. This will slow down the advance of the British, who need the naval bases of Benghazi and Derna for the continuation of the offensive towards the west.
8. I expect your orders for the defence of Tripolitania to be issued in accordance with these general directions.

Mussolini"

/In

In reply to my question, General Gandin informed me that the High Command in Libya had received telegraphic instructions which once more emphasised that defence must lie to the south-east of Misurata. However, it appears from a report from Heggenreiner that Graziani, who has not yet relinquished command, has hitherto not put into effect the Duce's instructions.

This morning (11th February) General Rommel was received by General Guzzoni. General Gandin and I were also present. General Guzzoni spoke as follows:

"By order of the Duce I welcome the commander of the German troops provided for Libya. The Duce's instructions regarding the conduct of operations in Tripolitania comply with the Fuehrer's opinion that the defence must be advanced far enough to the east to leave sufficient room for the operations of a strong Air Force, and also to keep the British in the desert. The first line of defence lies at Sirte; the main defence will be carried out at Misurata. Infantry divisions will be despatched to the east tomorrow. Graziani, who is now relinquishing command to Gariboldi, was of the opinion that there are more favourable tactical positions between Misurata and Homs. His objection to advancing defence further to the east was however not recognised. On 12th February, I will send General Roatta to Tripoli to supervise the carrying out of the Duce's instructions. The next few weeks will bring about a serious crisis until we succeed in building up an effective defence and in forming a mobile motorised group. During this period the Air Force will bear the brunt of defensive operations. Today I instructed the Chief of Air Force General Staff, General Pricolo, to carry out the following three tasks with the Italian Air Force in cooperation with Fliegerkorps X: air attacks against Malta and Benghazi, and against concentrations and advances of armoured forces on the coastal road.

General Rommel is requested to acquaint himself with the situation and as a proven leader of panzer units to make his advice available to the Commander in Chief, General Gariboldi. As soon as active units of the German defence force arrive, a mobile group will be formed under the command of General Rommel. Italian mobile formations (hitherto only the Ariete Armoured Division, to which the I Medium Tanks Battalion is now being sent) - will be subordinated to this group.

The Duce wishes to speak to General Rommel personally after he has acquainted himself with the situation.

If it becomes clear in the course of the next few days that Tripolitania cannot be held, I will be the first to admit that it is not worth sending German units to Libya only to be captured by the enemy. The prestige of the German Army forbids this and it is also not in keeping with Italian conduct of the war. On this point my opinion coincides with that of the Duce. However, I am absolutely confident that the crisis will be successfully overcome."

General Rommel and I agreed with these statements made by General Guzzoni. It remains to be seen whether there is still enough time to carry out the measures which have been decided on.

On the afternoon of the 11th, General Rommel will fly to Catania to confer with G.O.C. Fliegerkorps X and will then proceed to Tripoli on the 12th.

Rintelen

16th February, 1941

To:- C. in C. Italian troops in Libya, General Gariboldi

In consideration of the favourable development in the situation, the arrival of the first German troops at the front (Sirte), and of the excellent

/condition

condition of Italian troops, and also as a result of my personal observations on the ground and from the air, I beg to submit the following suggestions in brief to Your Excellency:

1. Conduct of the defensive battle in Libya:

Main defensive effort along the coastal strip Nofila, Sirte, Buerat. Mobile operations between Nofila and Sirte (towns excluded). The most stubborn defence will be carried out in the area around Sirte and along the coast on both sides of the coastal road as far as Buerat, so that enemy forces attempting encirclement from the south will not be able to link up with enemy forces which may be landed by sea to cut off part of the Sirte - Buerat position. Strong fast-moving units will be held ready in the area of Buerat and to the west for offensive operations in the defensive battle.

Defence of the oases:

Zella, the oasis group Uaddan, Hun, Socna, as well as the oases of Buetla and Bu Ngem.

Garrisons in the passes at Iefren, Garian, Tarhuna, Homs and also in the fortress of Tripoli.

Weak occupation of the French Colonial Empire frontier, as hitherto.

At least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all available forces should be used on the Sirte - Buerat front and at the oasis south of Buerat. Concentrated operations by all air forces available in Libya should also be carried out in this area.

2. Proposal for the conduct of the defensive battle in the Sirte sector until the arrival of considerable German and Italian reinforcements:

As has already been the case in the last few days, concentrated operations by all available air forces appear especially essential during the next few weeks to destroy all British battle units within reach, especially armoured formations, and to prevent the establishment of supply bases. Measures are being prepared for cooperation in this field between German air forces under my command and Italian forces. A battle unit consisting of Armoured Reconnaissance Unit 3, Anti-tank Unit 39, and one Italian motorised unit (which has already been used east of Sirte) under the command of the O.C. Armoured Reconnaissance Unit will be sent out in front of the line of the Italian divisions already in, or moving into position, (Pavia in area around Sirte, Bologna east of Tmed Hassan, Ariete Armoured Division in Buerat area), with orders to make and maintain contact with the enemy, and to reconnoitre the coastal strip extending 50 km. inland towards the east; the bulk of this force will prepare to repulse weak units in the Nofila area, but will make a fighting withdrawal on to the Italian position at Sirte in face of stronger enemy forces or threatened encirclement.

It is proposed that this formation cooperate with Air Force units.

The coastal strip Sirte, Tmed, Hassan, Buerat, will be effectively defended by the Pavia and Bologna Divisions and the Ariete Armoured Division for the time being. As soon as possible the Ariete Division will be replaced by an infantry division, thus making a panzer division available for offensive operation in cooperation with German troops, for the conduct of the defensive battle in the Sirte sector.

Consolidation of the Sirte position by labour battalions using barricades and obstacles, which will be brought up by sea if circumstances permit.

Defence of the Zella oasis, but above all of the Uaddan, Hun, Socna, Bu Etla and Bu Ngem oases.

/Consolidation

Consolidation of positions: use of mines .

Desert routes leading to the east will be blocked to civilian traffic because of the danger of mines. A public announcement appears useful. Presence of panzer units in the oasis groups to be simulated by the erection of dummies (to be changed daily to different forms and positions).

If circumstances permit, the operation of a further division will be considered in the area around Bu Etila and Bu Ngen.

3. Organisation of supply: I suggest that all supplies should be brought up to the Sirte sector in small coastal vessels escorted by Italian naval units, and that supply bases should be formed there for individual divisions, which will enable them to operate for several days without being supplied by land or sea.

4. I suggest that all enemy reports or situation reports concerning the above should be compared as quickly as possible.

Rommel

Field H.Q., 19th February, 1941

To:- C. in C. Army

Subject:- Operation Sonnenblume

The Fuehrer reached the following decisions on 18th February:

1. The German forces in Africa subordinated to General Rommel will receive the name 'German Africa Corps' with immediate effect.
2. OKH will arrange transport to Tripolitania of a full panzer division - in addition to the 5th Light Division and its panzer regiment - to reinforce the German Africa Corps.

Chief of OKW

H.Q., OKH, 1st March, 1941

To:- Field Marshal Keitel

The employment of further Italian forces in the Libyan theatre of operations intended by Italy, and the preparation of the necessary equipment has, according to reports received here, lead to General Guzzoni requesting General von Rintelen to send as soon as possible 3,000 captured French vehicles and tanks, the prospect of which had apparently been held out to him at one time.

This demand brings forward once more the problem of the vehicle situation. While we make every effort to economise so that the necessary vehicles may be prepared for Operation Barbarossa and so that in addition our troops in Libya, or those to be sent to Libya may be equipped, I cannot help having the impression that the Italians are behaving very differently. I have the impression rather that as regards vehicles the Italians are counting too much on the combined resources and do not realise that for their part all vehicles must also be withdrawn from their secondary fronts, especially those of the forces based in the Po Plain, in order to cover requirements in Albania and Libya.

The Italians apparently rely on the assistance of their great ally and do not seem to understand that they must first help themselves in this

/respect

respect by all possible efforts. Also I cannot perceive whether, perhaps, every possible vehicle has been drawn from Italian private circles and agriculture, thus causing a bottleneck, as has happened in our case.

I am bringing this question to the attention of OKW and urgently request that the necessities which have arisen be made as clear as possible to our allies. If, in addition to the requirements of Operation Barbarossa, we also equip units reserved for Libya with vehicles, this will represent our utmost capacity. The Italians will have to help themselves, and will certainly be capable of doing so if they proceed with vigour equal to ours.

Halder  
Chief of the General Staff

Field H.Q., 3rd April, 1941

To:- Army General Staff, Operations Division

Subject:- Operation Sonnenblume

The Fuehrer reached the following decisions on 2nd April:

1. For the time being the main task of the German Africa Corps is still to defend positions reached and to hold down as great a part as possible of the British forces in North Africa.

The resultant offensive operations with limited objectives may not be expanded further than weak forces permit before the arrival of the 15th Panzer Division. Above all an endangering of the open right flank, which would necessarily arise in the case of a pivot movement in a northerly direction on Benghazi, must be avoided.

2. Even after the arrival of the 15th Panzer Division, an extensive operation with Tobruk as the objective cannot be undertaken for the time being.

The commitments in other theatres of operations of the bulk of Fliegerkorps X and of Italian forces which cannot be further motorised at present will not permit an extension of objectives before the autumn of 1941.

A change in these plans could be considered only if the bulk of British armoured forces were withdrawn from Cyrenaica. New measures are being kept in reserve for this eventuality.

3. Cooperation with Italy will remain limited for the time being to the subordination, if necessary, of an additional motorised division (102nd) to the German Africa Corps, in addition to those forces already under Africa Corps command.

New coordination is being held in reserve for a large scale offensive later.

4. The German general at Comando Supremo is requested to obtain Italian High Command agreement to these principles.

Keitel,  
Chief of OKW

14th April, 1941

To:- OKH Operations Staff

The following was decided at a talk with General Guzzoni on the afternoon of 13th April.

/(1)

(1) .....

(2) .....

(3) Operations in Libya:

General Guzzoni gave me the gist of an order to G.H.Q. of the Army Group in Libya, which has yet to receive the approval of the Duce, which provides for a pause in the offensive when the Sollum area is reached, so that reinforcements of personnel, material and supplies for a further advance may be brought up. Occupation of the oases Girabub and Xiva will be recommended, so that the offensive may be placed on a broader basis.

Preparations for the continuation of the offensive in the spring are to be accelerated, so that the best use may be made of favourable strategic positions. As the Italian fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean area is unable to operate, it will be necessary to strengthen the Luftwaffe, and if possible Fliegerkorps X in Cyrenaica also.

The German general at Comando Supremo

14th April, 1941

To:- Army General Staff, Operations Division

Africa Corps sent the following by radio:-

"Continuation of operations in the immediate proximity of the British naval base will, as has already happened on April 10th and 11th, result in further participation by units of the British fleet in the fighting on land. In this case Army defensive measures are not available. In addition, combat units as well as supply services are tied down to the coastal road, so that if further activity by the British fleet proceeds undisturbed, operations may be endangered. Full scale operation of the Italian Navy to patrol the coastal area especially with destroyers and submarines, must be demanded. However, the best measure would be a timely blow by the Luftwaffe at jumping-off harbours. Increased transfer of Fliegerkorps X bomber units to eastern Cyrenaica would be the most favourable step in this direction. At the same time this would present the best opportunity of settling all offensive operations in the eastern Mediterranean area. Further decision regarding the Italian Navy and the Luftwaffe is urgently required as soon as possible."

I replied as follows:

"1. Have submitted your requests for support of operations by the fleet and the Luftwaffe to the Italian and German OKW. The Italian fleet is not able to operate in the sea area between Cyrenaica and Crete owing to the superiority of British naval units in the eastern Mediterranean.

2. OKW wires: Owing to the fact that the bulk of Fliegerkorps X is held down by operations against Greece, expanded and increased cover for the German Africa Corps will be provided by the Italian Air Force. The Duce has given assurances of this.

3. Stronger British activity against sea transports necessitates increased convoy escorts.

4. Have requested OKW that Fliegerkorps X should also be reinforced again on arrival of the 15th Panzer Division in Libya, so that the offensive may be continued."

/The

The unexpected success of the Africa Corps can be further exploited only with extensive Luftwaffe support, as naval operations are not possible east of Benghazi. I consider it essential that General Rommel be informed of the time at which he may expect increased Luftwaffe support, which may soon be available again as a result of the speed at which the Balkan campaign is proceeding. Operations by airborne troops and paratroops would greatly help continuation of the attack on Egypt. According to reports received here the British are bringing reinforcements up to Mersa Matruh.

The German general at Comando Supremo

15th April, 1941

To:- The German general at Comando Supremo

I request that the Italian High Command be informed of the following OKW interpretation, approved by the Fuehrer, of the situation in North Africa.

We concur with the Italian High Command opinion that, in view of the state of operations in eastern Cyrenaica, a pause should be made and used to prepare for the continuation of operations.

Provisional measures for an operation against Egypt, which will exclude the possibility of failure, can be seen in the following points:

1. Reinforcement of assault units. To do this it is necessary to wait for the arrival of the 15th Panzer Division and further Italian infantry units, as well as operational Luftwaffe units. For this purpose the reinforced Fliegerkorps X is once more available.

The following are intended as reinforcements:

1 mine laying Gruppe, 1 fighter Gruppe, 1 dive-bomber Gruppe and, if necessary, 1 transport Gruppe.

2. Expansion of the jumping-off base for the coming operation and protection of flanks by the occupation of Giarabub and Siwa oases.

3. Formation of a supply base for ground troops as well as installation and supply of ground organisation for German flying units in Cyrenaica.

4. The most important point is however the elimination of British attacks on rear communications by:

(a) capturing Tobruk,

(b) protecting coastal routes and coastal shipping against sea and air attacks, preferably by bomber, fighter and flak forces, and if possible by submarine and small craft operations,

(c) protecting sea transports from Italy to Libya.

This break in operations does not exclude the possibility of further thrusts to the east by reconnaissance units to clarify the situation further and to hamper the formation of a British defence front.

Chief of OKW

Field H.Q., 5th May, 1941

To:- The German general at Comando Supremo, General von Rintelen

1. The enclosed notes on the capture of the island of Corsica (Operation /Camellia)

Camellia) are despatched with the request that they be discussed in detail with the Italian High Command in the presence of liaison officers, and that the Italians prepare for the operation in detail so that if required, it can be put into effect quickly, after due German agreement.

Liaison officers will also have to influence the actual preparations.

2. The importance of keeping the French fleet in Toulon by superior Italian naval forces and by other measures (use of Italian aircraft, mining) must be made especially clear to the Italians.

3. As for the Luftwaffe, cooperation by units of Fliegerkorps X can be expected. Final consent to this participation and its extent must however remain dependent on the situation at the time. The transfer to Sardinia of adequate units from Fliegerkorps X will be prepared.

A possible Italian demand for support of the suggested airborne operation against Ajaccio, by detaching German transport aircraft, will be met by stating that it will depend on the general situation at the time whether German transport aircraft can be made available.

4. It is likewise dependent on the general situation whether the British Gibraltar Squadron can be drawn off by German naval actions in the Atlantic before the operation is carried out.

5. For your own information it is added that OKW intends to carry out this operation either (a) to forestall a threatened British landing, or (b) to coincide with the possible necessity of German occupation of the remainder of France (Operation Attila).

In this case German air units will mine the harbour of Toulon, which will be occupied by German forces as the operation proceeds, in addition to the Italian naval blockade.

6. A report is requested on (a) Italian agreement to the suggestions made, (b) the commencement and (c) the conclusion of preparations.

Jodl

Field H.Q., 20th May, 1941

To:- C. in C. Army

Transport situation in North Africa.

1. Difficulties in the supply of the Africa Corps are mainly due to the decrease in unloading capacity at Tripoli and Benghazi, owing to harbour damage and convoy losses.

Efforts are being made to repair the harbours as quickly as possible. The possibilities for this and the length of time involved cannot be estimated at present. The time when large vessels can be sent to Benghazi depends on this and on the establishment of adequate transport and unloading protection.

The use of French harbours in North Africa for German supply transport has been agreed to in principle by the French. Details are being arranged with the French as quickly as possible.

2. Losses in shipping space have hitherto been compensated by using Italian tonnage. In order to be certain in the future, the use of French shipping is suggested.

/The

The tonnage space available for transports along the African coast is considerably greater than the unloading capacity of the harbours. Coastal transport east of Benghazi (with the exception of single U-boats) is still not possible.

3. Air transport space to the extent of 2 transport Gruppen will remain available in Sicily until further notice.

4. Luftwaffe formations will be based in Sicily, even after Operation Mercury, in order to safeguard shipping.

More extensive operation of Italian air formations is required.

The reinforcement of protective measures by the Italian fleet can hardly be expected for the present, as escort units have been considerably weakened by losses, and have many other duties to perform.

5. It is expected that Operation Mercury will greatly ease the situation at sea in the central Mediterranean.

Keitel  
Chief of OKW

Rome, 14th June, 1941

To:- Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of OKW

General Cavallero's reply to the letter of 7th June, 1941:

Rome, 12th June, 1941

"The Fuehrer's theories and suggestions concerning the conduct of the war in North Africa, which were sent with the written memorandum on 10th June were eagerly received. It can be reported that they agree with the principles expressed by the Duce, and that the measures already introduced by the High Command correspond to them.

Our attitude in detail on the individual points is as follows:

1. Safeguarding transports:

As soon as the conditions of the air supply situation and ground organisation permit, the fighter formations there will be reinforced.

At the moment 13 flak batteries of various calibres and 11 2cm. flak batteries are being transferred there. The despatch of a further 12 flak batteries of various calibres and 11 2cm. flak batteries is being prepared to reinforce the flak defences of airfields and especially of the harbours.

Similarly 5 Italian coastal batteries, in addition to the two German 15cm. coastal artillery units, are being transferred there at present to improve the defences of harbours in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica against attacks from the sea.

2. and 3. The attack on Tobruk:

In order to reinforce still further the heavy artillery at Tobruk, to which heavy German artillery units (10cm. artillery and 21cm. mortars) are already being sent, the despatch of further artillery units (10.5cm., 14.9cm. of 28 calibres length, 14.9cm. of 40 calibres length and 15.2cm. of 37 calibres length) has been proposed. In the expectation that the whole of this artillery reinforcement can be brought into position at Tobruk, it is noted that activity by Fliegerkorps X from Crete will be very useful, and

/it

it is requested that it be mainly directed against shipping supplying Tobruk and against the defences of the fortress. The Duce eagerly accepted the plan to despatch more modern siege weapons for the capture of Tobruk.

#### 4. Unloading harbours:

As is known, Benghazi harbour is blocked at present by sunken ships and cannot take convoys consisting of more than two vessels of low tonnage. Every effort is being made to restore the harbour to full efficiency, to complete the laying of torpedo nets, and to bring flak defences up to full strength.

The question of commencing direct transport to Tobruk with small convoys of fast vessels has been examined but this solution has to be abandoned owing to the lack of suitable craft. Of the 5 fast vehicles available, which were sent to Tobruk, 4 have been lost.

The Italian Navy does not possess any vessels with a speed exceeding 10 - 12 knots, of suitable size for Benghazi harbour. On being asked, the German Naval Liaison Staff also declared that at the moment they do not have any vessels of this type in the Mediterranean.

#### 5. The use of torpedo boats for transport:

The use of destroyers and torpedo boats for transport duties has already been examined. As the number of these craft has already declined considerably owing to losses suffered, and as they possess only a small cargo capacity it is not possible to use them profitably. This would only cause a decline in the already low number of torpedo boats, thus necessitating another reduction in the number of convoys.

#### 6. Shipping routes:

At present transport is being introduced experimentally with single vessels having a speed of about 10 knots which will proceed from Bari or Brindisi direct to Benghazi.

These vessels should be given air cover by Fliegerkorps X from Crete as far as the African coast. If this experiment shows good results, these transport movements can be made more extensive. The Piraeus could be made the port of departure after the resumption of rail transport in Greece. The shipping route should run westwards past Crete to Benghazi, and this would bring about considerable advantages for the safeguarding of shipping movements.

To sum up, it must once more be emphasised that, as the Fuehrer has already stressed, the most urgent problem for successful operations in North Africa is that the transport question be solved in such a way that all the necessary war material can be brought to Africa as quickly as possible. If it is still not possible to direct all the necessary transports to harbours in Libya, even when all the above measures have been carried out, the harbour of Bizerta will have to be used as extensively as possible. As has already been arranged with Field Marshal Keitel, the Duce is looking forward to information concerning the German transport plan for these harbours, and is also waiting for news regarding the extent and time of Italian participation in this transport plan."

My attitude to General Cavellero's letter is as follows:

1. Owing to the almost exclusive claim on all available transport for the movement of the two German panzer divisions to Libya, the Italians must postpone until the middle of May their own requirements for supplying their colonies, replenishing their troops, and improving air and coastal defences. This can be explained by the fact that the reinforcements have only just started on their way.

/Experience

Experience has shown that Italian flak and fighter forces, as is the case with all other Italian units, are not as efficient as an equal number of German units. Their efficiency can be greatly increased if they act in close cooperation with German units.

It therefore appears necessary that, as soon as they can be made available, 1 flak unit and 1 searchlight unit each should be sent to Benghazi and Tripoli and held there continually for the defence of the harbours.

It also appears, as has been reported several times already, that the movement of sea transports can only be adequately guaranteed by using 2 Me 110 Staffeln.

2. The efficiency of Benghazi harbour is limited and can at present, according to Italian reports, take only two large vessels at once. Convoys of 6 ships must therefore be directed to Tripoli. In addition, the convoy escort vessels which, according to reports, are still available in the Aegean, are not sufficient for two transport routes, and so continuous supply of the German and Italian forces based in Cyrenaica cannot be built up on Benghazi harbour alone.

Derna harbour is not to be used for large vessels at all, and is at present being successfully exploited for the transport of ammunition by U-boats.

3. In view of the harbour and transport facilities at present available, adequate reinforcement of units for an offensive cannot be carried out until autumn, as all transports are required almost exclusively for the supply of units already based in Libya.

von Rintelen

Comando Supremo, 16th July, 1941

Directive for the C. in C.  
Armed Forces in North Africa.

1. An ever increasing quantity of troops and equipment is in Italy ready to be transported to North Africa. Transport of these to replenish the battle strength of Italian units active in this theatre is however limited by the known transport difficulties and by the limited unloading capacity of the harbours.
2. It appears that the British forces in Egypt are continually receiving reinforcements, evidently to take up the offensive again as soon as possible. Furthermore, landing attempts on the Libyan coast, especially at Tripoli and Benghazi, must be expected.
3. Owing to this situation the plan of a simultaneous Axis attack on Egypt from Cyrenaica and the Middle East must be postponed until a more favourable time. In this respect the development of the situation in Russia is decisive.
4. Until then the following necessities arise:
  - (a) Reinforcement of the defences in Cyrenaica, by completely equipping the forces active there. It must be noted that in this connection, equipment replenishment can be carried out - as far as possible during this month - only with the greatest difficulty because of transport from the homeland. It will be possible to commence limited transport of fresh forces in August.
  - (b) Extensive completion of consolidation on the eastern defence front, behind which a strong mobile reserve must be prepared.

/(c)

(c) Adoption of the necessary measures for defence against possible enemy attempts at encirclement from the south.

(d) Examination of command organisation on the east front. The best method for the general issue of orders is to be found and put into effect; in this respect the practicability of forming a mobile panzer group under the command of General Rommel must be taken into consideration.

(e) Preparation for the capture of Tobruk, especially by concentration of artillery and other suitable weapons for this purpose, which are en route. In consideration of the time necessary for this operation, continual harassing activity, especially by artillery and aircraft, is necessary in the meantime to wear down the enemy's physical and moral power to resist, and to interrupt his sea-borne supply. Furthermore, the Tobruk garrison must be prevented from effectively supporting a simultaneous enemy attack on the Sollum front.

(f) Regarding the situation in Tripolitania, it must be noted that at the moment the strongest enemy threat is a landing attempt. For this reason the bulk of the forces in this area must be held ready for coastal defence.

(g) Every effort must be made to increase the unloading capacity of Tripoli and Benghazi and to improve the A.A. defences of these places.

Continued consolidation of positions already determined by the High Command is a preventive measure. These positions can be weakly held by troops from Tripolitania; later, if the situation permits, they can be used as rest areas.

Mussolini

Field H.Q., 3rd December, 1941

To:- The German general at Comando Supremo

As a result of a conference with the Fuehrer I request you to inform Comando Supremo of the following:

OKW has ordered that every measure at its disposal be taken to contribute to the protection of supply transport from Italy to North Africa. A gradual improvement in the supply situation can be expected in consequence of these measures, especially regarding the operations of Luftflotte 2 and the increased use of light naval forces.

Only when Axis sea and air supremacy in the central Mediterranean has been restored by these methods can the French be approached again on the subject of using the harbour of Bizerta for supplying war materials. Premature requisition of the harbour would lead to undesirable British intervention in French North Africa without adequate French defence forces or the possibility of Axis support being available.

The German Armistice Commission, in liaison with the Italian Armistice Commission, is at present investigating whether the supply of food and other goods not classed as actual war materials can be introduced in advance. In any case it must be noted that the necessary transport and fuel are lacking to bring essential supplies up to the front on the long route from Bizerta. For the present therefore, the situation can be eased only by using air transport and the supply route via Benghazi and other Cyrenaican harbours to the fullest extent, in spite of the risks.

Chief of OKW

Field H.Q., 8th December, 1941

Comando Supremo transmitted the following order to General Bastico on 7th December:

"Comando Supremo has examined the present situation and Colonel Montesomole's report on the estimates of the situation by Rommel and Bastico. Bastico's situation report is summarised as follows:

1. The present front in the area of Tobruk cannot be held any longer.
2. It therefore appears necessary to disengage the enemy.
3. It is necessary to allow unit commanders absolute freedom of action on the battlefield in the attempt to defend Cyrenaica, and if this proves to be impossible, to consider a retreat into Tripolitania.

After referring to the Duce's directives, Comando Supremo agrees to the points of view mentioned and in addition issues the following instructions:

1. Every effort must be made to hold Cyrenaica, as it offers the important advantage of Benghazi harbour, which will remain available for unloading operations, and will also leave open two routes for our navy (to Tripoli and Benghazi).
2. Immediate reinforcement with mobile units at Agedabia is absolutely essential for the adequate protection of our conduct of operations.
3. The recapture of Ciale is of the greatest importance to ensure adequate protection against enemy attempts at encirclement with fast moving troops.
4. In the present situation it is more than ever necessary that the conduct of operations should be controlled by one Commander in Chief, who will act according to the instructions of G.H.Q. in that theatre, but who will carry out these orders with absolute freedom.
5. There are no objections to General Canbera's resuming his activities as Chief of General Staff if unified conduct of operations by Italian divisions appears to be guaranteed.
6. It is stressed that attention must be drawn to the possibility of an enemy landing attempt on the Libyan coast. An effort will be made to report any signs in this direction as early as possible.
7. Every effort must be made to prevent infantry units falling into enemy hands and to bring back as many weapons and as much material as possible. Everything that cannot be brought back must be destroyed.
8. Absolute discipline in carrying out movements must be assured.
9. Aircraft must be salvaged and the Air Force must provide continuous cover for movements."

The German general at Comando Supremo

Field H.Q., 8th December, 1941

To:- OKW Operations Staff

General Cavallero made the following statements to me at 1830 hours on 7th December:

Lt. Colonel Montesomole, who was sent to Cyrenaica by Comando Supremo, has made an early return from Libya after receiving the following information from

/General

General Rommel in the presence of General Gause and the Italian liaison officer, General Calvi di Bergolo.

"The Panzer Group is no longer capable of continuing the battle without disengaging from the enemy, in spite of the heavy losses inflicted on the enemy. The siege of Tebruk had to be given up on the east front after the Bologna Division and the German 90th Division had suffered such heavy losses that they could no longer resist enemy pressure. The Savona Division and its subordinated units have received orders to retire to Bardia, as all available ammunition and food supplies in bases have been expended. Losses among German divisions amount to about 4,000 killed, including 15 officers of unit commander rank; losses among the Italian divisions are approximately the same. Losses of equipment and material are similarly very high, so that both German panzer divisions dispose of only 40 serviceable tanks, the Ariete Division of about 30.

As it is not possible to make losses good in a short time, the Panzer Group sees itself compelled to disengage the enemy and retire to the Ain-el-Gazala position. Although the German and Italian units have fought very well there is no longer any possibility of defeating the superior enemy forces after these losses."

General Cavallero continued:

The Duce has agreed to General Rommel's request that henceforth he be in sole command of all troops. However, he requests that the Panzer Group be instructed to keep G.H.Q. Libya constantly informed on the situation and plans, and that daily reports in particular be forwarded, as otherwise General Bastico cannot do justice to his task. I have dispatched a suitable radio message to the Panzer Group.

The Ain-el-Gazala position has been occupied as a rallying line by a regiment of the Triesto Division, which is not motorised owing to its vehicles being surken route, and also by several garrison formations. General Rommel had proposed to arrange his retreat so that non-motorised formations could also be withdrawn. This will hardly be possible for units in Bardia, but orders have been issued that Bardia will continue to be supplied by submarines and aircraft.

The Panzer Group must avoid being cut off from Tripoli, since there are no large forces in the city as there were last winter. This is why the necessity of protecting the Agedabia area was specially stressed in the order to Bastico.

General Cavallero added that the situation in Libya could be restored if the three divisions waiting in Italy (Pisvo, Fistoia and Littorio) could be transported via Tunis. As the political conditions for this are lacking he would have to make the best of it, even though he had told the Duce that any political concession should be given to gain this.

The Duce has ordered that transport vessels with the necessary replacements and supplies of food, fuel and ammunition must sail as closely escorted as possible in spite of the continual presence of the British fleet.

In conclusion General Cavallero informed me that the Duce had not permitted him to go to Libya, as the situation was now clarified by the above order.

I spoke with Lt. Colonel Montesomole, a very quiet and practical officer, who fully confirmed General Cavallero's statements.

The German general at Comando Supremo

A.H.B.6 Distribution  
Same as for Translation VII/80

G.219129/EF/E/11/48