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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION VII/128

THE MEDITERRANEAN CAMPAIGN

Signals and Directives concerning

Axis problems of supply and German - Italian co-operation

April - June 1941

TRANSLATED BY

AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6

NOVEMBER, 1953

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No date or reference

Date approximately mid April 1941

Requests to the Italian Air Force

1. X Fliegerkorps (excluding elements serving in Africa) will be transferred to Greece when the latter has been defeated. The transfer of units will commence as from May 1941. The following tasks will be carried out from the newly-captured base:

- (a) operations against British naval forces at sea and in Alexandria,
- (b) operations against British supply movements through the Suez Canal and against railway lines leading to Ismailia and
- (c) the protection of sea communications in the Aegean.

This will necessitate a clear division of the eastern Mediterranean zone of operations, corresponding to the arrangement already made with the Italian navy.

2. The line dividing the German and Italian operational areas may be moved eastwards as soon as Crete has been taken and supplies to Africa can be routed via Crete to Tobruk.

3. The Italian Air Force will carry out the following tasks in its operational area:

- (a) Bomber and fighter formations concentrated in Sicily, southern Italy and Sardinia will patrol the western Mediterranean and ensure against raids by the Gibraltar Squadron by attacking British warships.
- (b) Supplies for Axis forces in Africa will be protected in the area east of Sicilian Straits to 20 degrees longitude. This will necessitate constant surveillance of the air and naval base of Malta and the employment of strong bomber and fighter forces against the island. Armed reconnaissance will be carried out along convoy routes, over sea areas and off the African coast in such a way that bomber formations held in readiness to take off at short notice can reach the target. In addition, complete surveillance should be maintained over those areas from which enemy naval forces can operate against our supply shipping.
- (c) Elements of the Axis Armed Forces serving in Africa to be given direct support by at least two bomber Gruppi and one single-engined fighter Gruppo equipped with the latest types. To relieve the burden of the Italian V Squadra Headquarters at Benghazi, it is suggested that Italian formations be subordinated to Fliegerfuehrer Africa as unified command is absolutely essential to ground support operations.
- (d) Italian AA and fighter formations to be employed to protect ports of discharge essential to the movement of supplies. In this respect, the air defence of Tripoli, Benghazi and later of Tobruk appears to be a matter of particular urgency.

4. Co-operation by the Italian Air Force in the German operational area is requested as follows:

- (a) employment of torpedo-bomber formations on Rhodes for operations against British naval forces.
- (b) employment of Italian fighter formations to protect Rhodes and Crete,

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(c) reconnaissance formations (2 - 3 coastal reconnaissance squadrons) to be made available for reconnaissance of the British fleet.

5. To ensure unified command, it is requested that the Italians agree to the subordination to X Fliegerkorps of the Italian formations mentioned in section 4 to be employed on joint operations in the eastern Mediterranean. It is suggested that an Italian Air Force General be attached to X Fliegerkorps to facilitate the issuing of orders.

6. Should the temporary transfer of X Fliegerkorps bomber formations to Sicily become necessary or desirable, these formations will be placed under command of Italian Air Force Headquarters on Sicily in accordance with the necessity for unified command within an operational area. It is requested that two airfields be held in readiness for this eventuality.

Date:- 18 April 1941

from:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces

to:- Robinson Ic

Copies to:- L/Atlas,
General Staff, Army/Operations Dept.,
Foreign Armies West/Attache Dept.,
OKH Battle Headquarters.

Here is General Guzzoni's appreciation of the situation in North Africa:

Africa Corps, in its spirited offensive, has achieved all that was possible with the small forces available. The strength of enemy defence at Tobruk and Sollum may create some difficulty for the attacking forces. The British have recognised the danger which threatens Egypt and are hastening to assist their hard-pressed forces by air and naval attacks in the Tobruk and Sollum areas and by naval attacks on our maritime supply lines. Owing to the inferiority of the Italian fleet, Africa Corps can be reinforced quickly only by Italian units at present in Libya which, unfortunately, are not motorised, and by using air transport. An immediate strengthening of X Fliegerkorps forces in Africa also appears to be an urgent necessity. The transfer of German and Italian units to Libya must be pressed forward by every means available, including shipping hitherto employed on the route to Albania, in spite of considerable activity by the British navy.

Date:- 18 April 1941

from:- OKW/Armed Forces Operations Staff/National Defence Department (I op)
No. 00687/41 - Top Secret.

to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff IA (Robinson)

Copy to:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces, Rome

It is requested that Comando Supremo be informed that air warfare in the eastern Mediterranean and attacks on Egypt and the Suez Canal can be most effectively carried out from the Greek mainland and the Dodecanese. For this reason the Luftwaffe intends to move large formations of X Fliegerkorps from Sicily to Greece. For this purpose airfields located mainly in

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the area to be occupied by Italian troops will be required. Comando Supremo is therefore requested to place at the disposal of the Luftwaffe the airfields and airfield installations and those signal networks and supply installations which the Luftwaffe considers necessary for the control and supply of the units concerned. If necessary, the Luftwaffe can construct new airfields in the area. Details will be settled directly between the two military authorities concerned. The Luftwaffe is instructed to respect any Italian requests.

Headquarters X Fliegerkorps

20 April, 1941

Subjects for Discussion for General von Waldau

1. X Fliegerkorps can protect only one of the convoy routes used by ships carrying supplies to Africa.

Naval Liaison Staff Rome also requested protection for the following routes:

- (a) Naples - Tripoli,
- (b) Tripoli - Benghazi - Derna,
- (c) Naples - Catania - Benghazi.

This request was rejected.

Suggestion: make new convoy route, as follows:

Naples - Messina - Benghazi.

X Fliegerkorps will provide cover from the Straits of Messina to Benghazi. However, the Italians must provide cover during the last day before arrival at Benghazi.

2. Naval Liaison Staff Rome requested reconnaissance over all the convoy routes mentioned in paragraph one so that any raid by British naval forces from the west as well as from the east may be observed in good time. At least four long-range reconnaissance Staffeln would be required to carry out this reconnaissance completely. For this reason this request was also rejected.

3. The Italian Air Force has frequently reported attacks in waves on Malta. Planned German attacks were thereupon cancelled at the urgent request of the Italians. However, it later transpired that every one of the "attacks in waves" throughout the night was carried out by two aircraft, each of which flew only one sortie, or did not operate at all "for technical reasons".

4. German construction organisations to be made available for the rapid repair of Benghazi harbour.

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Date:- 20 April 1941

from:- X Fliegerkorps (General von Waldau)

to:- Major Christ (GSO), C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia (Robinson)

To be reported to Chief of Staff.

The situation in Africa is characterised by the state of British air superiority. Owing to conditions in this theatre, German airfields are overcrowded in spite of extensive development. Parked aircraft, quarters, stores and an abundance of unserviceable equipment (aircraft) take up the full extent of airfields, so that there is less and less space left for taking off and landing. Army convoys and quarters located in great depth along the coastal road are highly vulnerable to air attack, and with the limited AA and fighter defence available, measures to relieve this situation are not nearly adequate. Rommel's AA units are not available for air defence as they are engaged in ground fighting to maintain the position at Tobruk. One AA Batterie was recently destroyed in the ground fighting. AA ammunition is not reaching units and defence is therefore severely restricted. Four fighters of I./J.G.27 had arrived at operational airfields by 19 April. Further elements are being transferred today.

Italian fighter equipment is inferior and, in spite of the readiness of personnel to go into action, is ineffective. The state of fighter serviceability is very low. A request for reinforcements was made to A.O.C. V Squadra. These will begin to arrive as from 20 April. Only then, and after sizeable elements of I/J.G.27 have become operational, is it likely that the balance will be restored. The British are reinforcing continuously. Yesterday there were 18 Hurricanes over Tobruk and 20 over Malta.

The absence of an aircraft reporting service in Africa is at present being overcome to some extent by using advanced patrols. However, the effectiveness of the latter is restricted and British aircraft approaching over a wide area cannot be located.

In spite of the utmost exertions by X Fliegerkorps, the movement of supplies is coming to a standstill. On 19 April the British also attacked coastal traffic and supply ships with fuel and bombs for Derna were sunk off Appolonia.

Overland supply along the Benghazi - Derna route is completely inadequate owing to transport shortage. Italian M/T columns, taken far beyond the agreed limits by X Fliegerkorps, were withdrawn yesterday. Claims put to General Aimone-Cat resulted in the return of one column as from 20 April. It is doubtful if further columns will be made available as they are controlled by Comando Supremo.

Tomorrow, the following requests will be made in Rome:

- (a) M/T columns to be provided exclusively for the supply of the Luftwaffe in Africa. Apart from the continuous provision of water and food, which appears to be assured, supply is more important than all other Army requirements.
- (b) All available Italian fighters to be moved up to front-line airfields. At present they are hanging around in southern Italy and Tripolitania.
- (c) Pressure to be put on the Italian Navy to compel protection of supplies for Africa.

If Rommel's position is to be maintained, I personally consider the following reinforcements to be necessary:

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(a) One extra fighter Staffel, one Flak Abteilung for the protection of ground organisation and one aircraft reporting company. One long range reconnaissance Staffel to be provided by C-in-C Army. One reinforced Staffel of HE 60's for air-sea rescue work and also to protect coastal shipping between Tripoli, Benghazi and Derna against the increasing threat of submarine attack.

(b) A German labour force under the control of a German plenipotentiary to be employed on the development of Benghazi.

Tomorrow I fly to Rome. Time and weather permitting, I will return on the same day.

Date:- 20 April 1941

from:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff IA (Robinson)
No. 7296/41 - Top Secret - (op 1)

to:- X Fliegerkorps

The Reichsmarschall directs the attention of A.O.C. X Fliegerkorps to the following:

(a) Every effort will be made to expedite the transfer to Africa of I./St.G. 1 and I./J.G./27.

(b) Warships and merchant ships off Tobruk will be destroyed.

(c) Very great importance is attached at present to the laying of mines in the Suez Canal.

(d) Operations will be carried out against warships in La Valetta harbour, to put an end to the attacks on our convoys to Tripoli. Aircrews will be instructed that the primary objective is not to attack shipyards, warehouses and harbour installations, but to destroy submarines, destroyers and freighters. Photographic reconnaissance will be carried out regularly over the berths at Marsa Muscetto, Sliema Creek and Misida Creek and the results discussed in detail with aircrews.

Date:- 23 April 1941

from:- A.O.C. X : Fliegerkorps,
Report No. 1021/41 - Top Secret.

to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff
for the attention of Chief of Staff (Robinson).

subj:- Telephone conversation between General von Waldau
and Major Grunow of 22 April 1941

Between its first employment in the Mediterranean area and 22 April 1941, the Lehrgeschwader has lost 97 aircraft and 30 complete aircrews, mostly very experienced personnel. The aircraft serviceability state on 22 April 1941 was as follows:

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II/LG 1	50%
III/LG 1	50%
III/KG 30	30%

X Fliegerkorps' tasks (protection of Axis shipping to Africa, bomber operations against enemy naval forces and convoys between Alexandria, Crete and Greece and, finally, support for Africa Corps in the battle for Tobruk) practically all necessitated operations reaching maximum flying time and extreme range over extensive sea areas. These operations made the highest demands on men and equipment.

Owing to the difficulty of these tasks, only experienced crews could be used in most cases, and the lack of serviceable aircraft resulting from the urgency of operations prevented training, particularly of young aircrews, in bombing and diving.

The ever-increasing AA and fighter defence of convoys (aircraft-carriers and fighter bases on Crete and in Cyrenaica) greatly reduced the aggressive spirit of aircrews in view of the great distances to be flown over sea areas and the consequent possibility of forced landings on the sea in the event of enemy action. The rate of successes also fell to an extraordinarily low level. Only the demands of the Supreme Command and the tense situation which developed at Tobruk following the Africa Corps' offensive have led me to produce a maximum effort in spite of the obvious consequences for men and equipment and the risk of heavy losses. However, the personnel and material situation, particularly in the Lehrgeschwader, has now reached a point at which operations at the rate hitherto carried out appear pointless until extensive training, also of young aircrews, has restored their confidence in bomb sights (by obtaining bombing successes) and the Geschwader's aircraft serviceability state has undergone a considerable improvement. With regard to the last point, an urgent demand must be made for aircraft engines.

I wish to report that, apart from convoy escort duties, L.G. 1 should be withdrawn from operations until further notice. In fact, I request that the possibility of exchanging L.G. 1 for a fresh Geschwader experienced in operations at sea should be considered.

Date:- 25 April 1941

from:- OKW/Armed Forces Operations Staff/
National Defence Dept. (I op)
No. Q0756/41 - Top Secret.

to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff, Robinson.

Copies to:- Chief of Army General Staff, 1st Dept.,
C-in-C Luftwaffe, Q.M.G., Kurfuerst,
German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces, Rome.

The Fuehrer has ordered that, in order to expedite the transfer of reinforcements for Africa Corps, one or two extra Luftwaffe transport Gruppen (Ju 52's) will be employed between southern Italy and Africa. The order in which units are to be transferred will be decided by Africa Corps Commander. Furthermore, the German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces is directed to request transport shipping from the latter so that movements may be intensified.

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Date:- 26 April 1941
from:- OKH/General Staff, Army/Operations Dept. (IIb)
No. 35419/41 - Secret
to:- Robinson IA

German Africa Corps reports by teleprint dated 25 April:

"According to a report from Fliegerfuehrer Afrika, he has received orders from C-in-C Luftwaffe to concentrate on anti-shipping operations. The situation at Tobruk and Bardia, which is deteriorating daily, can be maintained only if Fliegerfuehrer Afrika's forces are employed on ground attack operations. As on previous occasions, an immediate reinforcement of the Luftwaffe is urgently requested. Until then, X Fliegerkorps will concentrate its anti-shipping operations on the sea area Tobruk - Bardia - Sollum. Fliegerfuehrer Afrika cannot carry out such operations unless land forces are directly threatened by enemy warships." OKH would be grateful for appropriate measures.

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Fuehrer's Headquarters,
28 April, 1941.

from:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces
to:- OKW/L Atlas

Copies to:- OKW/Foreign Relations Dept.
General Staff, Army/Attache Dept.
" " " /Operations Dept.
" " " /Foreign Armies West

for information to:- Air Liaison Staff, Rome
Naval Liaison Staff, Rome

Top Secret Report No. 826/41

At 1100 hours on 25 April I gave General Guzzoni an account of Africa Corps' situation, referring particularly to the following points:

As the situation in Greece no longer presents any problem, North Africa is now Italy's main theatre of operations. Every effort must be made to support Africa Corps.

As a result of my report, General Guzzoni called a meeting for 1530 hours. Among those present were:

the Deputy Chief of the Army General Staff,
the Chief of the Naval Staff and
the Deputy Chief of the Air Force General Staff.

After General Guzzoni had commenced by explaining the situation in North Africa, emphasising that this was now Italy's main theatre of operations with precedence over all others, the following points were discussed in detail:

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1. Movement of Army Formations:

Convoy movements from Naples to Tripoli cannot be accelerated. However, infantry units can be transported to Derna by air. If, after the first three German battalions have been moved, there is a time-lag before further German formations arrive, the transport aircraft can be used to ferry across Italian battalions.

After 15th Panzer Division has been moved by sea, the shipping space will be used to transport the Italian trucks assembled at Naples for the motorisation of the Pavia Division and to provide the Army and Air Force with further vehicles. The Trieste Division, Piave Division and Littorio Armoured Division will be transported later, as will a medium tank battalion for the Ariete Armoured Division as soon as it is ready. The transportation of a division is estimated to take four weeks.

If necessary, the Italian Navy will make warships available for the transportation of troops, but material cannot be carried owing to the limited amount of space.

2. Employment of Air Force:

Long range air reconnaissance over the Mediterranean for the protection of transport ships is reported to have been intensified. My proposal that long-range reconnaissance be placed under unified command was not accepted. Fuel supplies for the German and Italian air forces in North Africa are assured for some time. The most pressing problem at present is the improvement of the Luftwaffe ground organisation in Cyrenaica.

As it will be necessary to use the transport shipping groups for ferrying Army troops for about another ten days, the three fast passenger ships "Citta di Bari", "Ramb III" and "Egitto" will also be made available for this purpose and will operate on the Italy - Benghazi route. The possibility of obtaining further ships suitable for this purpose will be examined. Anti-aircraft batteries will be transferred from Valona and Durazzo to reinforce the defences at Benghazi.

The Italian Air Force has been given the task of carrying out air attacks on Malta and convoy escort operations following the transfer of X Fliegerkorps from Sicily.

3. Employment of the Navy:

Eight Italian submarines are operating along the African coast between Tobruk and Mersa Matruh. Owing to their technical deficiencies they can operate only at night. In spite of this difficulty they claim to have sunk an auxiliary cruiser and five other ships during the last fourteen days.

The Army has been ordered to prepare fresh coastal batteries to strengthen coastal defence in North Africa.

The present fuel oil stocks of the Italian Navy will last until the middle of June. Arrangements will be made to bring fuel oil through the Corinth canal or by rail from Salonika.

In conclusion it can be stated that the Italian authorities now understand that every effort must be made to support the Africa Corps.

Copy to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe, Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia,
for the attention of Major Kusserow.

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Date:- 4 May 1941
from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia
to:- Kurfuerst Ia (General von Waldau or deputy)
ref:- Discussion on 4 May, 1941.
subj:- Transfer of X Fliegerkorps.

General Pricolo requested that his views on the following points be forwarded to the Reichsmarschall or his deputy and that a ruling be given:

(a) An urgent request has been made for the retention in Sicily of a Me 110 Gruppe and a Ju 87 Gruppe. This subject has been discussed with Field Marshal Milch and has again been broached through the channels of the Liaison Staff in Rome and the Italian Air Attache in Berlin. The Italian Air Force is prepared to place a formation of Macchi 200's (two hours flying duration) of similar strength at the disposal of C-in-C Luftwaffe in exchange for the Me 110 Gruppe. As the Italian Air Force cannot provide substitutes for the Ju 87's, General Pricolo again urged that, if necessary, a similar number of Ju 87's be transferred to the Italian Air Force in place of the Ju 87 Gruppe.

(b) In addition to the arrangements made with Field Marshal Milch, General Pricolo requested that consideration be given to the retention in Sicily of a mine-laying Staffel, which would be of importance in neutralising Malta.

(c) The transfer of X Fliegerkorps to Greece should not take place until the movement of 15th Panzer Division to Africa has been completed, otherwise there will be a lull in the operations against Malta at the most unfavourable time.

(d) The Italian Air Force requires exact details of Greek airfields to be taken over by the Luftwaffe as soon as possible so that it can make its own dispositions accordingly.

(e) The status of Fliegerfuehrer Africa following the transfer of X Fliegerkorps has still to be settled. In the interests of close co-operation with the Italian Armed Forces, General Pricolo considers that a decision corresponding to the arrangements hitherto applicable to X Fliegerkorps would be advantageous.

Liaison Staff comments:

Re 1) Owing to the present activity of the R.A.F. and the British fleet in the central Mediterranean, a rejection of the Italian request may not only jeopardise the movement of convoys but, in view of the known attitude of Supermarina, (Supreme Command of the Italian Navy) might also bring about the possibility of these movements coming to a standstill.

Re 3) Superaerea (Supreme Command of the Italian Air Force) has been informed of General von Waldau's oral notification that the transfer would not take place before the proposed time. However, confirmation by signal is requested.

Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No. 1318/41 - Top Secret

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National Defence Department
(IL op)

Fuehrer's Headquarters,
5 May 1941

from:- OKH/General Staff, Army/Operations Dept. (IIb)
No. 35469/41 - Top Secret

to:- OKW/L Atlas

Copies to:- OKW/L
OKW/Armed Forces Operations Staff

According to the report by General Paulus no quick, decisive success can be expected for the time being in the attack on Tobruk. The Army Supreme Command has therefore confirmed the following directive given to General Rommel by General Paulus as an order from C-in-C Army:

- (a) The area taken on 1 May will be held. Further attacks, even on a limited scale, will not be made for the time being unless immediate success without appreciable losses can be expected.
- (b) With regard to the seriously weakened condition of German troops which was observed, formations will be re-organised and mobile reserves withdrawn.
- (c) Depending on further developments in the situation, a resumption of the offensive will be permitted after the arrival of 15th Panzer Division and the (other) reinforcements.
- (d) Africa Corps' main task will be to hold Cyrenaica either with or without Tobruk, Sollum and Bardia. The fulfilment of this task must not be influenced by the fighting at Tobruk.
- (e) The Bardia - Sollum front will be reinforced by German mobile troops. Except for reconnaissance, no advance will be made beyond Sollum without permission.
- (f) The defence organisation at Gialo will be examined.
- (g) The Ain el Gazala position will be prepared. C-in-C Africa Corps is at liberty to withdraw to this line according to developments in the situation.
- (h) The coast will be guarded against enemy landings.
- (j) A secure supply base will be established.

Note by Chief of National Defence Department:

The Fuehrer agreed with the above measures and again urged that the mortar unit be sent up to the front. Time of arrival to be reported.

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Date:- 6 May 1941
from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia
to:- Kurfuerst Ia
ref:- 1. Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No.1318/41 - Top Secret - of 5 May 1941
2. Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No.1333/41 - Top Secret - of 5 May 1941
subj:- Transport Situation in the Mediterranean

Comando Supremo again referred through the Wehrmacht Liaison Staff to the alarming transport situation in the central Mediterranean and requested that the use of French ports in Tunisia be considered as this was the only possible way to assemble and supply an army for an offensive against Egypt.

The increased threat to transport shipping resulting from the intended transfer of X Fliegerkorps was also emphasized. In the view of Comando Supremo it would not be possible to relieve the situation by capturing Malta owing to the island's strong fortifications. In fact, the Italian Air Force and Navy were no longer strong enough for such an operation.

At the same time the Wehrmacht Liaison Staff reported that even after the transfer of 15th Panzer Division had been completed it was intended to send further German troops to North Africa and the retention of twin-engined fighters in Sicily for escort operations would thus also be of direct service to German interests. (see Section 1 of Italuft Ia signal No.1318/41 - Top Secret - of 5 May 1941).

For its part, Africa Corps has made requests through OKH for fighter and AA defence for Benghazi (see Italuft Ia signal No.1333/41 - Top Secret - of 5 May 1941) and for the employment of Luftwaffe formations at present based in Greece against British ships supplying Tobruk.

Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No.1353/41 - Top Secret

Date:- 6 May 1941
from:- C-in-C Luftwaffe, Operations Staff Ia (No.6562/41 (Top Secret))
to:- Italuft; Colonel Teucci, X Fliegerkorps.

The following points on war strategy in the Mediterranean have been approved by the Reichsmarschall. It is requested that they be passed on to the Supreme Command of the Italian Air Force. The Italian Liaison Officer on the Reichsmarschall's staff has been informed of the following aims and suggestions.

1. With the exception of those formations operating in Africa, X Fliegerkorps will be sent to Greece. Some of the units will begin their move in the first half of May 1941. The rest of X Fliegerkorps will be brought over after transportation of 15th Panzer Division has been completed. From its bases in Greece, X Fliegerkorps will carry out the following tasks:-

(a) Attacks on British naval forces at sea and in Alexandria.

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- (b) Operations against British supply traffic through the Suez Canal and on rail communications from Ismaila.
- (c) Protection of sea communications in the Aegean.
- (d) At a later period, protection of convoys from Greece to North Africa can also be taken over.

Corresponding with the agreement already made with the Italian Navy, a clear subdivision of operational areas for both Air Forces will have to be made.

2. Suggestion for demarcation line between German and Italian operational areas. Provision can be made for this demarcation line being moved eastwards later, as soon as supplies from Greece can be taken direct to Africa.

3. In the opinion of the Reichsmarschall, the Italians could assume the following tasks within their operational area:-

(a) Watch to be maintained on the Western Mediterranean by concentrations of bomber and fighter formations in Sicily, Southern Italy and Sardinia; by attacks on British naval forces this area is to be protected from sorties made by the Gibraltar Fleet.

(b) Protection of supplies for forces in North Africa in the area east of Tunis as far as 20 deg. longitude and along the African coast. In connection with this, a constant watch must be kept on Malta as a sea and air base; operations must be carried out against the island by strong bomber and fighter forces. Armed reconnaissance of convoys at sea and along the African coast must be made in such a way that the bomber formations (which are to be available soon) can carry out their operations. Intensive and concentrated reconnaissance of those sea areas from which enemy naval forces can operate against our supply convoys must ensure that the enemy is spotted and attacked as early as possible.

(c) German and Italian army units operating in North Africa must be supported by at least two I.A.F. bomber Gruppi and two fighter Gruppi with modern aircraft types. In order to relieve the Italian Air Force H.Q. at Benghazi, it is suggested that these formations be placed under command of Fliegerführer Afrika; in army support work, unity of command is absolutely necessary. The subordinate relationship to Fliegerführer Afrika would be fixed in the same way as that which applied to X Fliegerkorps during its operations in Sicily.

(d) Ports of discharge which are important for our supplies must be protected by Italian A.A. artillery and fighters. In this respect, priority should be given to the air defences of Tripoli and Benghazi, and later of Tobruk.

4. In the German operational area the following co-operation from the Italian Air Force is desired:-

(a) Torpedo-carrying bombers to operate from Rhodes in attacks on British naval forces.

(b) Italian fighter formations to provide fighter cover for Rhodes and the islands in the Aegean,

(c) Preparation of reconnaissance forces (2-3 sea reconnaissance squadrons) for reconnaissance of the British Fleet.

5. In order to ensure unity of command, the Italian Air Force formations (mentioned under 4.) operating in combined undertakings in the Eastern

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Mediterranean should be under command of X Fliegerkorps. So as to facilitate the transmission of orders, it is suggested that an Italian Air Force General be seconded to X Fliegerkorps.

6. Should it be necessary to move bomber formations of X Fliegerkorps temporarily to Sicily, these forces would be subordinate to the Italian Air Force Headquarters in Sicily. This policy is in keeping with the necessity for unity of Command within one operational area. It is requested that two airfields should be kept ready in case bombers or twin-engined fighters of X Fliegerkorps are sent to Sicily.

7. As it is absolutely necessary that operations from Sicily should not be interrupted it is suggested, in agreement with X Fliegerkorps, that the Airfields being vacated be occupied as soon as possible by the Italian Air Force.

Date:- 6 May 1941

from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia

to:- Kurfuerst Ia

Copies to:- Army Liaison Staff, Rome
Naval Liaison Staff, Rome

ref:- 1. Communications of General Paulus
2. Liaison Staff Italuft Ia signal No. 1353/41
- Top Secret - of 6 May 1941

subj:- The Situation at Tobruk

According to the report by General Paulus, representing the Army Supreme Command, there is little prospect of a decisive attack on Tobruk being resumed until the heavy tanks of 15th Panzer Division arrive in view of the present strength of our forces. The heavy tanks will be ready for action in about fourteen days at the earliest.

In the meantime the enemy can bring reinforcements into Tobruk by sea and attempt to relieve the situation with forces brought up from Egypt. In the event of a major enemy attack General Rommel will take over command of the siege of Tobruk.

In order to hasten the fall of Tobruk, particular importance is attached to an intensification of bombing and mine-laying operations against Tobruk harbour by Luftwaffe units stationed in Greece, prior to the start of Operation Mercury. (see Liaison Staff Italuft Ia teleprinter signal No. 1353/41 - Top Secret - of 6 May 1941).

Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No.1361/41 - Top Secret.

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Date:- 7 May 1941

from:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces

to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia Kurfuerst

The following teleprint is forwarded for comment.

The protection of German transport ships to Libya by Luftwaffe formations even after X Fliegerkorps has been transferred from Sicily to Greece is considered urgent and essential. The Italian Air Force is not equal to this task owing to its equipment and training. After the heavy losses sustained recently the protection of convoys is of increased importance to the transportation of German formations and the flow of supplies.

Similarly, it is requested that German flak be employed to ensure effective defence of the important discharge ports of Tripoli and Benghazi.

German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces IA No.921/41 - Top Secret.

Date:- 12 May 1941

from:- Reichsmarschall Goering

to:- Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia Kurfuerst

I again draw the attention of X Fliegerkorps to the following points:

In future X Fliegerkorps will carry out attack on convoys with concentrated force. It will be brought to the notice of aircrews and impressed upon them that:

(a) the main attack will be directed against the aircraft-carrier; the entire attack must first be concentrated against the carrier,

(b) merchant ships will not be attacked until the carrier has been put out of action and is sinking. On no account will the battle-ships be attacked after the carrier,

(c) the more strongly a convoy is protected, the more valuable is the merchant ships' cargo. For this reason the merchant ships will be destroyed immediately after the carrier,

(d) only the 1,000 kg HE bomb fitted with a 28A fuze is effective against an aircraft-carrier.

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Date:- 15 May 1941
from:- Africa Corps Ia
to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe
Copy to:- Luftflotte 4, Athens

The situation in the Sollum - Capuzzo area is very critical. The German advance detachment is falling back and is at present engaged in heavy fighting in the Sidi Azeis - Bardia area.

The Fliegerfuehrer can give only limited aid. No long-range reconnaissance data is available. I again request an intensified air effort by all available forces in order to prevent a serious reverse.

Owing to the supply situation it is not possible to concentrate sizeable reserves and launch counter-attacks.

Note: If teleprinter communication between Vienna and the Balkans is still interrupted, transmit by radio.

Date:- 15 May 1941
from:- HQ X Fliegerkorps Ia
to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia Kurfuerst

According to a report from Fliegerfuehrer Afrika dated 14 May 1941, G.O.C. German Africa Corps intends to concentrate his main force at Sollum and Bardia. The task of containing Tobruk will then be carried out by Italian troops. It will be necessary for Luftwaffe units to move forward into the area west of Sollum for the new deployment.

According to Fliegerfuehrer Afrika's assessment of the situation, the Luftwaffe's supplies and signals communications are not assured owing to the enemy-held fortress of Tobruk in the rear and the fact that with the transport and signals equipment at present available in Africa (shortage of cable), Tobruk cannot be by-passed through the desert. In the view of Headquarters X Fliegerkorps, formations under command of Fliegerfuehrer Afrika cannot be moved forward unless additional transport and signals materials are made available promptly and the extremely long supply lines adequately protected against air attack. In any case, the supply route will continue to be threatened until Tobruk is captured. It is therefore requested that either the additional transport and signals material required be made available or that Afrika Corps' plans be adjusted to the present capabilities of the Luftwaffe. Pending the arrival of a decision, Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will not permit formations under command of Fliegerfuehrer Afrika to be moved forward.

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Date:- 18 May 1941

from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ic

to:- Kurfuerst Ia

Copies to:- Kurfuerst Ic,
X Fliegerkorps,
Luftflotte 4 HQ.

ref:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No.932/41 - Top Secret.

subj:- Italian Air Force in Sicily and the Aegean.

1. Sicily

(a) State as on 17 May 1941

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Aircraft</u>
<u>10th Bomber Stormo:</u>	Chinisia	
30th Gruppo	Chinisia	} 24 S.79's
32nd Gruppo	Sciacca	
<u>30th Bomber Stormo:</u>		
87th & 90th Gruppi	Sciacca	4 S.79's
<u>43rd Bomber Stormo:</u>		
99th Gruppo	Gerbini	12 Br. 20's
278th Torpedo-Bomber Squadriglia	Pantelleria	5 S.79's
<u>1st Fighter Stormo:</u>	Palermo	
6th Gruppo	Catania	} 48 Mc.200's
17th Gruppo	Palermo and Pantelleria	
23rd Gruppo	Comiso	24 Mc.200's

(b) As X Fliegerkorps formations withdraw, the following will be assembled for transfer to Sicily:

One Bomber Stormo with	24 Cant 1007's
One Dive-bomber Gruppo with	18 Ju 87's
One Fighter Stormo with	48 Mc.200's

(c) In addition, the following will be assembled:

One Bomber Gruppo with Br.20's,
One Torpedo-bomber Squadriglia.

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Liaison Staff Italuft is making efforts to produce an even more extensive reinforcement of the Italian Air Force in Sicily.

2. Aegean

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Aircraft</u>
39th Bomber Stormo (only 92nd Gruppo)	Gadurra (Rhodes)	12 S.79's
41st Bomber Gruppo	Gadurra	12 S.84's (torpedo-Bombers)
50th Bomber Gruppo	Rhodes	12 S.79's
172nd Long-range Recon- naissance Squadriglia	Rhodes	6 S.79's
281st Torpedo-bomber Squadriglia	Rhodes	5 S.79's
161st Seaplane Fighter Squadriglia	Leros	7 aircraft
162nd and 163rd Fighter Squadriglie	Rhodes	24 Cr.42's and Cr.32's

The 41st (Muti) Bomber Gruppo has returned to Rhodes re-equipped with S.84's. These aircraft have been modified to carry torpedoes and bombs and are to carry out mainly torpedo operations from Rhodes.

Liaison Staff Italuft Ic Report No. 1529/41 - Top Secret.

Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ic

Headquarters,
19 May 1941

from:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces
(copy of teleprint No.999/41 - Top Secret)

to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia, Major Friedrich

ref:- OKH/General Staff, Army/Operations Department (I S)
No. 42240/41 - Top Secret - of 9 May 1941

On the afternoon of 11 May a conference under the chairmanship of General Guzzoni and attended by the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Roatta, the Chief of Staff of the Navy, Admiral Ricardi and the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Santoro, and, on the German side, Admiral Weichhold and myself, was held to settle the question of escorts, taking into consideration the requisitions made by the Naval C-in-C South-East for Operation Mercury.

1. To improve liaison between the German Twelfth Army Headquarters and the C-in-C Dodecanese, General Guzzoni proposed that the German liaison officer in Albania, who was now no longer required in this post, be sent to Rhodes in accordance with his earlier request that a German liaison officer be made available to General Bastico.

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2. All naval forces in the Aegean will be made available and eight torpedo-boats (4 destroyers, 4 torpedo-boats) at present still in Italian ports will be detached to meet the requests of the Naval C-in-C South-East. Beyond this, the Italian Navy is not in a position to provide further forces without reducing escorts for transports to Libya. In view of the present situation at sea this would be unjustifiable; similarly, the number of transports cannot be reduced owing to the present situation in Libya and the necessity of transporting safely to Libya not only troops, but above all ammunition, food and other supplies. This had been rejected by the Duce.
3. These eight available torpedo-boats must therefore meet all requests which have been and will be made by the German side, i.e. in providing escorts for shipping to be used by X Fliegerkorps on the crossing to the Bay of Patras (with elements being transferred to the Peloponnese) and for the transportation of 2nd Panzer Division. The movement of these ships from Sicily and southern Italy to the Bay of Patras can only be carried out in two groups, so that after the first group has completed the crossing the torpedo-boats will have to return to Italy again. If the consequent loss of time is admissible there is a possibility that the ships transporting 2nd Panzer Division can be escorted on the return journey; however, they will not proceed into the Adriatic towards Trieste, but will sail to Taranto, from which point rail transport will be used. However, all this will be possible only if the Naval C-in-C South-East can relinquish the torpedo-boats until the transport movements have been completed.

It must again be expressly pointed out that further forces cannot be made available for this escort operation without reducing the transports on the Libya run. It is estimated that about 10 - 12 days will be required to escort the two groups of shipping to Patras, and that this time will be increased by a further 2 - 3 days in escorting the Panzer Division transports from Patras to Taranto.
4. The Italian Air Force can provide air cover for the transfer, but it is pointed out that at present it has no Greek airfields at its disposal and that the Luftwaffe will therefore be obliged to cover the final part of the route as long as the Italian Air Force is unable to extend further south from Albania. General Guzzoni therefore requested that the airfields at Yannina and Paramithia in the area west of the Pindus mountains be placed at the disposal of the Italian Air Force immediately, or that at least one of them be made available. It was also stated that the seaplane bases at Patras and Missologhi should be at the disposal of the Italian Navy.
5. A decision is requested as to whether the transport movements and the escort operations by the eight torpedo-boats should be carried out as proposed in Section 3 and whether Taranto is approved as a port of disembarkation for 2nd Panzer Division. It is pointed out that after Operation Mercury has been completed the eight torpedo-boats will be required for other tasks in the Aegean and will therefore no longer be available for escort operations. I agree with Comando Supremo that a reduction in the number of transports to Libya or in their escorts is impossible, as transports are urgently required to improve supply and to increase the defences of ports of discharge.

The German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces -
OKW/Armed Forces Operations Staff/LIL op.

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Date:- 20 May 1941

from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia

to:- Kurfuerst Ia

Copies to:- Kurfuerst Ic,
Luftflotte 4,
X Fliegerkorps.

ref:- Inquiry to Superaereo.

subj:- Order of battle of V Squadra Aerea in Libya as on 19 May 1941.

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Aircraft</u>
8th Bomber Stormo (only 27th Gruppo)	Benghazi-Berka	12 S.79's
98th Bomber Gruppo	Benghazi-Benina	12 Br.20's
236th Bomber Squadriglia	Derna	not given
239th Bomber Squadriglia	not known	not given
279th Bomber Squadriglia	not known	not given
2nd Fighter Gruppo	Derna	27 G.50's
18th Fighter Gruppo	Benghazi and Derna	35 Cr.42's
155th Fighter Gruppo	Castel Benito	21 G.50's
151st Fighter Gruppo	Sorman	23 Cr.42's
374th Fighter Squadriglia	Castel Benito	11 Mc.200's
175th Long-Range Recon- naissance Squadriglia	Benghazi and Derna	not given
19th Long-range Recon- naissance Squadriglia	not known	not given

Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No. 1559/41 - Top Secret.

Supreme Command of the Armed Forces
Armed Forces Operations Staff/Abt.I
(I Op./IV Qu) No. 44704/41 - Top Secret

Fuehrer's Headquarters,

20 May 1941

Subject:- German Africa Corps

The principles governing the command and supply of the elements of the German Armed Forces serving in North Africa are summarised as follows in the light of developments in the situation and on the basis of previous experience:

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I Command:

1. The German Africa Corps is fighting in an Italian theatre of operations and is tactically subordinate to the Italian Supreme Commander in North Africa. In view of this, OKH has imposed the following restrictions on the G.O.C.'s freedom to make independent decisions and to issue orders:

(a) The tactical decisions of the G.O.C. Africa Corps are mainly dependent on the supply situation and on the support given both with regard to actual operations and in the supply of his troops by the Italian Supreme Commander in North Africa and by Comando Supremo in Rome.

In order to improve the close liaison necessary in view of the great distance from the Africa Corps' zone of operations to Tripoli and from there to Rome, a second German Chief of Staff with the appropriate personnel will be assigned to Africa Corps.

(b) This Staff will choose its position in the Headquarters of the Italian Supreme Commander in North Africa. The task of the Chief of Staff will consist in representing the requests and demands made by Africa Corps at the Italian General Headquarters in North Africa and in informing the G.O.C. Africa Corps of the over-all situation as it appears at the Italian General Headquarters. Details of his authority, particularly in relation to the German G.O.C., L.O.C. Area, will be defined by OKH.

(c) The signals channel will run from Africa Corps through the second Chief of Staff of Africa Corps at Headquarters Italian Supreme Commander in North Africa; in normal cases which require agreement between the German and the Italian High Commands or between the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, the channel will run from this point to OKW (Armed Forces Operations Staff/Abt.L), OKH being informed at the same time. In cases which concern only OKH, the channel from the German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces will lead directly to OKH. Conversely, orders will be issued along this channel.

2. Units of the Luftwaffe serving in North Africa are an integral part of X Fliegerkorps, which is employed in the Eastern Mediterranean and is subordinate to C-in-C Luftwaffe. Thus, operations from European and African bases will be closely co-ordinated. C-in-C Luftwaffe will make the necessary arrangements with the Italian Air Force. Fliegerfuehrer Afrika is directed to co-operate with the German Africa Corps and with Local Italian HQ's.

II Supply and Reinforcement

1. The difficulties (escorts, capacity of ports) connected with the transportation of reinforcements and supplies to North Africa necessitate more effective centralisation and constant co-ordination of German and Italian requirements. The available transport space must be filled according to the situation at the front and exploited rationally.

The responsible German authority in this case is the German General at the Headquarters of the Italian Armed Forces, who will co-operate closely with the Chiefs of the Liaison Staff of the Navy and Air Force and with the Second Chief of Staff of Africa Corps.

Requests for troops and supplies from Germany must be kept in relation to the transport space available for them to Africa.

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2. For this task the German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces will receive basic instructions from OKW in line with the requirements of the three services. In view of the amount of transport required for Italian supply, it is now essential that the supply situation of the German formations serving in North Africa be put on a more definite basis and that coastal artillery, heavy artillery and AA artillery be transported to Africa immediately.

3. For survey of transport situation see appendix.

Chief of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces

Sgd. KEITEL

APPENDIX

to Armed Forces Operations Staff/L
(I Op/IV Qu) No. 44704/41 - Top Secret.

The North African Transport Situation

1. The difficulties in the supply of the Africa Corps are due primarily to the reduction in the unloading capacity of Tripoli and Benghazi owing to damage to the harbours and to the problem of providing escorts.

Efforts are being made to repair the ports as quickly as possible. The results and duration of repairs cannot be estimated at present. The moment for sending larger ships to Benghazi will depend on these repairs and on the provision of adequate cover along the route and in the port while unloading.

The French have agreed in principle to the use of ports in French North Africa by German transport shipping. Details will be quickly settled with the French.

2. Hitherto, shipping losses have been balanced up by the employment of Italian vessels. To ensure the future situation, negotiations have been opened to obtain French shipping.

The amount of shipping available for employment along the African coast is considerably in excess of the unloading capacity of the ports. Movements by coastal shipping east of Benghazi are not yet possible (except for single U-boats).

3. Approximately two Gruppen of transport aircraft are to be kept available in Sicily until further notice.

4. Luftwaffe units to be left on Sicily even after Operation Mercury to protect transport shipping.

It is requested that Italian Air Force Units be used in a more vigorous manner.

There is little prospect of covering forces being strengthened by the Italian fleet as escort vessels have been reduced in number by serious losses and those left are heavily committed to other tasks.

5. Operation Mercury is expected to produce considerable relief in the situation at sea in the central Mediterranean.

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Date:- 21 May 1941
from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia
to:- Kurfuerst Ia
ref:- Directive telephoned by General Jeschonnek on 19 May 1941
subj:- Relief of X Fliegerkorps by the Italian Air Force.

The intention to move Italian Air Force formations to Sicily was reported in the teleprinter signal from Liaison Staff Italuft Ic No. 1529/41 Top Secret of 18 May 1941. These formations will be transferred in stages as German formations move out and will be under command of an Aeronautica Headquarters. The Liaison Staff has requested that the Aeronautica Commander or his Chief of Staff be directed to report to the A.O.C. X Fliegerkorps for verbal instructions concerning the take-over. The Liaison Staff reported on the plan for providing air cover for shipping convoys to North Africa and the difficulties involved in teleprinter signal Ia No. 1353/41, Appendices II and III, of 17 May 1941.

Apart from the AA batteries at the naval bases of Messina, Trapani and Augusta, Italian AA formations at present serving on Sicily comprise approximately fifteen heavy batteries. So far it has not been possible to obtain details regarding the Army AA Militia. According to a verbal report from Headquarters Italian AA Command (Dicat), it will probably be possible to bring up a limited number of AA batteries from places on the Italian mainland where the threat of air attack is not so great to reinforce the defences of airfields on Sicily. Superaereo was also requested to make separate representations to Headquarters Italian AA Command (Dicat) and, if necessary, to Comando Supremo.

With regard to AA defence in Africa, the Liaison Staff refers to its teleprint Ia No. 1334/41 Top Secret of 5 May 1941.

Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No. 1562/41 Top Secret.

Date:- 22 May 1941
from:- X Fliegerkorps
to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia Kurfuerst
Copy to:- Liaison Staff Italuft, Rome

With effect from 22 May 1941 Aeronautica Sicilia took over the tasks of X Fliegerkorps in the area west of 22 degrees east with the following reservations:-

1. Convoys can be protected against enemy air reconnaissance and attacks only within the effective range of Italian fighters from the available bases.
2. In the event of a resumption of operations against Malta there is at present no fighter available superior to the Hurricane nor a Stuka formation to attack enemy naval forces at sea.

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3. Mine-laying operations at La Valetta harbour will be discontinued.

The Commanding General, Report No. 28/41 - Secret - (Ia)

Date:- 27 May 1941

from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia

to:- Kurfuerst Ia,
X Fliegerkorps Ia

ref:- X Fliegerkorps Ia No. 32/41 - Top Secret - of 23 May 1941

subj:- Gaddura Airfield and the Italian Met. Code Unit.

1. Permission for permanent occupation of Gaddura airfield by a bomber Gruppe of X Fliegerkorps cannot be obtained for the time being. The main reason is that there are so many Italian units based at this airfield and quarters are so limited that another German unit cannot be accommodated. Superaereo will examine the possibility of transferring Italian units to other airfields on Rhodes, but holds out no hope of success. Instead, Superaereo offers to make room at Gaddura by transferring an Italian unit to an airfield on Crete immediately Operation Mercury is concluded. The use of Gaddura as an advanced landing ground for German formations is not affected.

2. Superaereo agrees to the movement (to Greece) of the Italian met. code unit and will issue the appropriate order.

Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No. 1604/41 - Top Secret.

Foreign Relations Department
No. 178/41 - Top Secret -
Ausl III Org

Berlin,
27 May 1941

Reference:- Teleprint from Military Attache Rome
No. 1369/41 - Top Secret - of 26 May 1941

"The Duce received me this afternoon (26 May) and instructed me to bring the following two points to the attention of the Chief of OKW:

1. The Libyan Question:

Examination of the Libyan transport situation has shown that by using the present transport routes it will not be possible to reinforce the formations in Cyrenaica within a short period and to such an extent as to enable Tobruk to be captured, the offensive to be resumed in the direction of the Suez Canal in the autumn or a full-scale British offensive in the coming autumn to be countered with the necessary forces. Supplies and replacements for the German and Italian forces in North Africa already require so much shipping space that the discharging facilities of Libyan ports have been used continuously to their full capacity. Moreover, there is little possibility of

/transporting

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transporting to Libya new formations or the 14,000 trucks considered necessary by the Italians.

If the war in North Africa is to be continued it is absolutely essential that the French place the Tunisian ports at our disposal for the movement of troops and supplies. Failing this, another acute crisis may arise in Libya in the autumn.

The Duce requests that the Germans do no more than maintain the fighting strength of the two German Panzer divisions as everything else - troops and material - is available in sufficient quantity in Italy. However, he did request that the route via Tunis be opened.

2. The Iraq Question:

No clear picture of the situation in Iraq is available. The Iraqi Army reports are certainly embellished in Oriental style. However, it appears that the situation cannot be maintained for any length of time with the aid so far provided by the Axis powers. We must now ask ourselves: "Shall we provide only token assistance or effective aid?" Our decision must favour effective aid, as it is still possible to provide this aid in time. There is plenty of manpower in the East; it is aircraft, guns and tanks that are needed.

The Duce then declared emphatically: "I, Mussolini, am in favour of energetic aid as we now have an opportunity of raising all the peoples of the East against Britain; however, should Iraq collapse, then they will all lose heart again. If the German command decides in favour of effective aid, then I consider it essential that after the capture of Crete, Cyprus should also be occupied from bases on Rhodes. The island of Cyprus - situated off the Syrian coast - is the key to the whole of the East. The capture of Cyprus will certainly be easier than that of Crete, as Cyprus is not so mountainous and well-fortified as Crete. If we hold Crete and Cyprus the British naval base in the eastern Mediterranean will be threatened by the Luftwaffe to such an extent that the British fleet will hardly be able to remain even in Alexandria. However, if examination shows that it is not possible to give Iraq timely and effective aid, then it would be better to tell Gallani in good time. I request that you bring these points to the attention of Field Marshal Keitel as quickly as possible." -

End of the Duce's statement.

Comments by the German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces:

Re Point 1:

The Italian General Staff reported that during June it intends to send six groups of six ships each to Libya plus two troopship groups. One ship in each of these groups has been set aside for German requirements.

This schedule, described as a maximum effort, will enable no more than supplies and slight vehicle and personnel reinforcements to be moved to Libya by either the Germans or the Italians. As the supply quota will increase during the next few months, it is evident that a large striking force cannot be assembled for an offensive to the Canal in this way.

Re Point 2:

I took the opportunity of informing the Duce of the three points in the teletype from the Chief of the Armed Forces Operations Staff of

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/26 May

26 May (1210 hours) with regard to "Operation Mercury". The Duce promised that German requests for troops would be met immediately. According to a report from General Bastico, two reinforced battalions will embark on the evening of 27 May and will commence operations on the morning of 28 May.

German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces

Date:- 28 May 1941
from:- Chief OKW
to:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces

Re the Duce's statements of the afternoon of 26 May:-

Re Section 1: (Libya)

The route to Tunis cannot be opened by force but only by bilateral agreement. We have been greatly helped by the agreements reached in Paris.

- (a) Bizerta will be made available as a port of discharge for the Africa Corps' supplies. (German personnel to wear civilian clothes). French shipping may also be employed from Toulon.
- (b) The Bizerta - Gabes railway line can be used.
- (c) France is prepared to provide us with heavy artillery, coastal artillery and ammunition for the African theatre of operations and also to transport a further 400 trucks from France to North Africa as far as the Libyan frontier.
- (d) Shipping space saved by the purchase by us of trucks in North Africa will be relinquished to the Italians.

It is essential that the Italian Armistice Commission agrees to the concessions Germany has made to the French for this purpose. When this route is working Africa Corps will be able to make a big reduction in the number of German ships using Tripoli to supply it. However, the German coastal Batterien to be provided and both of the heavy artillery Abteilungen as well as continuous weapon replacements will have to be transported to Tripoli. Six ships in June will not be sufficient for this purpose. It is not proposed to send further troopships to Africa.

Whether the route through Tunis can be opened up still further will depend on events.

Re Section 2: (Iraq)

Effective assistance, not a gesture, is also the German intention. The first success was the release to Iraq of three-quarters of the French war material stocks in Syria. Efforts will be made to open a supply route through Turkey; permission has already been given for the passage of oil and petrol. Italy is urgently requested to send all possible weapons and aircraft.

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Cyprus cannot be taken in a German airborne operation as the distance is too great, even from Rhodes, to provide fighter cover for the airborne forces. However, every effort will be made to send aid to Iraq, partly by air and partly by sea.

Date:- 28 May 1941

from:- C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia

to:- Luftflotte 4 (Vienna) by teleprinter to be forwarded
by courier to Battle Headquarters
Luftflotte 4

Directive on the Conduct of Operations by X Fliegerkorps
following its Transfer to Greece

1. When Operation Mercury has been concluded the task of defencing Greece will become the responsibility of the Italians. The following elements of the German Armed Forces will remain in Greece:-

(a) Army:

Only the units necessary to defend the supply base for Crete, concentrated in a small area around that base and one division in the Salonika area which will also be responsible for the protection of Lemnos and any other islands which may be occupied. The C-in-C Twelfth Army will move his headquarters to Salonika as C-in-C German forces in the Balkans. The German Armed Forces will be solely responsible for all military measures in the Salonika area. The exact boundary of this area has yet to be determined.

(b) Navy:

In addition to Salonika the Navy will continue to occupy the port of Athens and the coastline between these two ports as far as required for the control of coastal shipping. At a later date the German Navy will also be made responsible for the coastal defence of Crete.

The Admiral South-East will carry out operations and transport movements in the Aegean with the Italian naval forces allocated to him for this purpose in accordance with the directives of C-in-C Navy.

(c) Air Force:

X Fliegerkorps will remain in Greece and will use the ground organisation in Greece and on the islands. Installations not required will be handed over to the Italian Air Force.

2. X Fliegerkorps will carry out the following tasks:

(a) Operations against British naval forces in the eastern Mediterranean and at Alexandria,

(b) Operations against British supply traffic through the Suez Canal and against railway lines leading from Ismailia,

(c) Operations against transport ships en route to and in the port of Tobruk,

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- (d) Mining of Alexandria and Tobruk harbours,
- (e) Mining of the Suez Canal,
- (f) Protection of shipping routes in the Aegean and later to North Africa.

Units of X Fliegerkorps transferred to Crete will also be used to support Fliegerfuehrer Afrika. Fliegerfuehrer Afrika will continue to carry out the task of supporting the Africa Corps. Rhodes will still be used as an advanced landing base.

Turkish neutrality will not be infringed under any circumstances.

3. X Fliegerkorps will remain directly under command of C-in-C Luftwaffe for all purposes.

Orders as to which units will remain under command of X Fliegerkorps after the withdrawal of VIII Fliegerkorps from Greece have yet to be issued.

4. For the division of operational areas and duties between the Luftwaffe and the Italian Air Force and co-operation with the latter see order C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia No. 6562/41 Top Secret (green) of 6 May 1941 and order C-in-C Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia No. 8776/41 Top Secret of 28 May 1941 approving proposals made by Liaison Staff Italuft.

Date:- 30 May 1941

to:- Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ic

Copies to:- German Armistice Commission
Chief OKW Reichs Chancellery Berchtesgaden
OKW/L Atlas
OKW/Foreign Relations Department
General Staff, Army/Attache Department

Copy of teleprint from the German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces No. 1369/41 of 29 May 1941.

At noon on 29 May I informed the Duce of the answer of 28 May forwarded to me by teleprint.

(a) The Duce agreed with the view that the route via Tunis could be opened only through bilateral agreement, but was not very pleased that concessions granted to date apply only to the Germans. He made an urgent request that the same concessions be granted to Italy. He based this demand on the following facts:-

(i) Italy agrees to an easing of the terms of the Franco-Italian armistice treaty and therefore expects the French to meet her requests half-way.

(ii) The Axis forces are engaged in a common struggle in Libya and should therefore enjoy the same conditions. The supply of Italian troops serves the same purpose as that of German troops.

(iii) The reinforcement and reorganisation of Italian forces cannot be carried out by means of Tripoli harbour alone or, at least, would

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The High Commissioner was held to be reliable and loyal to the Vichy government. His position was difficult, because of unreliable de Gaullist elements amongst his troops. He thought that he could master them however and was determined to put up unconditional defence. The Axis powers were interested in holding Syria. Thus it would be necessary:-

- (a) To permit mobilisation on frontiers where necessary.
- (b) In the event of a British attack, to free for use all materials in stock.
- (c) To agree to reinforcements from France.
- (d) To give help with weapons where necessary.

The last item had already been approved by us. The Italian Armistice Commission should be informed of measures (a) - (c).

General Cavallero agreed with the views expressed in 1. and 2.

3. Cyprus

The island was the key to the defence of Syria and to the elimination of British naval bases in the Eastern Mediterranean. Present state of defences rather low, but this would soon be altered. If it were decided to take the island, then speed would be necessary. At present, the Wehrmacht could not undertake operations. The campaign for Crete was not easy and involved a great deal of bloodshed. Paratroops and airborne troops must be refitted first, and this would take time. Therefore it was suggested that the Italians should carry out operations from the Dodecanese. Germans considered that it was possible to carry out a surprise troop landing from fast warships (cruisers and destroyers) approaching under cover of darkness. It was important to gain the airfields as soon as possible, to be able to bring over bombers and fighters; then the game would be won. The Reichsmarschall had already promised that the Luftwaffe would support the landing from the air and would ward off any British ships which tried to interfere with operations.

The key to success was rapid but thorough preparation and extreme secrecy.

General Cavallero agreed and would consider the suggestion.

II. Negotiations with France

Chef OKW said that France was ready to cooperate with Germany; but there was a certain mistrust of Italy because of her claims on French territory. Public opinion in France was not at present favourable to a policy of cooperation with Italy. Germany had pledges which Italy did not possess (occupied zone, prisoners of war). French concessions were made essentially to Germany, and the French could not be forced to make the same concessions to Italy. It was essential that the Italians should agree to French demands which were approved by Germany. It was not desirable that the French should be scared off by fresh Italian demands or an Italian refusal to agree in the present negotiations.

It was therefore requested that Italians should give up their demands for:-

- (a) Availability of the port of Tunis for Italian shipping (question of prestige).
- (b) Negotiations with France to be made jointly by the Axis powers. The Italian Armistice Commission to be informed of this.

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German negotiations were serving the common interests of both Italy and Germany in opening an extra shipping route to Libya, thus relieving the burden on Italian ships by using French ships in French convoys, and obtaining French war materials and vehicles for the Libyan theatre of war.

The Italians were requested to leave the negotiations with the French to Germany; Italian interests would be well looked after.

There was discussion of the main points in the Paris protocol with special mention of the base at Dakar. If Bizerta were used as a port of discharge and Dakar as a base, the British would attack and the French would open fire on them (reference to Darlan's speech on the subject). But the Italians must remember that allowances must be made for French mobilisation in North and West Africa; otherwise Weygand might desert our cause.

General Cavallero agreed with Chef OKW and pointed out that the conference was to deal with decisions of a purely military and not of a political nature. He acknowledged the importance of a second shipping route to Africa, but he considered that even this route would be inadequate for the intended concentration in North Africa; Tunis would be required.

Chef OKW said that this was impossible at present, but it might be possible later. In his opinion, it would not be needed for the deployment in North Africa.

III. North Africa

Chef OKW agreed with the opinion that the offensive against Egypt could not begin before autumn. Operational aims, forces available, time chosen and supply facilities were closely bound up in this question. General Cavallero said that in order to reach a power potential equal to every situation, the Italians must bring over 100,000 men and 14,000 vehicles.

Chef OKW said that it was the German opinion that the offensive should be carried out, not with a mass of troops, but with a limited number of well equipped special troops. Strength of the attacking forces; four armoured divisions, two of them German, and three motorised divisions. More could not be provided. The strength of rear and defence troops must also be decreased, according to supply facilities. There must not be any superfluous consumers of food in North Africa, but only as many fighting men as could be supplied. The first task was to re-equip those troops who were now in action.

General Cavallero said that Italian divisions serving under the Africa Corps were worn out; they had lost 40-60% of their personnel and equipment. The vehicle situation was very bad, and the Pavia Division has only 27 trucks. Chef OKW realised this necessity, but considered the most pressing need to be the provision of A.A. and coastal artillery to afford better protection than before against enemy attacks on ports of discharge and supply dumps. It was therefore requested that the German A.A. and coastal artillery detachments in Naples should be brought over as quickly as possible.

After this, it was important that artillery reinforcements for the Africa Corps should be brought over, for one of the first conditions for subsequent operations would be the fall of Tobruk. At present, German and Italian troops could not reach it without heavy artillery. General Rommel thought that the siege of Tobruk could continue, even during the hot summer months.

Supply situation

Apart from supplying the fighting troops, it was absolutely necessary to make large scale provision of supplies and to prepare transport columns before the start of the offensive. Supplies for the German Africa Corps alone amounted

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to 40-50,000 tons per month; in addition, there were supplies for the Italians. These demands must be met by increasing sea and coastal transport. It could not yet be seen how much weight could be taken off by using shipping via Bizerta, but 1,500 French trucks would take a big load off road transport. The Italians would get all the vehicles not required by the Africa Corps. German transport aircraft had very little space available.

The Italians alone must protect sea and coastal transports, because German air forces were being withdrawn from Sicily. The Italian Air Force must take over their tasks. Stronger Luftwaffe units were being posted to North Africa to protect the coast and coastal transport; this had been ordered by the Reichsmarschall.

There must also be a reinforcement of air defences for important airfields on the coast. The occupation of Crete had considerably lessened the air threat to Italy. U-boats must be used to protect coastal bases. General Cavallero thanked Chef OKW for his statement. Both he and the Duce shared his opinions. Italy's most important task was to hold her present positions. Defence forces in North Africa were too small. These troops taking part in the siege of Tobruk must be relieved for a rest period. The situation at Sollum was one of constant danger. For this reason, it was necessary to bring up one armoured division and two motorised divisions to constitute mobile reserves.

General Priccolo aimed at reinforcement of the Air Force; this was also a question of transport, because there was an inadequate air force ground organisation in Africa.

Other demands would be examined.

German Supreme Command was requested to furnish Rome with a review of the situation in North Africa, their operational aims, and their plans for supplies. If possible, Rome would also like a report on the capacity and distribution of goods for the Bizerta route.

Chef OKW agreed to this. He pointed out priorities for German transports to Tripoli in the following order:-

A.A. artillery,
Coastal artillery,
Army artillery,
Replacements for unserviceable weapons in
the Africa Corps.

IV. Balkans

With the exception of forces belonging to Fliegerfuehrer Afrika, X Fliegerkorps was to be sent to Crete. The island would be built up as a strong German air base. The line from Merambello Bay to Ierapetra would be demarcation line for Italian occupation forces. The island was to have a German governor to whom the Italians would be subordinate in matters of defence.

General Cavallero agreed to this, and requested that an airfield on Crete should be left for Italian use.

Chef OKW said that an airfield was being constructed at Ierapetra for this purpose. Operations carried out by stronger German air forces from Crete were advantageous to our position in North Africa; they promised severe limitations to British naval supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean. For these operations X Fliegerkorps needed rear bases in Salonika, Athens and the eastern Peloponnese. It also required the fortifications of Kythera,

/Antikythera,

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Antikythera, Melos and Lemnos to protect our supply route. But above all, Mytilene and Chios must be in German hands as objects of negotiation with Turkey. Supplies for Crete come mainly on the sea route and must be protected by the Italian Navy. Cooperation so far had been excellent; there was recognition from all sides for the achievements of the Italian Navy.

Reinforcement of Italian naval forces was very much desired; amongst other things, M.T.Bs. formerly belonging to Yugoslavia could be used. The importance of the Italian sea route to the Dardanelles was emphasised.

Air warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean should be supported by extending the operations of Italian submarines. It was requested that Italian submarines should be withdrawn from the French Atlantic coast because Bordeaux was urgently required as a German U-boat base.

General Cavallero requested that Italian occupation troops might remain in Athens. Chef OKW agreed.

General Cavallero said that Italy was short of raw materials; mainly fuel oil, coal and rubber.

Chef OKW replied that these were all transport problems. Italy must fetch fuel oil from Constanza and French tankers would be used from now on. In payment, France would receive part of the fuel oil carried, and Italy would be given the rest. As soon as the transport situation permitted, coal and rubber deliveries would be increased. In conclusion he requested that the Duce be given a report of the day's proceedings. General Cavallero thanked Chef OKW and stated his full agreement with the opinions expressed on both sides.

Headquarters X Fliegerkorps

No. 210/41 - Top Secret - Ia

Battle Headquarters,

4 June 1941

Subject:- Discussion between A.O.C. X Fliegerkorps
and the Commander of the Italian Aegean Air Force

On 3 June 1941 the following agreements and decisions were reached during the discussion between the A.O.C. X Fliegerkorps and the Commander of the Italian Aegean Air Force, General Longo:

(1) Italian Aegean Air Force HQ and X Fliegerkorps HQ were directed to co-operate closely.

(2) Italian Aegean Air Force and X Fliegerkorps will carry out independent operations in the eastern Mediterranean. Operations against Alexandria, Port Said and Suez remain the prerogative of X Fliegerkorps. Prior arrangement with HQ X Fliegerkorps will be necessary if operations by the Aegean Air Force are intended against these areas.

In the event of combined and simultaneous operations the Aegean Air Force will follow the X Fliegerkorps plan of action. Details of co-operation (time, area of attack) will be arranged through the liaison officers on both sides.

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(3) Definition of Limits of Reconnaissance Areas

The Aegean Air Force will take over reconnaissance in the eastern Mediterranean east of 27 degrees longitude, while X Fliegerkorps will carry out reconnaissance over the sea area to the west as far as 22 degrees longitude and will be responsible for maintaining constant surveillance over Alexandria, Port Said and the Suez Canal. According to the forces at its disposal and the situation at sea, the Aegean Air Force will also take over reconnaissance over the sea area between Rhodes and Crete and, if necessary, north of Crete. According to the situation at sea, the Aegean Air Force and X Fliegerkorps are at liberty to carry out reconnaissance beyond the 27 degrees longitude dividing line.

The Aegean Air Force will continue to carry out reconnaissance for the German Stuka Gruppe (I./Stuka 3) at present based at Maritza (Rhodes) for the protection of the Straits of Scarpanto and Caso. Reconnaissance will be carried out according to the situation at sea and the operational range of the Stuka Gruppe (commanding officer: Major Siegel) so that the formation still has time to reach the target in the event of a penetration into the Aegean by British naval forces.

According to Aegean Air Force Headquarters the reconnaissance forces under command of the Italian Naval Headquarters Leros can be employed to patrol the sea route between the Dardanelles and the Dodecanese.

X Fliegerkorps Headquarters will instigate the conclusion of appropriate agreements between the F.O.I.C. Greece and Naval Headquarters Leros. The object is that, except in special cases, the protection of shipping against British submarines north of the line Crete - Scarpanto - Rhodes should be carried out by the aircraft of Naval Headquarters Leros and by the German formations especially provided for this purpose so that the only task remaining for the Aegean Air Force and X Fliegerkorps in this area will be operations against any British surface warships which may appear. Headquarters Aegean Air Force and Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will exchange reconnaissance reports immediately through the German wireless station at Gadurra (Lt. Scheel) for the time being and in the event that enemy vessels have been located the report will state whether they are being shadowed.

Headquarters Aegean Air Force and Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will make a daily exchange of their reconnaissance plans for the following day. To unify and co-ordinate reconnaissance in the event of plans coinciding, Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will submit suitable suggestions in good time to Headquarters Aegean Air Force for the employment of the reconnaissance forces of both sides.

Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will send a photographic officer to Rhodes to examine the possibilities of the Italian photographic station developing and evaluating German aircraft photographs so that these may be made available to both Headquarters as quickly as possible.

(4) Headquarters Aegean Air Force promised X Fliegerkorps that formations could use Rhodes as a base for reconnaissance on request and that every effort would be made to support operations and air-sea rescue activity. In the event of German formations using airfields on Rhodes, X Fliegerkorps will ensure that additional food and the necessary German material is provided to maintain the supply and serviceability of these formations.

No objection was raised to the occupation of Gadurra airfield (Rhodes) by a German He 111 bomber unit.

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(5) There is no aircraft reporting service in the German sense of the term on the Italian islands as the Air Force, Army and Navy participate equally in this activity. It was decided that for the purpose of participation by and exploitation of the Italian aircraft reporting service within the German aircraft reporting service the appropriate agreements should be made directly between the responsible departments, namely Luftgauko South-East and the Italian authorities (Dicat).

(6) At present the following Italian Units are available on Rhodes:

2 bomber Gruppi,
1 torpedo-bomber Squadriglia and
1 single-engined fighter Gruppo.

It should be noted that these formations are considerably below their establishment as regards equipment. Reconnaissance is carried out mainly by bombers. Following his visit to Rome, which has been ordered for the next few days, General Longo will be able to report on the reinforcement of the Italian Air Force on Rhodes. Until then there is little prospect of the proposed transfer of an Italian fighter Gruppo from Rhodes to Crete.

(7) Headquarters Aegean Air Force and Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will exchange liaison officers. The German wireless station on Rhodes (Lt. Scheel) will continue to function.

(8) Air-Sea Rescue Service

The officer commanding air-sea rescue services in the Mediterranean will contact the Italian officer in charge of air-sea rescue in the Aegean with a view to co-operation and mutual exploitation of the German and Italian air-sea rescue services.

for the Corps Headquarters
the Chief of Staff

Grunow

Headquarters X Fliegerkorps

Battle Headquarters,
5 June 1941

Report No. 69/41 - Top Secret - (Ia)

Corps Order

1. With effect from 5 June 1941 Headquarters X Fliegerkorps will take over the direction of operations against British forces in the eastern Mediterranean.
2. X Fliegerkorps will remain directly subordinate to C-in-C Luftwaffe as regards operations and to Luftflotte 4 for supplies.
3. Fliegerfuehrer Afrika will continue to be under command of Headquarters X Fliegerkorps and will still conduct operations independently on the basis of directives from Headquarters.
4. The following formations are subordinate to X Fliegerkorps:

Fliegerfuehrer Afrika

X Fliegerkorps reconnaissance Gruppe (comprising 1./(F)121
and 2./(F)123)

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Corps HQ Kette (3 aircraft)
L.G. 1 (including the reserve training Gruppe)
III./K.G. 30
II./K.G. 26
HQ Stuka G. 3 with HQ Staffel
I./Stuka G. 1
I./Stuka G. 3
II./Stuka G. 2
I./J.G. 27
III./J.G. 52 (probably subordinate until 10 June)
7./J.G. 26
I./Nightfighter Geschwader 3
III./Z.G. 26
Air-Sea Rescue commander Mediterranean
40th GAF Signals Regiment

5. Luftgaukdo. South-East - under command Luftflotte 4 - began to operate with effect from 1 June 1941.

6. The Korps Battle Headquarters is temporarily located at Kephisia (Semiramis Hotel).

For the Headquarters
- the Chief of Staff -

Grunow

ABT.L I H Op.

Fuehrer's Headquarters,
6 June 1941

During the discussion with Cavallero,

1. I Requested:

(a) that the Italian Armistice Commission be instructed to withdraw its objections to the Paris protocol.

(b) that Rintelen be given Section L of the Paris protocol as I did not discuss details of the Italian objections or counter-proposals with Cavallero, but rejected them in their entirety.

(c) that a detailed plan of movements to North Africa be drawn up, taking our requests into consideration.

(i) Increased air defence in North Africa by Italian fighters and AA.

(ii) Artillery for Tobruk.

(iii) Coastal defence (ports by artillery and submarines).

(iv) that Italian warships and aircraft take over convoy escort duties.

(v) Italian units to be reinforced and motorised.

(d) that we wait and see what benefit will result from the Bizerta route.

(e) that the Supreme Command on Crete be German, with Italian formations subordinate.

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(f) that Merambello Bay - Ierapetra form the dividing line between German and Italian forces.

(g) that air bases be made available at Athens, in the eastern part of the Peleponese, on Melos, Kythera - Antikythera and on Lemnos.

(h) that the Italians remove prisoners of war, except those who can be employed on airfield construction as labourers.

2. I Proposed the withdrawal of (Italian) submarines from the Atlantic.

Reason: Intensified employment in the Mediterranean urgent owing to the necessity of protecting Italian sea routes; also particularly for the transportation of oil through the Aegean. Bordeaux is urgently required by the Germans.

3. I Promised Cavallero:

(a) Eastern part of Crete to be occupied by the Italians.

(b) Ierapetra airfield (southern coast of Crete).

(c) Transportation of Italian supplies via Bizerta as soon as the route is working and the most urgently required German supplies are moving.

(d) French tankers to carry fuel from Constanza.

(e) Italian occupation forces to remain in Athens if German interests in Pireaus and supply depots are guaranteed.

(f) Release of trucks brought in from Tunisia if the German Africa Corps' vehicle and supply situation permits.

4. The Fuehrer again referred to the use of very fast ships on the transport route to Libya via Greece and Crete by the Italians. The latter could open a third sea route from southern Italy (Taranto) pending the construction of the German railway to Athens (Pireaus).

Sgd. Keitel

Date:- 7 June
from:- Advance Party X Fliegerkorps
to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe, Kurfuerst Ia
reference:- Teleprint from C-in-C Luftwaffe
Operations Staff Ia Report No.
10341 - Top Secret - Op 1

X Fliegerkorps reports the following disposition of forces and intended transfers:

<u>Units</u>	<u>Location</u>
1(F)/121, 2(F)/123 & Corps HQ Kette (3 aircraft)	Tatoi

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<u>Units</u>	<u>Location</u>
HQ I & II/L.G. 1	Eleusis
II/K.G. 26	Eleusis - later Gadurra (Rhodes)
III/K.G. 30	at present in Germany - later at Eleusis
Stab St.G. 3	Iraklion
I/St.G. 1 (less 1st Staffel)	Malacoi, later Crete
1/St.G. 1	Martuba
II/St.G. 2	Martuba
I/St.G. 3	Larissa
III/Z.G. 26	Argos - later Crete
I/J.G. 27	Gazala
7/J.G. 26	Malacoi
1./N.J.G. 3	Argos-South - later Crete
Aufkl.Fl.Gr. 126	not under command X Fliegerkorps
III/L.G. 1	Benina - elements in Derna

X Fliegerkorps Ia Report No. 209/41 - Top Secret.

Date:- 8th June 1941
from:- Liaison Staff Italuft Ia No. 1789/41 - Top Secret
to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe
reference:- none
subject:- Detachment of an Me 110 Schwarm (four or five aircraft)
to escort transport aircraft to North Africa

According to Superaereo the Italian Air Force is not able to provide escorts for transport aircraft flying to North Africa as the few available Re 2000's are required exclusively for the protection of transport ships sailing to North Africa.

Italian transport aircraft fly without escort.

Liaison Staff Italuft requests that an Me 110 Schwarm be detached to Sicily.

/Date:-

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Date:- 9 June 1941
from:- OKW/Armed Forces Operations Staff/Abt.L(1 op)
No. 001092/41 - Top Secret
to:- C-in-C Luftwaffe (Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ia)
for information to:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces
.OKH/Operations Department
C-in-C Navy/1st Naval Operations Staff

The Africa Corps request that the supply of Tobruk be paralysed by the employment of Italian submarines and E-boats will be presented to the Italian High Command with an emphatic reminder that German U-boats are not available for this task, but that the withdrawal of Italian submarines from operations in the Atlantic has already been proposed. The sooner the Italian Navy takes the desired course of action the sooner the collapse of British defence at Tobruk may be expected.

A report on Italian views is requested.

Report from General Cavallero to Chef OKW,

Field Marshal Keitel

Rome, 12 June, 1941

"The Führer's comments and suggestions on war strategy in North Africa, which were passed on to us with the written notice of 10 June, 1941 have been very welcome. We can state that they are in full accordance with the directives issued by the Duce, and that the measures taken by the High Command also accord with the Führer's opinions.

The following points are answered in closer detail:-

1. Protection of convoys

The fighter formations stationed there will be reinforced as soon as is warranted by the air force supply situation (which is now being built up) and the air force ground organisation.

At present, thirteen A.A. batteries are being sent there. These are of various calibres. In addition, eleven 2cm. A.A. batteries are being posted. We are preparing to send a further twelve A.A. batteries of various calibres and eleven 2cm. A.A. batteries to augment the defences of airfields and ports.

In addition, five Italian coastal batteries, apart from the two German 15cm. coastal artillery detachments, are being sent there to strengthen the defences of the ports in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica against attacks from the sea.

2. and 3. The attack on Tobruk

So as to strengthen further the heavy artillery outside Tobruk which has already been reinforced with heavy German artillery (10cm. artillery detachment and 21cm. howitzer detachment), it is intended to supply more artillery units (10.5cm., 14.9cm. (28 cal. length), 14.9cm. (40 cal. length) and 15.2cm. (37 cal. length).) In anticipation of all these artillery reinforcements being in position outside Tobruk, we note that the bombing operations of X Fliegerkorps from Crete will be very useful, and request that X Fliegerkorps be given as its

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main target the ships supplying Tobruk and the defence positions in the fortress. The Duce has welcomed the plan to send modern siege equipment to reduce the fortress of Tobruk.

4. Ports of discharge

As you know, Benghazi is at present blocked by sunken ships; therefore it cannot take in convoys of more than 2 ships of low tonnage. Every conceivable effort is being made to make the port serviceable again, to complete the task of laying torpedo nets and to perfect A.A. defences.

The suggestion to establish direct shipping traffic with Benghazi by using fast ships in small convoys has been examined; but this solution has had to be rejected because of the lack of suitable ships. Of the five fast ships available which were sent to Benghazi, four have been lost.

The Italian Navy has no ships with a speed of over 10-12 knots which are of a size suitable for Benghazi harbour. On inquiry, the German Naval Liaison Staff informs us that, at present, it has no ships of that type in the Mediterranean.

5. Use of torpedo boats as transports

The possibility of using destroyers and torpedo boats as transports has already been examined. Their load capacity is very small, and considering the small numbers available after the losses we have suffered, no useful purpose can be served by using these ships. This would only decrease the already small number of torpedo carriers available for convoys. Again, we would have to reduce the number of convoys.

6. Shipping routes

At present, we are running an experimental service of single ships with a speed of some 10 knots from Bari or Brindisi to Benghazi.

X Fliegerkorps in Crete will have to cover these ships in a south-easterly direction, towards the coast of Africa. Should this experiment yield good results, the service could be extended. After the resumption of rail traffic in Greece, the Piraeus could be used as a base. The route would have to be to the west, along the coast of Crete to Benghazi; this would have advantages for the protection of shipping.

To sum up, a point raised by the Fuehrer must be repeated; namely that the most pressing problem for the successful conduct of the war in North Africa is the solution of the transport question so that all the necessary material can be brought there as soon as possible. Since it is impossible to bring all the supplies needed through the Libyan ports in time, even if the measures discussed above are taken, it seems necessary to use the harbour of Bizerta as well. After the agreement made with Field Marshal Keitel, the Duce is looking forward to receiving information on the German plans for using this port; he is also anxious to know when, and to what extent, it is intended to include Italian transports in this plan.

General von Rintelen's comments on General Cavallero's report

1. We have had to claim almost 100% of the shipping space available to bring the two German panzer divisions to Libya; for this reason, the Italians had to postpone until the middle of May their own requirements of supplying their colony, refitting their troops and improving their air and coastal defences. This explains why reinforcements are only now coming in.

But experience has shown that Italian A.A. and fighter forces, as indeed all other Italian formations, do not achieve as much as the same number of

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German formations. Their performance is much better when they are working in close cooperation with German troops.

Therefore it seems necessary that, whenever they are available, one German A.A. detachment and one searchlight battery should be detached for the permanent defence of Benghazi and Tripoli.

In the same way, as we have previously reported, transport ships can only be adequately protected by using two Staffeln of Messerschmitt 110 fighters.

2. The capacity of Benghazi harbour is limited, and according to the Italians, can take at present only 2 large ships at the same time; this is because of the depth of water in the harbour. For this reason, convoys with 6 ships must be taken to Tripoli. But because those ships available after provision for the Aegean are in insufficient numbers for two convoy routes, supplies for the German and Italian forces in Cyrenaica cannot be built up through Benghazi harbour alone.

Derna harbour cannot be used by larger ships, and is used at present by U-boats carrying ammunition.

3. With the harbour and transport facilities available at present, no adequate reinforcements of our forces can be made for an offensive by autumn. All our shipping is being used almost exclusively to supply the forces already in Libya.

Top Secret teleprint No. 1496/41

Date:- 14 June 1941

to:- Luftwaffe Operations Staff Ic

for information to:- 3rd Naval Operations Staff

from:- German General at Headquarters Italian Armed Forces

On 9 June I informed General Cavallero of the contents of the letter from Chief of OKW of 7 June delivered to me by Lieutenant-Colonel D. dem Borne and upon General Cavallero's request I also supplied written notification. On 13 June General Cavallero informed me that the individual points had been examined and brought to the Duce's attention. He sent me a written answer, which I forwarded by courier with my views attached.

Summary of contents: In general, German views are in agreement with instructions already issued by the Duce.

Re Section 1 : The reinforcement of fighters, AA and coastal artillery is in progress.

Re Sections

2 and 3 : Italian heavy artillery will also be sent to Tobruk. Pending its arrival operations are requested against British supply shipping by X Fliegerkorps from bases in Crete.

Re Section 4 : Work is in progress to improve the capacity of Benghazi harbour. Following the sinking of four fast Italian freighters only vessels with speeds of 10 - 12 knots are available.

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Re Section 5 : The employment of destroyers and torpedo boats to carry material could be achieved only at the cost of escorts for transport ships.

Re Section 6 : Preparations are being made for an attempt to send single ships with a speed of ten knots from Bari or Brindisi direct to Benghazi. Air cover by X Fliegerkorps from Crete as far as the African coast is requested.

In conclusion it is again pointed out that the African theatre of operations can be adequately supplied only if Bizerta harbour is fully exploited. The Duce therefore requested notification of the German transport plan for Bizerta and information as to when Italian transports can be included.

Copies to:- Chief OKW
Reichs Chancellory Berchtesgaden
L Atlas
General Staff, Army - Attache Dept
and Operations Dept.

OKW/Foreign Relations Dept. III No. 1445/41 - Top Secret

Sgd. Dr. Meyer,
Captain.

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