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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION NO. VII/110

WAR DIARY OF PANZER ARMY

24 APRIL 1942 TO 25 MAY 1942

TRANSLATED BY

AIR MINISTRY A.H.B.6

APRIL, 1952

WAR DIARY OF PANZER ARMEE AFRIKA (Operations Staff),24 APRIL 1942 TO 25 MAY 194224 April 1942

- 1) The C-in-C, Chief of Staff and Ia (Operations Staff Officer) discussed the general situation and operational plans with the Chief of Staff of the High Command of Armed Forces in North Africa, Marshal Barbasetti.

In the opinion of Army HQ, the general situation indicates that early offensive action would have particularly good prospects of success for the following reasons:

- a) At present the enemy is still weak, whereas our formations will probably be brought up to full strength by the end of May, and will be reinforced with sufficient material to ensure superiority.
- b) It is probable that by bringing up more American tanks and possibly American troops as well, the enemy will have become considerably stronger by autumn.
- c) By autumn there will no longer be any guarantee of co-operation by Luftflotte 2.

It is therefore intended to attack and destroy the British field army in front of Tobruk at the end of May. Following this, the fortress of Tobruk will be taken, by a coup de main if possible or, failing this, by a quick offensive.

Army HQ will dispatch outstanding requests for personnel and material requirements immediately.

Marshal Barbasetti promised full support. He further stated that Italian supply services would not be subordinated to the Chief of the Italian Liaison Staff at Panzer Army HQ, as this measure seemed no longer necessary following the transfer of the Italian HQ to Barce.

25 April 1942

- 1) The mixed battle group sent out in the direction of B. Tengeder - Segnali South under command of Africa Corps reached the specified area after repelling small enemy reconnaissance forces and organised for defence in strong-points along the general line B. Tengeder - Segnali South - Salt Lake (11 km south of Garet Meriem). Its task is to cover mine-sowing operations on this line. Covering positions facing south and south-east are being held by Reconnaissance Unit 33 in the Musran el Muffetem area and by mixed Reconnaissance Company 580 in the Der Tengeder area.
- 2) The transfer forward of Brescia Division from the Mechili area to the area south of Segnali North was completed.

26 April 1942

- 1) Mine-sowing operations were continued according to plan.
- 2) In a discussion with the G.O.C., the C-in-C issued the following orders to Africa Corps:
- a) mines to be sown in the area around Segnali South and B. Tengeder,

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- b) these operations to be covered,
- c) uncontrolled minefield to be laid in Wadi el Mra,
- d) reconnaissance in force to be sent out with limited objective in the direction of Bir Hacheim.

It is intended to withdraw all reconnaissance forces later into hedgehog positions on the line Segnali South - Garet Meriem. The Luftwaffe will then be allowed to carry out free lance operations against all vehicles east and south of the hedgehog positions.

- 3) The Fliegerfuehrer was required to issue orders for a new bomb line.

27 April 1942

- 1) Nothing of importance occurred during the day.

28 April 1942

- 1) The C-in-C, the Chief of Staff and Ia held a discussion with A.O. C-in-C South, Field Marshal Kesselring, and Fliegerfuehrer Afrika, Lt. General Hoffmann von Waldau.

A.O. C-in-C South reported on the outcome of his recent interview with the Fuehrer. It was intended to take Malta, by the end of May if possible. 2 parachute battalions would be placed at the disposal of Luftflotte 2 for this purpose. The Fuehrer agreed with the view that it was essential to defeat the British field army as soon as possible, as it was believed that the rate of enemy reinforcement was faster than ours.

If possible, the Panzer Army offensive should be launched after the capture of Malta. The following will probably be available:

- 1 single-engined fighter Geschwader with 4 Gruppen,
- 1 dive-bomber Geschwader with 3 Gruppen,
- 1 twin-engined fighter Gruppe and
- 1 bomber Geschwader (L.G.1) of X Fliegerkorps.

If the enemy should attack first, the attack on Malta would be postponed and the above units would then also be at the disposal of Panzer Army.

The C-in-C stressed the necessity of bringing over 30,000 tons of supplies to Benghazi every month. A.O. C-in-C South promised to do everything in his power to press this demand with the Italian authorities, as he was also convinced of its necessity.

With regard to I./Flak 43, A.O. C-in-C South promised that the unit would be brought up as soon as possible. 2 light troops (Batterien) had arrived at Army.

- 2) The Supreme Commander of Armed Forces in North Africa, Marshal Bastico, decorated the C-in-C with the Grand Order of the Colonial Star in the presence of the G.O.C. Italian Army Corps.
- 3) A Panzer Army application of 22 April for the allocation of reinforcements was rejected by O.K.H. A further application was made.

29 April 1942

- 1) Nothing of importance occurred during the day.

/30 April 1942

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30 April 1942

- 1) The reconnaissance forces of Menny Battle Group were withdrawn to the Segnali South area.
- 2) The Italian G.H.Q., A.O. C-in-C South, C-in-C Naval H.Q. Italy and the German General in Rome were informed of Panzer Army's operational plans. The above authorities were requested to state whether the detailed conditions for the successful execution of these operations can be fulfilled.

Seen at Army H.Q.,
2 May 1942,
by the C-in-C:

ROMMEL, Generaloberst.

1 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C drove to the sector held by Motorised Infantry Regiment 155.
- 2) In the afternoon the C-in-C discussed the organization of mobile and non-mobile Army artillery for the coming offensive with Artillery Commander 104 and the Italian Artillery Commander, Nicolini.
- 3) Addition to War Diary entry of 30 April 1942, paragraph 3):

The German General at the H.Q. of the Italian Armed Forces reported that the operational plans of Panzer Army Africa were approved at the meeting of the Fuehrer and the Duce. The date for the attack on Malta was put back.
- 4) By order of O.K.W./Armed Forces Operations Staff, 3./Panzer Engineer 200 was not sent to Panzer Army Africa as intended owing to its employment for other purposes.

2 May 1942

- 1) Following an invitation from the C-in-C, Marshal Bastico and Marshal Barbasetti arrived at Army Battle H.Q. to inspect the positions of the Italian Corps.

The C-in-C again spoke of the future plans. Marshal Bastico expressed complete agreement and promised that the Italian G.H.Q. would make every effort possible to replenish the Italian formations. In the opinion of Marshal Bastico, Army demands for the supply of Italian divisions with fuel, ammunition and food would be met.

Afterwards a visit was made to XXI (Italian) Corps front.

- 2) In accordance with O.K.H. General Staff, Army/Organisation Staff order of 2 May, 12 7.62 cm (Russian) S.P. anti-tank guns will be sent to Naples en route to Panzer Army Africa by 20 May to enable the re-equipment of one anti-tank company of each of the two Panzer divisions.
- 3) SS "Ankara" and SS "Monviso" arrived at Benghazi, and SS "Lerici" and SS "Bixio" at Tripoli with the following cargoes of supplies:

Ankara	1,800 tons
Monviso	1,200 tons
Bixio	950 tons
Lerici	920 tons

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plus a total of 272 vehicles, 27 field guns and 20 tanks.

- 4) The German General at H.Q. Italian Armed Forces issued the statement on the amount of material shipped to Africa during April.
- 5) Provision has been made for the shipment of 47,000 tons of supplies, plus vehicles, to Benghazi during May.

3 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C, Marshal Bastico and Marshal Barbasetti drove to X and XX (Italian) Corps.
- 2) The German General at H.Q. Italian Armed Forces was requested to obtain permission from Comando Supremo for the San Marco Naval Landing Battalion to remain in Africa for the time being, as it was intended to use this formation in the Panzer Army offensive.
- 3) A proposal for the re-organisation of 90th Light Division's supply troops was submitted to O.K.H. General Staff, Army/Organisation Staff with a request for approval.
- 4) In order to give the enemy the impression that the Army had defensive intentions, the Corps were ordered to erect obstacles of maximum height (rows of stakes, etc.) along the front line.

4 May 1942

- 1) During April 5,917 men were brought over to Panzer Army by air, i.e. approximately 200 men per day.

5 May 1942

- 1) A discussion was held at the Advanced Army Battle H.Q. at el Cherima between the C-in-C and the Commanding Generals of Africa Corps, X Corps and XX Corps on the subject of the organisation and employment of Panzer Army for the forthcoming offensive and the resultant re-organisation. The following orders were issued:
 - a) X Corps and XX Corps to relieve one another,
 - b) Light Infantry Regiment 155 to be relieved by elements of XXI Corps; afterwards, Menny Battle Group to be relieved by motorised elements of 90th Light Division.

6 May 1942

- 1) The Chief of Comando Supremo, General Count Cavallero, the Supreme Commander of Armed Forces in North Africa, Marshal Bastico, and the German General at H.Q. Italian Armed Forces, General von Rintelen, arrived at Army Battle H.Q. General Cavallero brought the Comando Supremo directive for the forthcoming Panzer Army operations.

Afterwards the C-in-C took his guests to the X Corps front.

In the afternoon a discussion was held at Derna. The following were present: Field Marshal Kesselring, General Cavallero, Marshal Bastico, General Rommel, Marshal Barbasetti, State Secretary of the Italian Air Force General

/Fougier,

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Fougier, Fliegerfuehrer Afrika, Lt. General von Rintelen and the Chief of Staff and Ia of Panzer Army H.Q. The following decisions were reached:

- a) to reinforce Fliegerfuehrer Afrika for the offensive, the following will be transferred from Italy:

1 dive-bomber Gruppe,
1 single-engined fighter Gruppe,
1 twin-engined fighter Gruppe (Me 110).

In addition, a Flak Abteilung will be assembled. It has still not been decided whether paratroops - possibly 2 battalions - can be made available. X Fliegerkorps formations will co-operate from bases in Crete and will be reinforced by a Ju 88 Bomber Gruppe and a Ju 88 twin-engined fighter Gruppe.

The following formations will be sent to reinforce 5 Squadra:

1 single-engined fighter Stormo (Macchi 202),
1 mixed single-engined fighter Stormo.

The allocation of a third Stormo (dive-bomber and single-engined fighter Cr 42) is still open to question.

- b) The date for the operation to capture Malta was postponed; in any case this will not be carried out until the Panzer Army operations have been completed.
- c) Sabratha Division will again be subordinated to Panzer Army.
- d) From the end of May, X and XX Corps will each have about 100 vehicles placed at their disposal for the movement of troops all at once.
- e) A tank battalion (Pz. Abteilung) will be sent up to XX Corps for Trieste Division.
- f) In May 40,000 tons of supplies will be shipped from Italy to Benghazi; in addition, a further 10,000 tons will be brought from Tripoli to Benghazi by coastal shipping. Two thirds of the transport space will be at the disposal of the Germans.
- g) The San Marco Naval Landing Battalion will be placed under command of Panzer Army and moved up to Bomba Bay.
- h) Engineer Assault Battalions 31 and 32 will be placed under command of Panzer Army for employment with X and XXI Corps.
- i) Co-operation by Italian light naval forces was assured. Details have not yet been settled.

7 May 1942

- 1) A discussion was held with Colonel von Lahousen, Chief of Second Department O.K.W. Counter-Intelligence. Sabotage units will be sent to Panzer Army soon for land and sea-borne operations.
- 2) Following a further application by Panzer Army H.Q. that tractors be provided at least for the non-mobile 4./Artillery Regiment 115 (21 cm howitzers), O.K.H. General Staff, Army/Organisation Staff replied that tractors could not be sent,

/8 May 1942

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8 May 1942

- 1) In an Army Order of the Day the C-in-C took the strongest exception to the senseless spreading of rumours concerning the forthcoming operations and ordered that offenders be severely punished.
- 2) X and XX Corps began to relieve one another.
- 3) The C-in-C held a discussion with the G.O.C. XXI Corps and the commanders of Trento and Sabratha Divisions concerning the employment of XXI Corps. Sabratha Division will be brought forward by 20 May and put into the XXI Corps area between Trento Division and 90th Light Division. The C-in-C pointed out that Sabratha Division should be trained in the rapid occupation of positions and the preparation of them for defence.
- 4) The C-in-C settled the final Army artillery areas of operation with the German and Italian Artillery Commanders and discussed the conduct of artillery operations during the first two days of the offensive.
- 5) 3 ships put in at Benghazi with a total of 2,400 tons of German supplies, including 1,350 tons of fuel.
- 6) A guard company for duty in Naples is to be formed from detachments of the Panzer Army Field Reinforcement Battalion.

9 May 1942

- 1) The Chief of Staff discussed with the Fliegerfuehrer Luftwaffe co-operation during the first three days of the forthcoming Panzer Army offensive.

10 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C and Chief of Staff flew to Tripoli where supply questions were discussed with the Commander L. of C. Area and an inspection made of vehicle repair installations.
- 2) The X Corps - XX Corps exchange relief was completed. XX Corps has now taken over command of the former X Corps sector, and X Corps of the former XX Corps sector.
- 3) According to an O.K.W. order, the two parachute battalions which were being considered for use in the forthcoming offensive cannot now be made available.

11 May 1942

- 1) Nothing of importance occurred during the day.

12 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C discussed operations by Panzer and motorised divisions during the first two days of the offensive with the Commanding Generals, Divisional Commanders and the Fliegerfuehrer at Advanced Battle H.Q.
- 2) 5 ships arrived at Tripoli with the following supplies:

1,300 tons of fuel,	1,270 tons of miscellaneous supplies,
1,884 tons of ammunition,	540 vehicles and
1,625 tons of food,	14 field guns

/13 May 1942

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13 May 1942

- 1) 3 ships arrived at Benghazi with 3,350 tons of supplies.
- 2) Marshal Barbasetti arrived at Army Battle H.Q. for a discussion with the Chief of Staff. The following decisions were reached:
 - a) Sabratha Division will be brought up to XXI Corps by 20 May. Approval was given for German trucks to be made available to assist in the transportation of this formation.
 - b) Two smoke platoons, each equipped with 30 smoke generators, will be sent up to Tmimi for employment with XXI Corps.
 - c) The Italian Air Force and Navy will give maximum support to the operations. The Army will put forward requests for their employment.
 - d) A small X Corps covering force will remain in Mechili.
- 3) The tanker "Fassio" arrived at Tripoli with 1,400 tons of fuel.

14 May 1942

- 1) In a special letter the C-in-C referred the Commanding Generals and the Divisional Commanders to the maintenance of secrecy with regard to the forthcoming operations.
- 2) As a result of the regrouping ordered on 15 May, H.Q. 90th Light Division took over command of the Segnali South sector and H.Q. 15th Infantry "Brigade" (i.e. two regiments) took over command of the Tmimi sector, at the same time being placed under command of XXI Corps.
- 3) SS "Giuliani" arrived at Tripoli with 950 tons of German supplies.
- 4) By authority of O.K.H./General Staff, Army/Organisation Staff (I) order 4616/42 Secret of 5 May, the following will be made ready for active service and sent to Panzer Army Africa:
 - 1) for 90th Light Division:
 - 1 heavy infantry gun company (motorised),
 - 1 tank battalion (Pz.Abt.),
 - 1 artillery regiment staff (motorised),
 - 1 mixed light field howitzer battery (Abt.) (motorised),
 - H.Q. Anti-Tank Battery (Abt.) (motorised) 190,
 - H.Q. Panzer Signals Section (Abt.) 190 with 1. (telephone)/190.
 - 2) for 21st Panzer Division:
Artillery Survey Troop (armoured) 155

15 May 1942

- 1) Hecker Formation (13./Training Regiment 800, San Marco Naval Landing Battalion, Engineer Landing Company 778 (moving up from Tripoli or Benghazi)) assembled at Bomba Bay to carry out special training for their assignments in the forthcoming Panzer Army operations.
- 2) Panzer Army H.Q. gave its views on the Africa Shipping Staff's schedule /for

for May. It was again requested that the majority of ships be sent to Benghazi so that the supplies could reach the battle area by the end of the month.

Seen at Army H.Q.,
17 May 1942,
by the C-in-C,

ROMMEL, Generaloberst.

16 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C discussed with the Commanding Generals and Divisional Commanders of X and XXI Corps the employment of their formations during the first two days of the offensive.
- 2) By order of O.K.W./Armed Forces Operations Staff, the operations to be carried out by Panzer Army Africa in the period end of May - beginning of June will receive the code name "Theseus". The first day of the offensive will be called R-Day.
- 3) The C-in-C held a discussion with A.O. C-in-C South, Field Marshal Kesselring, and the C.O. German Naval H.Q. in Italy, Vice Admiral Weichold:
 - a) There was complete agreement on the subject of Luftwaffe support for Panzer Army during operations against the British field army. Luftwaffe co-operation in the Panzer Army attack on the fortress of Tobruk was then discussed. In addition to routine tasks (day and night attacks on supply roads in the rear, the railway line to the front, shipping movements etc.) Luftwaffe operations will be concentrated on the Tobruk road triangle during the night preceding the offensive, and on enemy AA positions and Tobruk harbour on the morning of the offensive. In addition, waves of attacks will be carried out to hold down the western sector of the enemy's fortified front.
 - b) Co-operation by the German Navy:

With effect from X-Day, 8 - 9 U-boats will operate in the sea area Alexandria - Tobruk.

8 E-boats have been assembled in Suda Bay for operations against enemy naval forces, to cover Hecker Formation's operation and to escort supply transports.

8 mine-sweepers will clear mined areas, escort supply transports and cover the Hecker Formation operation.

9 Navy T.L.C.'s will be used to carry supplies and for the landing operation by Hecker Formation.
 - c) Co-operation by the Italian Navy:

It was agreed that the four obsolete torpedo-boats available in North Africa were not suitable for operations against British light naval forces in the sea area Tobruk - Alexandria. They will therefore continue to be used for protecting the coastal shipping route between Tripoli and Benghazi. Owing to lack of fuel, Italian cruisers and destroyers cannot carry out operations from Suda Bay. Moreover, according to a report from Vice Admiral Weichold, these vessels cannot operate at night.

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- 4) Addition to War Diary entry of 15 May, paragraph 2: reply from Africa Shipping Staff:

- a) O.K.W. has ordered the shipment of Special Staff D,
- b) Army Coast Defence Artillery Troop 362 was embarked by mistake,
- c) In the opinion of Comando Supremo and the Italian Navy, all shipping bound for Tripoli cannot be directed to Benghazi,
- d) All 60 tractors will be shipped to Benghazi before the end of May.

17 May 1942

- 1) SS "Petrarca" arrived at Benghazi with 1,700 tons of supplies.
- 2) The following arrived at Army Battle H.Q. to continue yesterday's discussions on the question of German and Italian air and naval co-operation:

A.O. C-in-C South, Field Marshal Kesselring,
Fliegerfuehrer Afrika, Lt. General Hoffmann von Waldau,
C.O. German Naval H.Q. in Italy, Vice Admiral Weichold,
C.O. 5 Squadra, General Marchese,
C.O. Italian Navy in North Africa, Vice-Admiral Lombardi,
Chief of Staff Italian G.H.Q. in North Africa, Marshal Barbasetti.

Agreements was reached with the Italian officers on subjects discussed by German officers yesterday.

In addition, Vice-Admiral Lombardi made known the Italian naval forces available for the Tobruk operation:

2 mine-sweepers,
2 10.2 cm guns,
1 troop of 7.6 cm guns.

Marshal Barbasetti reported that instead of the 200 vehicles promised, only 50 vehicles could be allocated to the Italian Corps.

- 3) The Africa Shipping Staff reported that the Italian Armed Forces had relinquished their allocation of shipping space in favour of German vehicles to increase the rate of sea transport.

18 May 1942

- 1) SS "Bixio" and SS "Roselli" arrived at Benghazi with 3,240 tons of supplies.
- 2) SS "Lerici" arrived at Tripoli with 500 tons of supplies.
- 3) SS "Bolsena" was torpedoed and sunk by an enemy submarine while returning empty from Benghazi to Italy.

19 May 1942

- 1) The Army Order for the offensive was issued.

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- 2) The C-in-C flew to Benghazi to inspect harbour installations. At present there are:

3 large,
4 medium and
7 small ships,

to be unloaded in the harbour. The discharging facilities of the port are therefore taxed to capacity at present.

20 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C drove to Africa Corps Battle H.Q. to hear Fliegerfuehrer Afrika's lecture on co-operation between ground forces and the Luftwaffe.
- 2) G.H.Q. Armed Forces in North Africa issued an order for operations in the forthcoming offensive to 5 Squadra and the Italian Navy.

21 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C drove to X Corps Battle H.Q. where he discussed with the Commanding Generals of X and XX Corps the advance and co-operation between the two Corps on X-Day and X+1-Day.
- 2) According to an order issued by O.K.H. General Staff, Army/Organisation Staff on 21 May 1942, a further 24 S.P. 7.62 cm (Russian) guns will be sent to Panzer Army Africa in June for the re-equipment of 4 anti-tank companies of Africa Corps and 90th Light Division. The 5 cm anti-tank guns which will thus become available will be used to bring up the strength of the Africa Corps motorised infantry companies, whose equipment with anti-tank weapons was increased by O.K.H. to 3 heavy anti-tank rifles and 6 5 cm anti-tank guns per company.

22 May 1942

- 1) The C-in-C drove to 90th Light Division Battle H.Q.
- 2) SS "Wachtfels" and SS "Argentera" arrived at Tripoli.
- 3) Italian G.H.Q. North Africa reported that the three infantry battalions which arrived by passenger ships at Benghazi on 17 May and were intended for X Corps cannot be committed for about 3 weeks owing to their inadequate training and lack of anti-tank weapons. Army H.Q. replied that it cannot cancel the plans involving the three battalions, and therefore requested that they be sent up to Corps immediately.

23 May 1942

- 1) Mixed Reconnaissance Company 580 with the subordinated captured British artillery troop will be renamed Reconnaissance Unit 580 with immediate effect.
- 2) Addition to War Diary entry of 22 May, paragraph 3:

Italian G.H.Q. North Africa stated that the three newly arrived battalions could not be employed at the front before 10 June. In their place a Libyan Volunteer Battalion (500 natives under Italian officers) will be sent up to Panzer Army immediately. Panzer Army H.Q. thereupon requested that three

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full-strength battalions of Bologna Division be sent up immediately in place of the three battalions originally intended.

- 3) C.O. German Naval H.Q. in Italy issued an order to subordinate naval formations concerning co-operation during the forthcoming Panzer Army Africa operations.

24 May 1942

- 1) Marshal Bastico visited Army Battle H.Q. to extend to the C-in-C his best wishes for the forthcoming Panzer Army operations. The Commanding Generals were also present. Regarding the matter of the three infantry battalions for X Corps, Marshal Bastico expressed deep regret that the battalions could no longer be brought up in time. However, an effort would be made to move the Libyan Volunteer Battalion and 1 battalion of Bologna Division up to the forward area as quickly as possible.
- 2) The two Italian Infantry Corps (X and XXI Corps), Artillery Commander 104 and the Italian Artillery Commander Nicolini will be brought together under Cruewell Group with effect from 25 May.

25 May 1942

- 1) X-Day was made known to subordinate H.Q.'s.
- 2) The C-in-C drove to XX Corps.
- 3) SS "Ankara" and SS "Monviso" arrived at Tripoli.

Seen at Army Battle H.Q.,
25 May 1942,
by the C-in-C,

ROMMEL, Generaloberst.

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