The complete ignorance of our own plans and the very obvious reorganizing of the enemy forces made it mandatory to be unusually careful in the selection of attack objectives.

On 29 May, also, it was impossible to establish communications with the Puny Army; several requests made to the air force signal liaison detachment, asking for information on the German ground forces' situation and plans, remained unanswered.

The surprise penetration of British tanks on the south flank of the Italian I Corps was characteristic for the confusion that reigned concerning the overall situation. During this surprise thrust General Crusell, who intended to fly to the Puny Army headquarters in a Storch liaison aircraft, was shot down and taken a prisoner.

The difficulty of coordinating the Army's requirements for support with the Luftwaffe's capabilities became particularly obvious during the first days of fighting.

The Army had many wrong ideas on the procedures that had to be followed to carry out an ENEMY's operations order, even though the air units were ready for commitment. The ground forces failed to take into consideration the need to first send a military officer to brief air unit commanders on the situation on the ground and in the air, and to disseminate and transmit orders to the dispersed air fields of the various squadrons. Moreover, assured
combat shows no fact that operations orders requiring air support usually arrive too late to be effective, data transmitted via radio are therefore often outdated insofar as their tactical relevance to the enemy situation is concerned. One must emphasize in this connection that air operations conducted without complete ground combat intelligence imposed tremendous mental strain upon the air unit commanders, thus completely justifying the

The three reported breakdowns off of operations on 29 May.

On 30 May radio contact with the Rommel Army headquarters, the German Africa Force headquarters, and the Luftwaffe signal detachment was reestablished, thus greatly facilitating the evaluation of the situation in the light of our own air reconnaissance results.

The enemy assembly of two strong armored groups in preparation of a major battle was clearly identified from the air. The southern group was in the area east of Bôr R kurz, while the northern group was slowly moving southward under the protection of about 60 tanks about 6 miles northeast of Acroma.

The main effort of the Luftwaffe was directed against these two groupings; the Germans flew 536 missions against the...

These attacks were continued during the hours of darkness and repeated during the early morning hours of 31 May and 1 June.

The X Air Corps intensified the night attacks on El Adem and the Italians flew annalsite on Acroma. The enemy
Forces that had been contained near Bachel was also softened up by air bomber attacks.

The expected major offensive by the two British armored forces failed to materialize for the time being. Generaloberst (General) Henschel recognized that the shortage in the Luftwaffe and contributed to the overall success achieved.

Field Marshal Henschel informed the Luftwaffe headquarters, that the German army attached decisive importance to the fact that the constant threat to its lines of communication from the direction of Bachel to definitely eliminated. General Henschel planned to let the two British armored forces dive against his and new fortified positions METZER to assume the offensive at the most propitious moment for taking the initiative. Luftwaffe attacks on enemy armored concentrations were, however, to be given secondary importance, with the elimination of the forces threatening the supply lines designated as primary air HALL targets.

For this reason the Luftwaffe shifted the main effort of its attacks, starting on the afternoon of 31 May, toward the enemy groupings along the northern flank between Bachel and north of Voglau - Rotanitz. After a series of attacks by 3rd Ninth of the 7th Elephant-Jaguar Fighter Group were instrumental in destroying these enemy forces during the following days. Subsequent evaluation indicated that 17 armored reconnaissance vehicles, 47 trucks, 3 tractors, and 2 prime movers were destroyed during these attacks.  

* Von Bachel Diary, p. 45.
The British army headquarters had finally arrived at the
decision to attack the support point at Metz on 2 June
with two divisions in line, and it had asked for maximum air
support for this occasion.

As shown by experience, the British had up to then established
a routine of flying only one morning and one evening mission, which
however were flown by a force embodying all available aircraft.
The British units had orders to avoid combat with German fighter
aircraft, except with those which were engaged in escorting dive
bombers.  

During the period 23 May to 1 June the Germans shot down
73 British fighters and 2 Wellington aircraft during aerial combat.

They also dropped a tonnage of 347.47 tons of bombs. The German
losses amounted to 24 aircraft (4 Messerschmidt 109, 4 Messer-
schmidt 110, 9 Jagers 87, and 1 Junkers 88); no figures on
Italian losses are available.

It is not without interest to cite Field Marshal Weygand's
impressions on the combat experience of these past days. He had
been at the front from the beginning of the offensive.

"The operation was based on the element of surprise. The
decisive blow against the British was to be struck by an enveloping
movement out of the desert which was to be subsequently supplemented
thereafter by the landing from the sea of a small, but selected, landing
force."

* This information had been verified by radio intercepts.
... Field Marshal Remarque intended to lead the forces employed on the enveloping flank, but wanted to remain in charge of the overall conduct of operations. The front line commander was Lt. Gen. Crosswell."

"The plan proper was simple and clear, and Field Marshal Bostian had approved it. The chain of command displeased me, once before Remarque had lost control of the conduct of operations by remaining with forces engaged on one of the flanks. One should have established a stationary command post."

"The element of surprise was achieved, but communications with Remarque were disrupted. The messages on the course of the ground fighting, which were equally important for the air force personnel and General REM Crosswell, failed to get through. The confusion on the battle field, shore armored attacks, counterattacks, and movements with inverted front lines changed at rapid pace, complicated the conduct of air reconnaissance to an unusual degree and made the employment of bombers very risky."

"On the early morning of 29 May General REM Crosswell's liaison plane landed in enemy territory and he was taken prisoner. The German combat units had lost their leader. Upon everyone's insistence I finally agreed to assume command of the ground forces."

"On this occasion I had the opportunity of experiencing the difficulties involved in conducting operations according to the wishes of a higher headquarters that refuses to answer questions and cannot be contacted."
"However, dynamic Force. I's presence on the outflanking movement's role might have been, he was very exposed to and too directly involved in the vicissitudes of the battle. The key must have listened to eyewitnesses in order to realize what the situation was like on the first day of combat during the armored battle at Rommel's headquarters." 

"I repeatedly tried to establish radio contact with Rommel when I asked for a meeting anywhere and wherever it might suit him." ..... "It was a real pleasure to observe Rommel's incredible skill in conducting desert warfare. The existing situation was anything but favorable." ..... A subsequent conversation between Rommel and me took place on the subject of Ahr-Bach, which was held by strong Free French forces under General Massig and which constituted a grave danger to the German troops. According to Rommel's request the Luftwaffe flew heavy dive-bomber attack missions against this target, in the event with minimal results. These air attacks and later infantry assaults were all the more unsuccessful, because the timing of the ground and air attacks could not be properly coordinated." 166

The Royal Air Force was very active from the outset and tried

166 Albert von Haller, Soldat bis zum letzten Tag (Soldier to the End), pp. 179-81, Athenaeum Verlag, Brem, 1955.
Cunningham's fighters attacked the seven air fields by night. The fighter-bombers, of which there were than four squadrons available, and put about 200 vehicles out of action. On 23 and 24 May Cunningham abandoned all efforts to retain air superiority and concentrated all his forces on attacking the supply columns, mainly to the east and south of Bir-incieli. In the afternoon flying was resumed by some aircraft. Under the protection of one of these nonsenses, the Italians succeeded to open a gap in the British airfields, which Kemal used to pass through his supplies.

On the morning of 25 May the enemy (the Germans) were in a very critical situation. While some tanks withdrew southward to shorten their supply lines, other units pulled back to the west. Thence, however, opened another gap in the British airfields from the rear, which was even wider than the first gap. The battle raged for the possession of those two gaps. The British counter and later the allied bombers (sic) brought the airfield to a boil.

Vehicles that were heavily damaged by gun fire, others that had been hit by bombs, and finally vehicles that had crashed into one another all ran into the British airfields.
Other attacks on the supply lines south of El-Meleh were less successful. On 31 May and 2 June heavy sandstorms spread over the battlefield, thus restricting the activities of the Royal Air Force. The Germans, however, began to show a real unease over the decisions so that Coningham had to switch to the defensive.

During these days Kessel succeeded in reorganizing his forces, maintaining his positions in front of the road to the minefields, and improving his situation at the expense of the Eighth Army. 167

Three days passed until General Ritchie proceeded to attack. This interval was extremely useful to the German Afrika Corps which could then repair some of the many tanks that had stopped out or been damaged.

"What had gone wrong? It is always easy to criticize from hindsight and act as if everything could have been anticipated, but in this instance I can prove it black and white that I was right, then and there. In his book "A Fear of Battle," Alan Searlehead reports that I said to him on 3 or 4 June, "The great chance case when Kessel was wedged in against the minefields and we could have attacked with the Indian 5th Division under General Briggs. This chance we have not missed." Then the attack finally jumped off on 5-6 June, it was already 167

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three days later, the strong point of the 190th Brigade had
been captured by the Germans. ... "The 5th of June was
the turning point of the battle, even though the British had
lost their chances for a complete victory already three days
before." 163

The Panzer Army expected an attack either against the
frontal sector of its divisions in the center or against the
renewed forces near Sir Buinba. So these reasons the 15th Panzer
Division was assembled north of Bir-Benat during the night
of 5-6 June. From that assembly area the division could
move northeast or southeast according to the situation. On
5 June the British jumped off after a strong artillery barrage
lasting for one hour. The 2d and 3d armored Brigades as well
as the Indian 10th Division and VIIth Indian Brigade attacked
the entire armored Division east of Bala. The Italian Division
withdrew to the positions occupied by our own artillery in
the rear and there the British threat was stopped by a near
concentrated barrage of artillery. Now the Panzer Army jumped
up to the attack, making a counterattack while protecting its
northern flank.

General led Coastal Group Sula, which was the army reserve,
conducting his force in person into the rear of the British
advancing the positions near Knightsbridge. The 15th Panzer Division

163
Desmond Young, Die See, 19-1, 146-7 und (the second mention)
Ulrich Wimmer, Afrikancende Truppen (African Troops), vol. 11,
moved along the left flank of Cossel’s forces; its mission was
to envelop the enemy forces from the north. On 6 June, the bulk of the
89th Infantry Division, which had hitherto been unable to disengage
from British attacks, could gain ground by advancing to the east.

On the other hand, Cossel’s left wing, which had been enveloped
by British forces, had to withdraw to Bizerta during the night
of 5–6 June.

During the heavy fighting that lasted through 10 June and
during which the British armored units suffered severe losses
from concentrated fire, the British were pushed back across the
Trig Capuzzo.

General Mitidier had not been able to make up his mind whether
to pull his divisions out of the northern sector of the desert
front and to assemble them in time for flexible employment.

With their 300 guns and 200 to 300 armored reconnaissance
vehicles and machine gun carriers these forces could have
carried considerable weight and would probably have stopped the eastward
threat of the 89th Infantry Division.

Meanwhile, the Tribeste Division and the 90th Light Division
had begun to attack near Bir-Messaha, supported by wheeling attacks
in waves of the dive-bomber units. There a struggle of extreme
severity had gotten underway, the French defended themselves
in cleverly constructed field positions and close combat
facilities, such as foxholes, small fortifications,
machinegun and antitank gun positions, which had all been protected by heavily minefields. For this reason, the German attack made only little headway. On 6 June the 30th Light Division's advance guard reached points that were still some 200 yards from the fortress of Bir-Hakeim. During the next two days the two divisions were equally unsuccessful in achieving a major success, with the enemy forces remaining in their dugouts. On the other hand, the Germans were able to ward off minor British attempts to relieve the French garrison.

In an effort to give the offensive some renewed vigor, a cochet group of the German Afrika Corps was brought up as a support force on 9 June. After severe losses the assault force, who had constantly been exposed to the fiercely fighting French defenders' ferocious fire, fought their way within 200 yards of the fortress by 2000 hours. Finally, the cochet group led by Oberst (Col.) Bond succeeded in penetrating into the main line of resistance by 10 June. After this penetration had been achieved, Bir-Hakeim could no longer be held. During the night of 10 - 11 June some sizable elements of the garrison under the command of General Robin broke out of the ring of encirclement in a westerly direction and linked up with the British 7th Motorized Brigade. Upon seizing the fortress, the Germans found that the defensive positions around Bir-Hakeim consisted of about 1,000 pillboxes for infantrymen and heavy weapons as well as
various other facilities. Under the courageous leadership of
General Ebenk, the garrison had been able to resist the German
assaults for almost 10 days. Now the divisions EBP and engaged in
the struggle had become free to participate in the decisive
battles of the Kasserine.

The course of the fighting around Kasserine had led
to a number of alterations between the Luftwaffe and Panzer Army
headquarters, during which Field Marshal Kesselring in person also
intervened.

The Luftwaffe sorties that had been flown every day since
3 June, involving strong forces several times a day, had resulted
in quite considerable losses for the German aircraft. These
sorties, EBP however, had not achieved their objective in the
sense that the ground forces had not taking advantage of these
for their offensive operations. The reason for this lack of
success was above all the weakness of the assault troops who
were incapable of breaking the resistance.

General Ebenk, however, refused categorically — despite
Field Marshal Kesselring’s admonitions — for the mine being
to prove more effective for assault missions.

Instead, he requested the Luftwaffe to shift its main
effort from Kasserine to the enemy forces along the east and
north flanks of the German Africa Corps. This request was put
into action with evident success. On 6 and 7 June, Luftwaffe
attacks on British armor assemblies, etc., were continued with
noticeable success in the area northwest of El-Azizia. During a
conference with Pomeroy Army headquarters personnel on 7 June
Field Marshal Kesselring had arranged for the following general
three schedule:
8 June . . . . . Elimination of the air-Malhla resistance;
9 or 10 June . . . Threat and advance to the coast while forcing
a defensive front toward the east.
10 - 14 June . . . Penetration of the Malhla positions
15 - 20 June . . . Having up the infantry divisions toward the east.
18 - 22 or 23 June . Attack on Tobruk; in this connection Field
Marshal Kesselring mentioned the 23 June as
the ultimate target date for the seizure of
the fortress.

Reconnaissance patrols were to advance into the area north
and east of El-Dobhi.

air
On the basis of this schedule the attack on Air-Malhla
was prepared for 8 June. The concentrated effort of 95 Jumoars 87,
3 Jumoars 88, and 10 Messerschmidt 110 protected by 50 fighter
aircraft took place punctually at 0621. The air assault forces
attacked the fortress proper and the areas immediately to the
north and east, producing maximum mass effect. But the attack
did not help in paving the way of the ground forces.

Von Milian Diary, p. 27.
According to the time schedule the enemy forces west of Acroma were to be attacked on 9 June in order to initiate the offensive of the German Afrika Corps, the objective of which was the penetration of the Gamila frontline. The preparations for these operations, however, were cancelled out by renewed requests for immediate dive-bomber support against Bir-Sachel at 1200 and 1730 hours; these requests originated from the Rommell Army headquarters. 

In an effort to produce an effective commitment of the Luftwaffe units, which was really equally in the army's interest, the Luftwaffe (Air Force Commander) made a personal call at Rommell Army headquarters on the evening of 8 June, during which he expressed his objections. 

Using the evaluation results as a basis, the Air Force Commander claimed the commitment of his units well in advance. The evaluation took into account not only the situation on the ground but also the tactical air information. The readiness for action of the air units was also influenced by the various technical factors that had to be taken into consideration.

The frequent and short-noticey changes of decisions and requirements nullified all planning of the tactical command agency of the Luftwaffe. So long as the efforts in strength against Bir-Sachel were not being exploited by the ground assault forces because they were too weak, these attacks
remained without effect. They led to the premature attention of the Luftwaffe and to the superiority of the Royal Air Force at the decisive points.

The Panzer Army headquarters upheld their plan to first penetrate the Geilen position. No northward drive was to be started unless 0700 at the earliest so that the Luftwaffe could hit first. The timing of the attack was not clearly fixed. Then on 9 June the ground forces were again unable to make headway toward Bir-Hashim despite the double early commitment of strong dive-bomber forces, the Panzer Army headquarters finally decided to move up one battalion and some artillery of the 15th Panzer Division. It requested the employment of strong dive-bomber support for the evening in order to launch "one last attack." The air force units flew a particularly successful sortie by 33 dive-bombers at 1900, dropping their loads on enemy battery positions at the main axis of resistance one mile north of Bir-Hashim.

In the evening General von Halden reported to Generaloberst Feuchter: "That to this day 1,630 aircraft have been committed in support of the ground forces during attacks on Bir-Hashim."

On 10 June the Fliegerführer (Air Force Commander) conducted three major attacks on Bir-Hashim and the outpost area immediately in front of the fortres, using a concentration
of forces for this purpose, even though the first attack had to be discontinued because the heavy base and dust obscured the vision so much that the can troops could no longer be identified. The ENM and third sections consisting of altogether twelve waves were extremely effective according to reports of the 44er Army headquarters. Several fires were visible from over 12 miles distance on the ground.

Altogether 12 Junkers 87 and 74 Juanka 88 dropped 189,75 tons of bombs. They were protected by 166 Messerschmitt flying escort missions. During the air combat 1st Lieut. Marieville achieved four more victories, bringing his total of enemy planes shot down to 61.

A reconnaissance report indicated strong concentrations of enemy vehicles near 22-idea and Numen.

In the morning hours of 10 June German aircraft established that the area around Air-Racksdale was in German hands. For this reason targets northeast of 22-idea were attacked for the first time at 1245 hours. The Air Force Commander assembled all his forces by 1245. The main effort of the attack was directed against the area between 22-idea and Numen.

Excerpts from the diary of an Englishman captured at Air-
Racksdale night of interest, because they describe the devastating effect of the continuous air attacks very graphically. 169

169
Van Wellen Diary, pp. 639, Karlsruhe Document Collection, Appendix 29.
The British Air Force first placed its main effort on supporting and supplying Bir-Hakeim. Cunningham's fighters decided according to their commander's own words to adopt the Free French and their Fortresses. On 1 June the British fighters flew therefore over than 100 sorties around such some positions of the 9th Squadron armed 9 Dornier at a loss of 5 British aircraft. South of the fortress none 30 German vehicles were put out of commission.

During the following days the attacks on German transport columns and air-bases were repeated successfully; all that happened within view of the French who sent Cunningham a radio message saying: "Well done, thanks for the Royal Air Force!"

He immediately replied: "Thank you for the sport, you have done well, too."

But after 2 June the indecisive fighting in the El-Ajdabia area required the commitment of all available forces.

On 3 June, when it had become evident that General had made up his mind to eliminate Bir-Hakeim, whatever the sacrifice might be, the bulk of the Western Desert Group was moved back to the support of the Free French.

The situation of the Fortress batteries had became worse desperate than ever because the 53th Light Division had begun to intervene. The fortress was subjected to incessant attacks, launched by waves of infantry and armor, supported by strong
artillery and a steadily growing number of air force units. Despite constant combat with British fighters and victories achieved by the 6th Squadron, equipped with Hurricane II D—the so-called tank hunters—with 40-mm. guns, the German pressure grew. On 9 June overwhelming artillery fire was directed at the fortress.

The dropping of rations and water came from the air did not replace the normal resupply on the ground or the support of ground relief forces.

On 10 June the Hurricanes and the first Spitfire squadron that appeared in the desert saved the garrison from being overwhelmed by the German assault forces, but two subsequent threats reached their objective. During the night of 10-11 June some 4,000 men escaped on 11 June, protected by British fighter aircraft.

The unexpectedly heavy and extended resistance of the French at Mird-Sheba as well as the defense put up by the British armor near Knighthbridge were both actively supported by the Royal Air Force. They completely upset the schedule for the execution of their offensive. 170

After the fall of Mird-Sheba, the 13th Panzer Division

and the 90th Light Division as well as the 34 and 334 Reconnaissance Battalions, led by Rasoul, reached the area east and southwest of El-Aden on the 23rd evening of 21 June.

To counter this danger, Ritchie moved the British 74th Panzer Brigade into the area east of Knightbridge. On 22 June these British armored units were scattered after a severe fight, and El-Aden was occupied by the 90th Light Division. In the main defensive position of the El-Aden musta, at El-Cuhaim, the Indian 29th Brigade continued to offer stout resistance, being actively supported by British bombers.

Also on 22 June a combat group of the 13th Panzer Division had jumped off toward the east so that the British forces were now being confined to an ever smaller area and squeezed by the two German armored divisions. During the course of 22 June Ritchie moved the 33rd Army Armored Brigade from the Basala position into this narrow strip.

On 23 June the 13th Panzer Division jumped up the elevations toward the west, while the Italian XIX Motorized Corps pushed the British into the area north of Frigh Capano. During the evening hours, after the sand storm had subsided somewhat, the 13th Panzer Division resumed its forward thrust and advanced toward the east.

On 23 June the British had been forced to abandon also
Knightbridge, one of their pivots of defence, which they had
defended so strongly.

"On 13 June, when darkness fell, we had lost the major part
of our armoured forces." 172

On 14 June the German Africa Corps was supposed to seize
Agouza and break through to the coast in order to cut off the
British forces holding the Gemala position. British withdrawal
movements along the Via Balbo were already under way. The Italian
XV Corps (motorized) was to protect the flank, the 90th Light
division was to advance eastward in order to create a favorable
situation for capturing the advance positions around the fortress
of Tobruk.

On the afternoon the German armoured divisions moved north-
ward. Extensive speed was indicated since the British forces were
streaming back in thousands of vehicles toward the east. By the
evening the Germans had taken the high ground east of Agouza, thus
opening the access to the Via Balbo for all practical purposes.

During the hours of darkness elements of the British 50th
Division succeeded in breaking out across positions held by the
Italian Corps; they moved southward. At the same time the South
African 1st Division withdrew via Tobruk. Once again the 1st
Armored Division had suffered heavy losses during the defense of Agouza;
with its remnants withdrawing to the east, with the annihilation
of his armoured units. Ritchie had been deprived of his only chance

172 "General Young, BIBA, p. 186."
to intervene actively in the further fighting in the Marmarica area.

On the morning of 15 June the 21st Panzer Division was moved from the area around Tarawa and, together with the 90th Light Division and one reconnaissance battalion, it was committed for an eastward thrust via El-Aoden. That same evening these forces captured the strong point Natirma near El-Aoden. Despite heavy bombing attacks by the Royal Air Force the division reached al-Merengh, where its advance was brought to a halt by strong defensive fire. The bulk of the British Eighth Army had succeeded in withdrawing to the border area between Libya and Egypt.

The main defensive positions of the El-Aoden complex REM were not captured until the morning of 17 June, when the 90th Light Division took them by assault. In the course of the preceding night elements of the Indian 39th Brigade had broken out of the ring of encirclement. The previous day the 21st Panzer Division had taken the strongly defended fortresses El-Duda and Falhameh. The entire German Africa Corps and the Ariete Armored Division now launched a pursuit toward Gambut and the area to the south of it. There were situated the airfields of the British Air Force, which had to be neutralized in order to prevent interference from the air during the ground assault of Tobruk. The Tobruk and Gambut areas were capped up by 18 June. Among the supplies found in that area were artillery ammunition dumps with stacks of shells dating back to November 1941, which were now put to use. The essential
motions for closing the ring of coi1lement around the fortress from the west had been carried out simultaneously. The command post of the Panzer Army headquarters was moved to the strong point El-\nHattan, which had previously served the same purpose for the head-
quarters of the British XXX Corps.

As early as on the afternoon of 11 June the German Africa
Corps marched to its assembly areas for the attack, while the 90th
Light Division moved eastward in order to deceive the enemy with
regard to the plans of the Panzer Army. Apart from that, the 90th
Light Division was also to capture the British supply facilities
between Tobruk and Bardia.

The Italian Favia Division and the Littorio Armored Division,
were
the first elements of which XXX, just arriving, were to cover the
west and south flanks of the attack force.

The Luftwaffe XXI finally had able to concentrate its main
effort on the El-Ayen -- Acreen area after Air-Bechib had been
captured. The overall reconnaissance results of 12 June indicated
that the enemy evaded the German attacks by withdrawing to the
northwest and northwest.

For this reason, the Luftwaffe launched bomber and twin-
engine fighter attacks on the enemy lines of communication, mainly
in the Acreen area, from the early hours of dawn. The Army had
not communicated its plans to the Luftwaffe until noon of 13 June.
so that the Air Force Commander was under the impression that the
Army requests for air support were not based on concepts of joint
formation of main effort. These requests pertained to constant
strong fighter protection; dive-bomber sorties at short notice
against specific targets, without indicating the plans of the
German ground forces; and reconnaissance missions, the execution
of which was hardly possible because of the shortage of fighter
aircraft. These exaggerated requests were complied with
independently by the Air Force Commander within the availability
of material and according to the situation in the air.

During the midday hours the 50th Night Division was given
air support against enemy attacks in the area northeast of El-Ahmi.
In accordance with the wishes expressed by the Waffen Army head-
quarters, the point of main air effort was shifted to the Arabian
area.

After having given repeated information on the situation and
the definite plans of the Army, the Luftwaffe headquarters received
news that the German Air Division would launch an attack on the
elevated terrain seven miles southwest of Aspera on 14 June,

after dive-bombers had flown their first sortie against this
target on 14 June, further attacks had to be diverted to a convoy
of 30 ships outside Tobruk.

A major British effort to resupply Tobruk also forced the
Luftwaffe commander to shift his main effort to air-naval operations.
Outside the port of Tobruk Luftwaffe aircraft sank a
freighter of 8,000 ton capacity and a 500-ton escort vessel,
which apparently belonged to a part of the convoy that had been
diverted. Three additional waves of dive-bomber fly attacks
against the convoy proper during the course of the afternoon.

All other still available forces launched continuous daytime
attacks on the withdrawal movements and truck concentrations
along the Sissila front, with fighter and fighter-bomber air-
craft performing particularly well during low-level attacks.
Altogether 390 aircraft dropped 81,3 tons of bombs. The major
naval operation planned by the British was greatly hampered
by the German successes of 14 June. The eastern elements of the
British naval force remained over night in the waters between
Africa and Crete, and on 15 June it was once again attacked
by three distinctive waves of German aircraft.

In an effort to support the Panzer Army around Tobruk
and at Sissila, Luftwaffe units attacked concentrations of
British tanks along the Via Balbia and some 10 miles southeast
of Tobruk, achieving obvious success.

The 3d Group of the 53d Fighter Wing shot down
10 Beaufighters and 1 four-engine flying boat of the type
Consolidated 291; these aircraft had been in transit from
Martuba to Khoms. During a RAF fighter sweep above the
Panzer Army near El-Adem, the R.A.F. lost six Coltis aircraft.
with Lt Ir, Marseille shooting down 4 of them to bring the
total number of his victories to 91. Altogether 209 aircraft
participated in these actions, dropping 51 tons of bombs. An
advance detachment moved out on 16 June in order to relocate
the fighter aircraft to Ramla. The possibility of displacing
one fighter squadron with minimum ground personnel to the El-
Aden airfield is taken into consideration for 17 June.

The Air Force Commander's unite sank 1 cruiser, 1 escort vessel,
and 2 commercial ships on 15 June; they had formed part of the
convoy moving afloat. The battleship of 10,000-ton
displacement was observed in a sinking condition, with its
hull open. The freighters with 10,000-ton capacity were
so severely damaged and burned so fiercely that it was
assumed that they were lost by the British. Moreover, one
cruiser was damaged, one ship firing antiaircraft guns of
various calibers -- apparently a destroyer -- was set on
fire, and one additional freighter was damaged.

Both British convoys were destroyed on 14 and 15 June,
with only two freighters reaching Malta during the last night.

After 16 June the Luftwaffe in North Africa could once
again give its full support to the Panzer Army. That day
British trucks concentration were hit by 13,2 tons of bombs.
German fighters prevented further air attacks on the 21st Panzer
Division near Sidi-Benagh and shot down 10 aircraft. Fighter-
...nibbers attacked trucks within the Tobruk perimeter and the British fighter airfields near Gambut, hitting two British
MX planes that were just taking off.

Reconnaissance reports indicated truck traffic toward the east and some 200 trucks accompanied by about 20 tanks in the El-Dobi area. Some 198 aircraft flew north.

On 17 June the heavy attacks of British aircraft on the 21st Panzer Division continued; all German fighter units were employed in free strafes; they shot down 12 British aircraft, with Lt. J. H. Marselle obtaining his 101st victory.

On the Gambut airfield that had just been occupied by the Luftwaffe, the 27th Fighter Wing was attacked by low-level aircraft around 1900, which led to a loss of seven aircraft.

The forward displacement of fighters to El-Dibi that had been ordered by the Supreme Commander South (Gen. Haig) had to be cancelled because artillery fire from Tobruk started soon after the first planes began to land. On 18 and 19 June the Air Force Commander had detailed conferences with General Kessel concerning the Luftwaffe support during the assault of Tobruk.

1. The following basic principles for issuing orders were established:
   a. The ground forces wanted earliest air support. The 3d Dive-Bomber Wing will make tests whether bombs can be dropped as early as 0300.

   b. The attack sectors for the 3d Dive-Bomber Wing are determined.
c. Italian units were to be committed during the following
hours and one-half.

d. Early assembly of one wave of fighter escorts to attack
targets upon request of the F année Army. Reporting according
to lines of attack methods, transfer to dive-bomber grid squares.

e. Immediately afterward continuous preparation of individual
waves of dive-bombers and Italian C.S. 42’s.

f. Second wave of Junkers 88 about 2 hours and 40 minutes
after the first bombs were dropped over the target area, i.e.
cross roads -- flak batteries and positions at the airfield.

g. Commitment of Italian Cant 5 against flak positions at the
airfield end post.

h. To mark the right and left flanks of the main points of
penetration, the artillery commander was to fire smoke shells
when enemy aircraft approached.

i. For pinpoint target attacks, directional fire was promised to
facilitate the finding of the target.

j. The ground forces were to continually make themselves
identifiable by blue smoke signals that were to be used both
before and during the attack.

k. Two hours after the start of the attack reconnaissance
flights were to be begun and continued along the right flank
from K-Oboi to Gambut. A weather detachment was to move out
on 19 June.
6. General Wavell considered it feasible to displace forward
some air force supplies to Sidi-Bexels, but without occupying
the airfield. It was questionable whether the 9th Light
Division could stay there.

The Luftwaffe unit commanders were orally briefed on the
afternoon of 25 June on the basis of this conference, and then
the written orders were issued.

The draft of the operations order was preserved and has
been attached as Appendix 50; the grid-map table is missing.

On 26 June, also, the intelligence officer at Headquarters,
Air Force Commander, Africa, listed the number of enemy squadrons
and aircraft.

In the frontline and rear areas as far as Khebara there were:
48 squadrons with 475 aircraft; and

In the Nile area: 19 squadrons with 275 aircraft, for a total of:
38 squadrons with 900 aircraft that were ready for take-off.

In addition, it was assumed that the British had some 200 aircraft
in the Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamian areas.

During the last few days only six squadrons had been
committed above the combat area, the remaining frontline
squadrons were probably being deployed and shifted.

See Appendix 50.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fine</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930 hrs</td>
<td>3d Bomb Wing</td>
<td>R-59 - R-59</td>
<td>Continuous reconnaissance above targets, every 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>minutes after 6-hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First 1200 Area Command</td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
<td>F-10; L-6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 minutes 3d Bomb Wing</td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
<td>in J, 9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to 20 min</td>
<td>3 Junkers 87</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>34 Group</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alternative target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + 20</td>
<td>26th Tain-</td>
<td>R-60; 9;</td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and 30</td>
<td>engine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Point of main effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>Fighter</td>
<td>c-3, 11</td>
<td>Identified batteries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>3 Weasser-</td>
<td>Same target</td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + 50</td>
<td>Anti-aircraft</td>
<td></td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and 50</td>
<td>(schindte 110)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Point of main effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>3 Weasser-</td>
<td>Same target</td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + 70</td>
<td>Anti-aircraft</td>
<td></td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and 90</td>
<td>(schindte 110)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Point of main effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>60 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Until</td>
<td>Batteries in</td>
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<td>Alternate targets</td>
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<tr>
<td>N + 90</td>
<td>End</td>
<td></td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
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<tr>
<td>minutes</td>
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<td>Point of main effort</td>
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<td>Identified batteries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>3d Dive-</td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + 30</td>
<td>Bomber Squadron</td>
<td>F-10; B-4</td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and 100</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Point of main effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identified batteries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>54 Dive-</td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + 100</td>
<td>Bomber Squadron</td>
<td>F-4; L-3</td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
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<tr>
<td>and 120</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Point of main effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min. (7)</td>
<td>1 Junkers 87</td>
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<td>Identified batteries</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>34 Dive-</td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N + 100</td>
<td>Bomber Squadron</td>
<td>C-9; B-6</td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
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<td>and 120</td>
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<td>Point of main effort</td>
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<td>Between</td>
<td>34 Dive-</td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
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<tr>
<td>N + 120</td>
<td>Bomber Squadron</td>
<td>B-9</td>
<td>around and southeast of road fork R-4;</td>
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<td>and 230</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Point of main effort</td>
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<td>30 minutes</td>
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<td>Identified batteries</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Unit</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Observations</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 100 MM</td>
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<tr>
<td>and 130</td>
<td>and Mass Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minutes</td>
<td>Command</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9 Jumbers 28</td>
<td></td>
<td>Alternate target</td>
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<td>Fort Solare</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Battery positions</td>
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<td>and the area west</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of road fork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 150</td>
<td>First Line</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>and 180</td>
<td>and Mass Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>minutes</td>
<td>Command</td>
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<td>9 Jumbers 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Between 150</td>
<td>First Line</td>
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<tr>
<td>and 170</td>
<td>and Mass Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>minutes</td>
<td>Command</td>
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<td>9 Jumbers 28</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Second Air Fleet forces opposing the British were on 20 June:

a. Air Force Commander Africa had 333 aircraft, with 126 ready for service;
b. II Air Force had 180 aircraft, with 78 ready for service; and
c. II Air Force had 151 aircraft, with 93 ready for service. The total authorized strength was therefore 614 aircraft, of which 397 were ready for service.

The Royal Air Force covered the withdrawal from the Canal position after the fall of Bir-Saheil by hampering the advance of the German armored forces until 14 June in the Aden - Assam area, thus preventing them from breaking through to the coast.

Most of these British aircraft were diverted to protect the convoy that HMS was leaving Alexandria. And growing.

The resupply of Malta had been of grave concern to the British War Cabinet during the past few months." On 20 March the last 3,000 tons of supplies had arrived on the island, and since then Malta had not received any more.

Now, in June, a large-scale effort was made to improve the situation. This time convoys were to be sent out simultaneously from the east and from the west in order to converge on Malta.

To protect these convoys, the British had started air operations well ahead of this, launching their first attacks on airfields and port installations on 20 May, and continuing

* For their composition and organization, see Appendix XI.
** See Page 285.
Annex A4 to Page 258

a. Air Force Commander Africa and Panzer Army Headquarters

on 23 June 1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>40 (actual)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Short Range Reconnaissance

- 4th Squadron (B)/129 (7) at Martuba, equipped with Messerschmitt 109 and 110... 23... 13

### Long Range Reconnaissance

- 2nd Squadron, 114th Long Range Recon. Gr. at Cuma, equipped with Junkers 88... 12... 9

### Fighter Units

- 1st Group, 27th Fighter Wing at Martuba... 1...
- 1st Group, 27th Fighter Wing at Martuba... 29... 10
- 3rd Group, 27th Fighter Wing at Martuba... 28... 14
- 3rd Group, 27th Fighter Wing at Martuba... 21... 12
- 37th Fighter-Bomber Squadron at Cuma... 3... 9
- 27th Fighter Command at Helwan... 3... 9
- 3rd Group, 354th Fighter Wing at Martuba... 36... 18
- 16th Fighter-Bomber Squadron at Martuba... 3... 4

(All equipped with Messerschmitt 109)

### Night Fighter Units

- 1st Group, 44th Night Fighter Wing at Bepha equipped with Junkers 88... 28... 10

### Twin-Engine Support Fighter Units

- 2nd Group, 26th Support Fighter Wing, somewhere in North Africa, equipped with Messerschmitt 110... 47... 16
- 10th Squadron, 26th Support Fighter Wing, somewhere in North Africa, equipped with Messerschmitt 177... 3... 9

### Bomber Units

- 12th Squadron, 1st Luftwaffe Area Command, at Bepha, equipped with Junkers 88... 13... 9

### Dive Bomber Units

- 1st Group, 26th Dive Bomber Wing (Junkers 88) 120 (111) 2... 2
- 1st Group, 26th Dive Bomber Wing (Junkers 88) 50... 16
- 2nd Group, 26th Dive Bomber Wing (Junkers 88) 21... 18
- 10th Group, 354th Dive Bomber Wing (Ju 87) 26... 13

(All stationed at Bepha)

| 333 | 186 |

---

**Composition of Second Air Fleet on 20 June 1942**

1. Situation map of the Luftwaffe High Command indicates an authorized strength of 614 of which 337 were ready for service.

2. Strength Analysis of the Flying Units in the Mediterranean Theater and in Africa (Extracted from Situation Maps in the Field) indicates an authorized strength of 697 of which 337 aircraft were ready for service, both in Kallzone Document Collection.
Annex 4b to Page 288

Il Air Force and Second Air Fleet, Respectively
on 30 June 1942

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-Range Reconnaissance Units</th>
<th>Authorized</th>
<th>Actual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 122 Long-Range Recon. Group at Trapani, equipped with Junkers 88</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Squadron, 122 Long-Range Recon. Group at Catania, equipped with Junkers 88 and Messerschmidt 110</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Second Air Fleet)

| Reconnaissance Group at Trapani, equipped with Junkers 88 | 3 | 7 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fighter Units</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. 293rd Fighter Wing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22nd Group, 334th Fighter Wing</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Both at Cosenza and both equipped with Messerschmidts 109)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fighter Units</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26th Group, 308th Fighter Wing at Catania, equipped with Junkers 88 and Messerschmidt 110</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bomber Units</th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>No. 305th Bomber Group at Catania</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 306th Bomber Group at Catania</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 24th Bomber Group at Catania</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>78</td>
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</table>

*See Footnote No
**4. RAF Troops on 20 June 1942**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aircraft Units</th>
<th>Strength</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>R.A.F. Aircraft Units</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>14th Squadron, 125th Group, stationed at Tarsanga, equipped with Arado 196</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. 120th Group, at Tarsanga, equipped with F.K. 8 (Translation unknown) 126</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Squadron, 126th Group at Tarsanga, equipped with F.K. 8 (777)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Squadron, 126th Group, at Kasella, equipped with Arado 196</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34th Squadron, 126th Group, at Tarsanga, equipped with Arado 196 and Reinko 60</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Footnotes 3a and 3b.
they without let-up every night up to 11 June. The fighter aircraft stationed at Malta had increased to more than 100 Spitfires, which had been moved in by the aircraft carrier "Hedge." Other British aircraft had also been transferred to Malta, and some 60 of the latter were ready for service.

The situation on Malta had nevertheless become extremely serious. "Our rations consisted of one and one-half slices of very bad bread with jam for breakfast, canned meat and one slice of bread for lunch and — except for an extra slice of bread — dinner was the same. There was sugar with every meal, but marmalade was served only every second or third day. Even the drinking water, light, and heating were rationed. All ordinary items were missing, and since the production of coal required coal, none had been brewed for several months..." "We needed hundreds of tons of bombs and ammunition. The island was facing surrender, by mid-August it's personnel and inhabitants would be starved. Unless help arrived, we would all be INDI dead for a long time so that the actual date of surrender was really much sooner." 172

In execution of Operation RAPOOH "six freighters moved into the Mediterranean during the night of 21 June, coming from..."
the Atlantic. They were escorted by the anti-aircraft cruiser "Cairo" and nine destroyers. Admiral Curtis had his command post on the battleship "Malaya"; the aircraft carriers "Eagle" and "Argus", 4 cruisers and 6 destroyers were ready and available to lend support. On 14 June the convoy was attacked at the longitude of Sardinia, with the Germans dropping many bombs. One destroyer was sunk, and the cruiser "Liverpool" was damaged and put out of action. In the evening, when the convoy approached the straits, the heavy ships had to turn about."

"On the next morning — 15 June — two Italian cruisers, several destroyers, and numerous aircraft attacked the convoy south of Sardinia. The enemy naval guns were superior to the British in range, and before the British succeeded in closing the Axis forces — not without losses to them — the destroyer "Melbourne" sunk and another one was severely damaged. The air attacks, however, continued throughout the day; three additional British freighters were sunk. The two remaining ships of the badly-behaved convoy arrived at Malta during the night. The convoy approaching from the east — Operation "HERCULES" — which consisted of 12 vessels, was even less fortunate.

Admiral Vian, who was again in command, had this time a far stronger cruiser and destroyer escort at his disposal.
than when he had won his victorious engagement in April.
However, his naval force included no battleship nor aircraft
 carriers despite the fact that it could be assumed the major
 part of the Italian Navy would be massed against him.
  On 11 June the convoy left, and on 14 June it was
exposed to incessant air attacks north of Crete. That evening
Vian received a radio message that the enemy fleet, including
one battleship of the "Littorio" class, had left Taranto,
apparently with the intention of catching him.

On the other hand, there was justified hope that the
British submarines and the Royal Air Force planes stationed
on Malta and in the Cypriote would hit the Italian fleet
very strongly during its approach toward the convoy. One
Italian cruiser was actually hit and subsequently completely
sunk. But that was not sufficient. The Italians maintained
their counterstrike direction so that a clash with this
overwhelmingly superior force on the morning of 16 June
appeared inevitable. Convoy and escort vessels were forced
to return to Egypt. The cruiser "Barbaria" had meanwhile been
 sunk by a submarine, while 2 destroyers and 3 freighters
had been lost to air attacks. The Royal Air Force also
suffered heavy losses.

"The Italians, however, lost the additional heavy
cruiser and one of their battleships was damaged, but the
eastern access to Malta remained closed, and no other convoy attempted to force its way from that side until November of 1942.

"Thus, despite initial British efforts only 2 and 14 supply ships had reached their destination, and Malta's plight continued unabated."

As 24th has been forced to retreat the bulk of its units to support Operation RHUMBA during 15 and 15 June, after which it shifted its effort once again to the battlefields of the Balkans. The British Eighth Army and succeeded in withdrawing toward the northern and middle line armored forces, however, had suffered heavy losses in the process of withdrawing. The 8.8.P had supported the ground forces during their withdrawal movement with almost aggressive so that now it had become unsuccessful in intercepting the withdrawal. On 19 June, when the British forces within enough by passing Illied, the far-advanced armored units were attacked successfully on several occasions so that they were forced to stop their drive.

The air bases around Malta were not evacuated until the last possible moment, and the ground personnel performed outstandingly during the evacuation. The Germans found no material or supplies that could have been of any use to them.

But the M.A.T.S. was unable to prevent that at Sobrahe some
Ensign forces were controlled by the Axis powers.

Eisenbrey hoped that the threat on Tobruk — a rapid turn-
about nation-launched out of a pursuing movement — would
surprise his adversary. Outside the fortress to the west of
the Egyptian border, there were no sizable British armored
forces.

It was believed that because of the gluten of the
fighting after 21 June, the staffs and combat units had been
unable to plan a systematic defense of Tobruk. The garrison
consisted of the reinforced South African 1st Division, the
Indian 11th brigade, two battalions of the Indian brigade,
a few armored battalions led by the 1/2 Indian Armoured
Brigade headquarters — an army reserve staff — and several
artillery regiments.

To the east and west Tobruk was surrounded by rocky
impassable terrain, which extended southward into a flat
sandy plain. The Italians had fortified the arid, terrain
in an outstanding manner at the time Salto governed the
province. The many fortifications that formed a belt around
Tobruk were sunk into the ground in such a manner that the
attackers could identify them correctly only from the air.
The fortifications consisted of an underground labyrinth
that led to antitank and machine gun positions.

Every single platform was protected by an antitankwitch

and barred wire entanglements, behind the outer belt of fortifications, which in most instances was constituted by several concentric lines, there were strong artillery positions, field positions, and several individual fortresses. Most of these fortifications were secured by belts of mine fields of great depth.

The Italian XIII Corps, reinforced by some tanks, was designated to carry out the decisive attack in the southwest area of the fortress belt. The force that was to conduct the decisive assault consisted of the German Africa corps and the Italian XIII Corps. The penetration areas in the southwest were to be nuanced by the entire combined German-Italian air force.

As soon as the infantry had overcome the line of fortifications, the German Africa Corps was to push ahead across the road fork toward the fort area and open the exit. Following the German Africa Corps, the Italian XIII Corps was to seize the fortified positions and thrust toward the Makin Sectari into the rear of the South African force.

Arriving at 0520 on 20 June, several hundred fighter aircraft began to hammer at the points that were to be penetrated in the southeast part of the fortress. Vastorous columns of dust rose into the air, carrying with them obstacles and weapons of the defenders, with little effect.

- 294 -
tore into the barbed wire entanglements. Firstly after the
Luftwaffe assault, the infantry units of the German Africa
Corps, the 10th Rifle Brigade, and the Italian 11 Corps began
their advance. During the preceding night some gaps had already
been cut across the minefields so that the infantry was able
to penetrate the first British positions within two hours
after the air attacks; the pillbox after another was taken
in bitter close combat actions. At 0800 the engineers bridged
antitank
the main ditch, the path was thus opened for an advance of the
armored units.

By about noon the German Africa Corps reached the road
and, after inflicting heavy losses in the British
forces, the 10th Rifle Brigade continued to
fierce British attacks attempted to leave the port; German
artillery and antiaircraft guns sank five of these ships.

By the evening, Fort Reben Pillarink offered to surrender.

While the Axis forces took Fortress Sharra by assault. At the
hour of darkness about two-thirds of the fortress terrain were
in German hands, the city and port had been taken by the
German Corps already in the afternoon.

At 0840 on 21 June General Kopp, the commander of the
South African 2nd Division and officer in charge of Tobruk,
surrendered the fortress to General Morsel. His command post
had been destroyed and he had lost contact with his troops.

He was thus unable to prevent the defeat.
More than 63,000 prisoners and valuable supplies were

captured by the Germans, more than 1,500 tanks and about 500

guns were destroyed or captured by them. In recognition of his

outstanding performance, Mussal was appointed Field Marshal.

The Luftwaffe was able to score direct hits on practically

all pillboxes in the planned target area, when it started the
day off early in the morning of 20 June. Thus, the ground forces

attack was given the necessary impetus. The continuous bom-

bardment of the batteries that had been well carried by the

ground forces facilitated the quick penetration of the 87km

zone of resistance and influenced the capture of the fortress

decisively.

Since no British fighters appeared over the battlefield,

the further advance of the Luftwaffe took place without

incident. The total number of sorties flown was 935, with

the Italians flying an additional 177.

But the assault of the fortress had after all required

an extreme effort of all concerned, since the very weeks of

very heavy fighting against enemy forces that were numerically

superior and had more material had left their traces on the

axis troops.

Even so Mussal believed that he should ask another extreme

effort from his victorious units by making them take up the

pursuit of the defeated British Eighth Army.

The enormous booty of ammunition, POW, rations, and
material of all types guaranteed in his opinion the flow of
supplies for the continuation of the offensive.

He therefore arrived at the conclusion that the weakness
of the British resulting from their defeat at Tobruk ought to
be used for penetrating as far as possible into Egypt.

He had repeatedly been told in Rome that the flow of
supplies to North Africa could not be guaranteed in sufficient
quantities as long as the ports of Tobruk and Marsa-Matruh
were still in Axis hands. Because of the fundamental change
in the over-all situation, he believed that he could dispense
with the capture of Malta.

In Speidel's opinion the British Eighth Army was extremely
weak at this point. Two newly brought up infantry divisions
formed the main force of resistance. The armored units that
had been moved in from Egyptian rear areas in extreme haste
could not possibly have any real combat strength. For these
reasons he hoped to catch up with the Eighth Army during its
withdrawal and force it to give battle. Once the remaining
element of the British forces that had escaped after the
Barbarossa fighting were destroyed - this seemed quite
feasible - the British would be unable to mobilize any
additional forces within the Egyptian theater. Without
real
any ENS resistance, the German Panzer Army could safely
advance toward Alexandria and Suez Canal, suffering no
Further delays, upon Rommel's request, the Duce lifted the limitation on the operational freedom of action of the Panzer Army, and on 25 June the Axis units began another eastward advance.

The British Eighth Army had already evacuated the border territory with the intention of placing positions around the fortress Marsa Matrum.

Under these circumstances, extreme speed was essential.

Unfortunately, the German Africa Corps suffered from a serious shortage of fuel during the day of 25 June so that the advance was stalled for several hours.

The Littorio Armored Division was also delayed for many hours so that it could not continue the pursuit. The Italian XX Corps consisted of altogether 14 tanks, 30 guns, and 2,000 infantrymen.

The Royal Air Force inflicted heavy losses upon the pursuing German-Italian forces during those days at a time when the Luftwaffe was still regrouping its forces and reorganizing so that it was incapable of providing fighter protection.

The German Africa Corps with its remaining 30 tanks was the principal target of the British bombers and low-level attack planes. The air attacks continued through the night. The 200 multi-engine aircraft and 350 single-engine planes available to the Royal Air Force in western Egypt.
Flow one sortie after another.

Despite all handicap the Panzer Army succeeded in approaching the Marsa-Watruh area within six miles distance on 26 June. The British had dug in along the line Bir-Shala – Marsa-Watruh, but during the evening before the 90th Light Division penetrated further north and cut off the coastal road to the east and the west.

Marsa-Watruh had been fortified in a manner similar to Tobruk, but the fortifications were by far less cleverly constructed than in the latter fortress. Within the entire area there were probably some 250,000 men. In Marsa-Watruh were the bulk of the New Zealand and Indian 10th Divisions, as well as elements of the British 9th and Indian 5th Divisions.

On 27 June the German Afrika Corps, commanded by General Rommel, together with the Ariete Armored Division attacked the British armored forces anchored in the area north of Bir Shala. The fight lasted until late in the evening, whereupon 18 destroyed American tanks were scattered over the field of battle.

During the night and on the early morning of 28 June major elements of the motorized garrison of Marsa-Watruh succeeded in escaping through gaps in the ring of encirclement.

In the afternoon, at about 1730, the 90th Light Division,
the 550th Reconnaissance Battalion, Combat Flight Field, and the elements of the Italian X and XII Corps which had
had been moved up by truck, assembled for the attack and
jumped off. The tough struggle lasted through the night
but by early morning on 29 June Marsamukh was in
German hands. In addition to large supply dumps the
Germans captured military equipment of all types,
altogether enough to equip one division. Some 40 tanks
had been disabled within the fortress area, and 6,000
British soldiers were taken prisoners.

The last fortress with prepared fort installations
along the west-egyptian coast had fallen into Axis hands.
Once again the British had suffered heavy losses, but
they had nevertheless succeeded in withdrawing major
elements of their infantry forces into the El-Alamein posit-
ion, which had already been occupied by some fresh troops
and the improvement of which had been under way for some time
with all possible effort. The Germans planned to reach the
El-Alamein position before it had been completed and seize
it before the withdrawing Eighth Army had had time to establish
its defenses along the fortifications. This haste was the
day: if it was captured, the way to the Nile delta would
be open.

On 29 June at dusk the Germans reached the area about
6 miles east of El-Alamein. To the east the British were
Fighter Wing was moved forward to Gambut, the Luftwaffe commander at the Panzer Army headquarters with the 4.(M)/12 squadron went to Area, and the 3d Dive-Bomber Wing to Bir-Bu-Mania. Attacks against the enemy rear area communications were handicapped by heavy accumulations of sand (dust?) at the new airfields.

It turned out that the British fighters in the Sidi-Barrani area were still unable to count on ground station support which would have enabled them to obtain information and control data from these ground installations.

On 24 June the liaison officer at the Panzer Army headquarters reported that that the area south of Sidi-Barrani had been reached. The objective of that day was the area 30 miles southeast of Sidi-Barrani.

According to reports of the Panzer Army headquarters some individual fighter-bomber attacks achieved good and lasting effects. After noon all flying activities had to be stopped because of sand storms.

The reconnaissance information showed that the enemy continued to withdraw to the Mersa-Matruh area and farther to the east.

While his airfields were still being successfully attacked Luftwaffe Area by First XXX Command aircraft in the afternoon, the British had evacuated these fields by the evening.

On 25 June the fighter aircraft concentrated their main effort
blowing up their supply dumps. The point of the 15th Panzer
Division had already advanced beyond El-Daba. The German Africa
Corps captured enormous booty, including one 150-mm. battery.
On 20 June the fighter bombers and low-level aircraft attacked
once again the German-Italian forces. The German attack, scheduled
for 20 June against the El-Alamein position, had to be postponed.
The German units earmarked for this offensive had been delayed
both by the withdrawing British forces and by unexpectedly
difficult terrain.

The Air Force Commander attacked on 21 June (sic) the British
elements withdrawing eastward and covered the southern flank
in the El-Alamein area by launching other sweeps.

He reported that it seemed as if the opponent would or could
not execute his plan to hold out along the Mchedala - Sollum
line. Because of the unexpectedly swift fall of Tobruk, he
apparently did not have sufficient time to reorganize his badly
damaged units in this position and to establish a defensive
line by reforming them. The total number of troops counted
around Sollum and further eastward — the Air Force Commander
continued — indicated that after all some very sizable forces
had escaped eastward. There were indications that the British
intended to continue their withdrawal to the east.

The Germans reorganized their air forces during the
22 and 23 June by deploying some of the units. The 27th
on protecting the air space above the Front Army, which had to suffer from heavy and frequent low-level and bombing attacks by British aircraft approaching from the Marsa-Matruh area. Altogether 19 British aircraft were shot down.

On 26 June the first Luftwaffe Area Command aircraft attacked supply dumps south of Marsa-Matruh, while the 36 dive-bomber wing interfered with enemy movements southeast of Marsa-Matruh. Only 23 enemy aircraft were shot down.

British fighter-bombers inflicted serious personnel and material damage on enemy attacks on Elimmat, which came as a complete surprise and was not countered by anti-aircraft fire. On the morning of 26 June a conference took place at Kessel's headquarters, which was attended by Galliéra and Medico; they conveyed the Fiche's approval for continuing the offensive. The Commander Supreme was willing to provide 300 trucks in order to displace forward the essential Luftwaffe ground personnel and supply services.

On 27 June fighter sweeps continued. The advance of the 4th Light Division south of Marsa-Matruh gained ground. Dive-bomber attacks along the right flank could no longer provide the necessary support for lack of proper target data. One dive-bomber group was to be moved forward by 28 June. General van Hahn had to make a forced landing; the Linien aircraft (He 111H) having been destroyed on the ground by enemy fighters, evading down three times.
On 26 June the Luftwaffe flew free sweeps above the Tunisian Army as well as one joint sortie with Italian units against enemy assembly and railheads in and around El Angela. These operations were based on reconnaissance information provided by German aircraft. Upon requests received from the Tunisian Army Headquarters, strong enemy concentrations southeast of El Angela were attacked at 1230. This attack had been delayed for lack of a key switch line and because the radio communications arrived late. The attack was finally carried out on the basis of reconnaissance information obtained by Luftwaffe means, the veracity of which was beyond doubt.

On 29 June El Angela fell, and the Germans captured tremendous booty despite the heavy damage previously inflicted by the Luftwaffe in the port area and despite the planned demolitions carried out by the British.

The free sweeps encountered only light enemy opposition.

The British fighters had been displaced to the rear to the Bussaq (7) area.

The army continues its eastward drive with the German Africa Corps jumping off at 1600 from the area southeast of Tuba toward El Angela and with the Italian XLI Motorized Corps advancing to the right. The Littorio Armored Division was north of the German Africa Corps, while the motorized elements of the X and XLI Italian Corps moved via El-Maha to the coast.

After having established contact, the Tunisian Army head-
quarters indicated that it plans to launch a deceptive attack against the south portion of the El-Alamein position on 30 June; this was to be followed by a penetration in the center, the northern front was to be collapsed by a thrust to the north-east. For this purpose the Luftwaffe was to provide strong support in the south and subsequently in the center. The instruction wing was to provide air force commanders for this purpose. The operations officer of the Panzer Army headquarders was to decide whether the attack can be launched as soon.

The displacement of the Luftwaffe units took place on 30 June into the area around and west of Falu. The command post was established west of the Panzer Army headquarters north of Falu.

In 30 June the Panzer Army was advancing eastward in the direction of the defensive position extending southward from El-Alamein; the elements of the Italian X and XII Corps which lacked mobility were left to mop up the area of Monastir. At 0300 on 1 July the Panzer Army was assembling for the attack.

The displacement of the Luftwaffe units into the Falu area on 30 June was delayed by sand storms so that the intended evening assault of the El-Alamein position could no longer be staged.

The Air Force Commander took off in a liaison plane (Morane) to look for the Panzer Army headquarters; in the area south of Falu he found elements of the Luftwaffe, which
had encountered American tanks. The Italian armored forces were so badly shaken up that their mobility was strictly limited.

There followed a conference at El-Alefa at Field Marshal Rommel's headquarters; he indicated that he planned to launch his attack at 0300 on 1 July and discussed the possibilities of air support.

There are no statistics on German air victories and losses for the units subordinate to the Air Force Commander Africa until 30 June. The total losses of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean theater for the months of May and June amounted to 248 aircraft, most of which were fighters and bombers; in addition, 39 aircraft were damaged.

The German capture of Tobruk gave the Allied forces a terrific shock, and Rommel immediately continued his advance toward Egypt, the British Navy left Alexandria and all the personnel rear area installations became greatly excited.

The British Air Force had to remain inactive during the siege of Tobruk because its fighters had previously been forced to evacuate Cyrenaica so that they were incapable of intervening from their distant airfields in the east.

The British reaction in the air was all the more violent after 23 June, when their aircraft attacked the Axis troops by day and night during their advance toward El-Alamein.

See Footnote 126.
extraordinary effect produced by these air attacks can be gathered from the entries in the war diary of the German Africa Corps made during this period. They mentioned repeatedly that the German air force units were nowhere to be seen and complained bitterly about this fact. The Luftwaffe had been badly hurt by attacks on Gebel, Alison, and Sidi-Sarrani, which had taken place during critical moments of the pursuit.

The Wellington aircraft of the 202nd Group flew 40 to 70 sorties per night, supported by Albacores of the 81st and 82nd Scouting Squadrons, which dropped flare bombs and hit their targets only too well.

When the withdrawal movements continued and Cunningham's units returned to their former main bases, their effectiveness increased even more. The R.A.F. had given perfect cover to the Eighth Army during its retreat from the Gebel position. The surprise was all the greater that the Luftwaffe had let the withdrawing British forces escape almost unscathed, even after the fall of Tobruk.

"For several days in a row the coastal road offered the extraordinary spectacle of a continuous line of vehicles that moved closely behind one another and extended over many miles. It was the perfect example of a defeated army. Helplessly driven into one clear area it withdrew along one single narrow road. This was the kind of situation of which some
enthusiastic young bomber squadron commander might dream, with a certain amount of logical thinking on the part of the dive-bombers and fighters, the British columns would have been driven into bundles of utter confusion."

The reason for this failure of the Luftwaffe was assumed to have been caused by two different facts. First, a great number of the German squadrons were incapable of keeping up with Rommel's advance, although he had asked for complete air cover for his troops and had expected to constantly receive it, he had ignored the fact that air force personnel, just like the infantry, had to be well equipped with trucks in order to advance rapidly.

"Furthermore, the Luftwaffe had not developed the art of adjusting to any situation without delay to such a high degree as the Western Desert Group," 175

These accusations are serious, but they can be answered, if one thoroughly examines the course of events. It was quite true that the German air force squadrons were very insufficiently equipped with trucks. This was the great handicap under which they operated when compared with the very fully equipped and motorized British

squadrons (author's parenthetical note: streamlined squadrons). Furthermore, thanks to the activities of Tedder, Dawsen, and the efforts of several others, the R.A.F. had fully adopted the doctrine of mobile warfare.

Another factor was that it was easier to "adjust to the prevailing situation without delay" if a withdrawal quickly leads into friendly territory — such as in this instance — where the flying units are supported by large-scale, well-organized ground organizations.

In advancing into enemy territory, the pursuer must move up his entire ground organization and needs time to repair the airfields the enemy has evacuated so that they are once again in condition for take-offs.

The friendly air force was therefore not be so readily available to make contact with the enemy. unique

But why was the opportunity missed by which the withdrawal of the defeated British Eighth Army was transformed into a catastrophic rout by massed sorties of the Luftwaffe?

The diary of the other side: an OTTENFELD mutuel leader of the Luftwaffe forces, General von Saldan, mentions several attacks on the retreating British forces in a number of entries, but it fails to refer to a specific transfer of the main effort to the route of withdrawal.

For instance on pp. 52, 55, 80, 59, 69, 60, and 89.
played to Sicily, while others were preparing to take similar action."

"No logistical planning for an advance into Egypt had been under consideration, and the means of transportation for such an operation were also not available." 176

When the Armed Forces High Command and the Comando Supreme cancelled the seizure of Malta after the capture of Tobruk, this unexpected switch in the main effort of the strategic air operations presented an apparently insoluble problem.

Orders issued on the basis of strategic plans have such far-reaching implications that they cannot simply be changed without notice like field orders (Gra: The German term "Gattelbefehle" -- orders issued from the saddle -- has the connotation of improvisation.)

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176

Luftkrieg in Afrika (Air Situation in Africa), p. 12. Survey based on a study prepared by a number of officers after KREUZ World War II. (The information pertaining to the air situation was contributed by General der Flieger (Lt. Gen.) Seidenmann, for the period 8 April 42 - July 42. Karlsruhe Document Collection.)
Malta or Cairo, the Cause of the Downfall. The Background.
Field Marshal Kesselring at Field Marshal Rommel's Command
Post on 22 June 1942. The Conference of the Marshals" on
The British Forces High Command's Decisiveness and Their Brave
Consequences.

Soon after his arrival in Italy, Field Marshal Kessel-
ring had clearly realized that the conquest of Malta was
essential for securing the sea traffic lanes. The fate of
the German-Italian forces in Africa was entirely dependent
upon the flow of supply. The past year had brought out this
fact quite clearly.

In February 1942 Field Marshal Kesselring convinced Hitler,
also, of the absolute necessity to seize Malta. *

Rommel was of the same opinion; in fact, he had offered
to conduct the operation in person. **

General K.H. (General, Retired) Westphal, who was his
operations officer at that time, reported on this subject
as follows:

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* See Footnote 195
** See Footnote No. 136.
"After the fighting in the western Marmaria area had come to a conclusion, Rommel flew to the Armed Forces High Command headquarters in East Prussia in order to report and to receive instructions on the conduct of operations during the year 1942."

"He specially emphasized the urgency of seizing Malta, which he considered as a prerequisite for all further operations in the central Mediterranean. But he was not given any clear-cut directives. Mussolini, also, evaded the issue. But Rommel did not want to be stalled. In April 1942 he submitted a very detailed evaluation of the situation to the Armed Forces High Command and the Comando Supremo. This evaluation culminated in the assumption that the British -- contrary to Italian hopes -- would launch a new offensive with strong forces despite the hot temperatures that would reign at that time.

For this reason it would be necessary to anticipate once again their next move and capture Tobruk by June, at the latest.

The conquest of Malta was again a matter of life and death for the German-Italian forces in the desert, since the existing threat to the flow of supply across the sea could be reduced to bearable proportions only if this enemy supply point was eliminated."

"It was desirable that the seizure of Malta be so timed that it would precede the attack on Tobruk. If the preparations
for a joint naval and air assault on the island could not
be completed within a short time, it would be necessary to
conduct the thrust on Tobruk before the other operation. In
any event, however, would it be necessary to conduct the
seizure of Malta immediately afterward.

"It developed, however, that the preparations for the
Malta operation could not be completed before June, for
this reason the attack on Tobruk was to take place before
the assault on Malta. If, subsequent to the conquest of
Tobruk, the Axis forces reached the Libyan-Egyptian
border, the Luftwaffe units, which could effectively support
only one operation at a time, would have to be diverted
to the operation directed against Malta."

"The start of the attack of Panzer Army Africa was
planned for 26 May 1942." 177

also
The Commando Supreme had finally come to the decision
that Malta would have to be seized.

"If Malta was taken from the British, the central
Mediterranean would no longer be dominated by Royal Air
Force units and the British would lose one of the pivots
of their support point system."

"On 21 April 1942 the Armed Forces High Command finally

177
Siegfried Wendtke, Erwin Rommel (North Africa, the Fateful), p. 195.
Europa-Contact Verlag C.M.B.N., 1994, Neuffingen/Herrenberg.
agreed to support the Italian preparations for the seizure of Malta. Two German General Staff officers joined the staff planning the capture of Malta, which was commanded by General Gandin."

"The planning for the summer 1942 was the main topic discussed during the Duce's visit to the Oberalpbach (Hitler's Alpine retreat near Berchtesgaden) on 29 and 30 April."

"Cavallero advocated that the conquest of Malta be considered as the most important requirement for the further conduct of military operations in North Africa. Hauselring, who took part in the conference, was of the opinion — which he based on information from Rommel — that before the Malta operation — given the code name HERCULES — the Panzer Army would have to defeat the British so that the latter would not be capable of launching an attack of their own to relieve Malta. The Luftwaffe forces were numerically too weak to provide simultaneous support in several theaters of war. Since Keitel and Jodl agreed with this theory, Cavallero finally consented to let the Panzer Army first attack at the end of May and capture Tobruk, if possible. The army would then, however, have to stop at the Egyptian border so that by full moon in July at the latest Operation HERCULES could be carried out by the Axis. This agreement
was approved by Hitler and Mussolini."

"After returning from this conference, I accompanied
Cavallero to Africa to discuss the Chamberlain agreement
with concerning the campaign plans with Bistico and
Rommel."

"The directive from the Commando Supreme specified
that, after the capture of Tobruk, the Libyan-Egyptian
border along the line Sidi-Gar — Halfaya — Sollum was
not to be passed by the bulk of the Panzer Army. Some of
the air force units and means of naval transportation
were then to be withdrawn and diverted to Operation
HERCULES." 178

Field Marshal Kesselring also confirmed the information
given by Generals Westphal and Hintelen:

"Commander-in-Chief South and Panzer Army Africa had
agreed in the spring 1942 that the next objectives for
operations in the Mediterranean theater would be Malta and
Tobruk. Tobruk without Malta would not suffice. The naval
route Athens — Crete and Crete — Tobruk were within reach
of naval and air forces operating from British-Egyptian
support points. Axis convoys operating along these routes
had to be strongly protected, which in turn overtaxed the
available forces that were needed to protect convoys out.

3, 4, 5, and pp. 6-8). Karlsruhe Document Collection.
of Italy. Another factor was that the flow of supply via
Greece suffered from handicaps that could never really be
overcome because of the demands made by the Russian campaign.
There was only one point on which Rommel and I differed: the
sequence of operations."

"It was my task to secure the naval routes of communication
and the ports of discharge. For this reason, I suggested
to Hitler that Malta be seized first, to be followed by the
cross-country assault of Tobruk. Even though Hitler had
agreed to follow this schedule, I supported later -- at
the end of April -- Von Berchtoldaen Rommel's plan to carry
out the ground attack first by jumping off from the El-Camara
position. I was of a tactician on the ground to under-
stand Rommel's plan. Furthermore, the attack preparations
against Malta had not sufficiently advanced to permit the
start of the operation without any delay, I thought that
this support on my part was justifiable since the farthest
objective -- the Italian-Egyptian border -- would thus be
reached all the sooner, IMAXIMA if the British assembly
preparations were disturbed during an early phase. After
a victory on North African territory, the attack on Malta
could not possibly go wrong, all the more since the pre-
parations for such an attack could meanwhile be brought
to their successful conclusion." 173

179
Rommelring, op. cit., p. 168.
After considering the descriptions by Generals Westphal and von Bistelen as well as by Field Marshal Keitel, Rommel's version of the reasoning used for the offensive planning cannot be accepted as being correct.

"Even before the start of the offensive, Malta was to be seized by Italian and German parachute and airborne units. However, for incomprehensible reasons our higher headquarters dropped this plan." . . . . "VERMELNIVAKK, ve VIIHERA determined that D-day would be 26 May, mainly because the British forces constantly grew in strength." "

plans for conquering
The NASHINHUM Malta had not been dropped, as Rommel seemed to believe, they had only been postponed for a variety of reasons, and the operation was supposed to begin after the seizure of Tobruk.

The preparations for Operation NERULUS had meanwhile taken more concrete shape.

"There was far more intelligence on enemy strength than what was known before the attack on Crete. The total enemy forces amounted to 30,000 men, including the Maltae volunteer units and the armed labor forces."

"Many excellent aerial photographs were available. All fortres installations, fortifications, coastal batteries, antiaircraft positions, and field fortifications had been reconsidered to the last detail. We even knew the caliber

See Footnote No. 169.
of the coast artillery guns and their angular adjustment toward the interior of the island. Many machine gun nests had also been identified from aerial photographs."

"An army had been assembled for the seizure of Malta; it was to be commanded by General Cavallero, the Italian Chief of Staff of the Comando Supremo."

"The overall command was therefore to be exercised by the Italians; that was only too natural. The attack forces consisted of the German XI Air Corps — a parachute corps — and three Italian corps. The parachute and airborne forces alone numbered more than 30,000 men." .... "To these forces were added the Italian Folgore Parachute Division and the Italian Superba Airborne Division."

"Six additional Italian divisions had been assembled as landing forces to be transported by naval craft; their total actual strength was to be more than 70,000 men."

"This was an overwhelmingly powerful force to be employed against Malta, five times as large as the force used against Crete." 160

This information provided by General Student was supplemented by Generalhauptsturmführer (Major General) Conrad, the Flieger-160
Kurt Student, Generalhauptsturmführer (Gen., St.). Der unbekannte Angriff auf Malta (The Planned Attack on Malta), extracted from Der deutsche Fallschirmjäger (The German Paratrooper), No. 10/56, pp. 5-4, Karlsruhe Document Collection.
Fruh (Air Force Commander) of the II Air Corps.

"As during the operation against Crete, I had the task to direct the approach flights of the parachute and airborne units, committed for this purpose, General Student promised that I would probably receive ten groups equipped with Junkers 52 and three wing headquarters staffs, which would be subordinate to me. Then he asked me how I planned to use my groups and whether I had any further questions or suggestions."

"During the latter part of summer 1941, the operations officer, Captain Cellani, and I had prepared a study on methods for conquering Malta, even though we had not been requested to do so. In formulating our ideas, we tried to avoid repeating the mistakes made in Crete. I was then able to give General Student an immediate reply that was based on thorough and well-considered study of the problem."...

To begin with, D.F.S. 230's (small freight gliders) and Gotha Hatzehfabrik 240's (larger freight gliders), equipped with crank parachutes, were to land immediately after the last bombs had dropped. They were to land at anti-aircraft artillery positions, near command posts that had been identified, and in the vicinity of mysterious caves, that is, near pinpoint targets and in far greater number than in Crete. I suggested to scrape together all my B2-aircraft to tow the freight gliders. Directly after these landings, the parachutists were to jump over their
designated targets. My plans called for six groups of parachute troops and following them immediately, four groups of airborne troops. Because of the relatively short flight distances, the ten groups could fly several sorties per day.

I also recommended that the first Junkers 52 drop the parachute commandeos who had proved so effective in Crete with their special equipment. Special reconnaissance aircraft (pathfinders) would have to mark the flight direction on the water by using "water-smokes-bombs." They would draw a direct central line toward the targets on Malta so that the following Junkers groups could find their targets even though the island might be camouflaged by smoke."

Obviously, I can no longer produce the exact figures from memory at this time. But with the assistance of my "large notebook" I can reconstruct the following figures:

"We counted on approximately 600 parachute combat observers, 450 glider pilots, 200 of whom with parachute drop experience (Pr. Sturmfallschirmausbildung), 300 o all freight gliders, and 200 large-size freight gliders."

Then I flew to Italy to check on the airfields in person. After talking to General Ramek and Major Hors of the advance party of the XI Air Corps at Frascati near Rome, and after reporting to the Commander-in-Chief South, I landed at Catania. There I had a very thorough-going conversation with
Generale Neururer and Buchholz. Then I visited the selected
airfields in the company of these gentlemen, including the
and command post, southwest of Catania, west of Pase del Rinato;
visiting the airfields of Galtagirone, Zela, and Comiso.
The command posts were fields from which the harvest had
just been taken, offering neither shelter nor camouflage
possibilities, quite apart from the fact that they lacked
water facilities and workshop installations. Telephone
communications and quarters were to be constructed. The
locations seemed unsuitable because of the high incidence
of dust during the dry summer. (See the experiences made
at the Ripollia airfield.) Moreover, some of the command
posts were so close together and situated from west to east
that the glider trains would endanger one another in case
the aircraft had to take off with an east wind. On the
following day I also visited the Reggio airfield, which seemed
suitable, and the Vibo-Valentia airfield, which appeared too
small to me. Immediately upon returning to Berlin I submitted
a detailed report in writing, describing my impressions,
making suggestions, and voicing my objections. 151

Field Marshal Kesselring had the following comment
with regard to the plans for the attack operations on Malta:

151 Gerhard Conrad, Donalda da (Maj.Gen., Ret.) Verberichtungen
fuer das Flugsamen Fliederabens Einsatz der Fallschirm- und Luft-
lande-Verbaende bei dem beabsichteten Unternehmen Malta, Juni 42
(Preparations for the Commitment of Parachute and Airborne Units
for the Planned Operation against Malta, June 1942). Kurfuerstube
Document Collection.
"The plans called for General Student leading two parachute divisions, including the Italian Folgore Parachute Division. (The division had been quickly trained by the very active parachute officer, General Ranchi, so he had been very successful, since the division was rated excellent. The exercise I witnessed indicated that these forces had the true parachute spirit.) Transportation wings, heavy freight gliders (Gothaer Waggonfabrik 242′s with a 20-ton capacity) and "Ginata" (Giganten — with a carrying capacity of 24 tons for the transportation of tanks were available. In addition, there were 2 to 3 Italian assault divisions, elements of the battle fleet, whose naval guns were to conduct the artillery preparation against the vessels island fortifications, while others were to escort the trans-
There were also some assault boats, port ships. The MARELEIBERGENS flying units were somewhat stronger than the forces committed for the first air attacks on Malta."

"The operations plan was essentially as follows:
1. The parachute troops were to assemble after their landing and attack the elevations in the south, after their seizure, these hills would be used as points of departure for the attack on the airfield south of the city and for the capture of the port of La Valetta. Shortly before the ground assault, the airfields and antiaircraft positions were to be bombed from the air.
2. Main attack effort of the naval forces and seaborne assault troops..."
against the strong points south of La Valetta. They were to attack the port of La Valetta proper in conjunction with the parachute units while the coastal batteries were simultaneously being bombed from the air.

"A diversionary attack was to be carried out by naval forces against the bay of Marsa Brollo," 182

Even though Malta's defenders had been reinforced by the arrival of 100 Spitfires, the general situation on the island was rather sad.

The large-scale resupply effort made in mid-June was to resupply Malta for some time, but only two freighters actually reached the port of La Valetta. The manifold shortages had thus not been relieved.

There is no reason to doubt that the employment of such strong air forces, having the benefit of the experiences made in Crete and the assistance of considerable Italian landing forces from the sea, would have resulted in the capture of the island.

The Italian Navy would at first be opposed solely by British torpedo aircraft and submarines. There were no major British naval units available in the Mediterranean.

The shock resulting from the unexpectedly swift fall

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Kesselring, op. cit., pp. 173-75.

See page 289.
of Tobruk, which affected the entire British Empire, could surely also have paralyzed the determination to offer resistance that Malta's defenders might otherwise have displayed. Under these circumstances it would have been doubtful whether the naval squadron stationed at Gibraltar could have given assistance, especially since the successes achieved by German submarines in the Mediterranean forced the British to be very cautious.

Among the Italians it was primarily the Chief of the General Staff at the Commando Suprmo, General Count Cavallero, who was fully convinced of the necessity to conquer Malta. This "daring" step had been subjected to much criticism.

Count Ciano, the Foreign Minister, made the following comments on this subject in his diary entry of 16 May 1942:

"Cavallero declares: 'I know that this is a difficult operation and that it will cause heavy losses; I also know that I risk my neck in this operation. But I am the one who wants to have it because I consider it absolutely essential for the further conduct of the war. If we seize Malta, Libya will be secure. If we don't, the situation of the (Italian) colony will become more and more precarious. I shall take charge of the operation, myself.' . . . Cavallero does not hide the fact that he hopes to earn a lot of personal prestige from the operation, but I don't think he ever will."
13 May 1942: "Colonel Casaro does not share Cavallero's
vital enthusiasm for the attack on Malta. The island's
air defenses are still very effective, and the defenses
against attacks from the sea are still fully intact. The
interior of Malta is one single machine gun neat. To land
paratroopers would be very difficult. A major part of the
aircraft participating in such an operation would be destined
to be shot down before they could even drop their human cargo.
The same must be said about a landing from the sea. On the
other hand, it must be remembered that, when our air attacks
relented for two days only, Malta's defenses grew even tougher.
In these last few days both we and the Germans lost quite a
couple of victory. Even Rommel considers a possible landing with
great worry, and the German General Loomer did not hide his
open aversion to the project. The men who support the operation
are Kesselring and Cavallero, with the latter trying his usual
tricks to make the other one shoulder the responsibility." ....

11 May 1942: "I had a long and interesting conversation with
Carboni. At the moment he commands one of the divisions earmarked
for the attack on Malta. He is decidedly
opposed to the operation. He is convinced that we shall
suffer heavy losses and that no positive results will
be achieved by carrying out the operation. He considers
Cavallero as responsible for the situation and regards him as an intriguing and untrustworthy person."  

21 June 1942: "General Carboni came to Rome to discuss the operation against Malta, which is supposed to take place at the time of the next new moon. He is convinced, in his capacity of a military man, that we are heading for an unprecedented disaster. The preparations were childish; the equipment is missing and where it exists, it is unsatisfactory. The landing troops will never be able to land or, if they do succeed in landing, they will be completely wiped out. All commanders are convinced of this situation, but nobody dares to speak up for fear of Cavallero's wrath. But I am more than ever of the opinion that the operation will not take place."  

Final entry of 22 June 1942: "On the other hand, there is a certain amount of hesitation with regard to the operation against Malta. Mussolini wrote to Hitler and informed him that we would have to cancel the operation definitely, if we did not obtain 40,000 tons of oil for this purpose."  

These excerpts from the Ciano diaries must be considered as significant for the general atmosphere and were quoted for this reason. They are not to be taken as factual criticism.

since they completely lack objectivity in examining the
military aspects of the situation. They do reflect, however,
the internal differences and oppositions to Musolini’s
Fascist regime; these obstructionist trends dominated the
entire military scene in Italy, with the soldier at the
front having to suffer the consequences of this internal
immolation.

Since the seizure of Malta never transcended beyond the
preparatory stage, one cannot make any decisive statement
as to its feasibility. Only the fact that Malta was ready to
be taken by assault on 10 May after the attacks it had undergone
in April can be taken as proof that the execution of the
operation was justifiable and that it would have succeeded
in all probability.

After the fall of Tobruk, Rommel was in a vengeful
mood that was fully justified. On 22 June he committed
his forces to launch a pursuit across and beyond the
Egyptian border. There was apparently no objection raised
against this step.

According to the plan that had been originally pre-
pared, the line Sidi- Omar — Halfaya — Sollum was not
to be passed by the Panzer Army’s main force. At the
time, however, the bulk of the army was still in the Tobruk
area.

Field Marshal Rommelring writes on this subject as follows:

See Footnote No. 1/6.
On 22 June 1942 I visited Field Marshal von Rundstedt at his headquarters. Upon my arrival I found him issuing orders for the advance on Sidi-Barrani for noon of that day. This plan was in line with my own concepts without reflecting on the feasibility of the Malta operation. 124

Field Marshal Kesselring was therefore apparently of the opinion that solely reconnaissance and security units were to push ahead toward Sidi-Barrani, whereas the bulk of the Panzer Army would stop along the Egyptian border.

It seems unlikely that Rundstedt's plan to thrust toward Cairo and thus abandon the seizure of Malta was discussed at this meeting, since Kesselring would surely have pointed out his opposing views on that occasion.

He writes that he visited Rundstedt: if, for instance, General Hasso had been present and the argument over the question: 'Malta or Cairo?' had started already on 22 June, Field Marshal Kesselring would certainly have mentioned that fact.

One can draw two conclusions from the above-mentioned factor: Either Rundstedt himself was not fully decided upon which objective he intended to pursue in the immediate future or else he hid his true plans when he encountered

124 Kesselring, op. cit., p. 172.
evaluation of the situation are quoted verbatim.

1. **The Position of the Italians**

   "General Bastico, as the nominal Commander-in-Chief of Italian North Africa, requests by order of the Comando Supremo and on the basis of his own convictions that the pursuit into Egypt be stopped in accordance with the agreements on the seizure of Malta, which were concluded at Derchtesgaden. This request is all the more urgent because the island fortress has very quickly recovered from the heavy Italian-Jerman bombing attacks of last spring, so that the naval transports from Italy had BERSHEBA suffered very heavy losses already in June. The elimination of Malta is more important to the Comando Supremo than conducting the pursuit to the Nile, which for supply reasons would necessarily lead to great difficulties."

2. **Rommel's Memoirs**

   "Contrary to the ideas he expressed in February and in contrast to his operational plans of April," Field Marshal Rommel evaluated the situation — he had apparently transmitted these thoughts to Hitler and Mancosini as early as 21 June — as follows:

   "Tobruk has fallen; its significance as fortress and factor influencing friendly and enemy operations is well...

   See also pp. 315-4.
known. The supplies captured at Tobruk will suffice to provide for the Panzer Army for a long time. Bardia has been seized, and thus the entire territory of Libya has been recaptured. The Egyptian position at Sollum is already in friendly hands. *Tobruk and Benghazi, which are relatively close to the front line, are available as supply ports for the army. The situation is more favorable than ever before. Rommel considers the British as completely defeated. He therefore believes that he has to venture an immediate pursuit to the enemy basis in the Nile Delta by forcing his weak and overextended troops to make an extreme effort in order to transform half a victory into a full one. He also counts on the low morale of the British troops and leadership, which would facilitate his task. However, immediate and rapid action is absolutely essential. He is afraid that too much time has already been lost by the fighting for Tobruk. The supply difficulties would rapidly and fundamentally improve, if Alexandria was captured in the near future."

"The British are "on the run"; one must not let them catch their breath and settle down. A delayed attack of the Nile Delta will require far more troops and cause far greater losses than an operation launched at the present. Consideration of the army's existing supply difficulties must not be decisive.
For the time being, the supplies captured at Tobruk were available, and in addition the port of Tobruk was in German hands. The attack plan to seize Malta was outdated by the course of events; at this time it would seem a division of Axis forces which would all have to be concentrated at one decisive point in Egypt in order to form the maximum air effort. This was particularly true of the air forces,

"For these reasons Rommel would start his advance into Egypt that very evening and cross the border by tomorrow.

3. The Commander-in-Chief South's Report

"During a conference between Field Marshal Rommel and the Commander-in-Chief South, which took place at Tobruk at midday on 21 June, the latter shared Rommel's opinions and supported them by stating: 'that the supplies would be procured...as required,' as witnessed by the then acting chief of staff of the Panzer Army."

*If the last sentence was actually said, it is impossible that this could have taken place at Sidi Barrani on 26 June. On that day the Panzer Army was still 6 miles southwest of Marsa Matruh. (Tracy's Note 10: 160)

**Apparently there is another confusion of dates. The C-in-C South saw Rommel first on 22 June at his headquarters; the fortress was surrendered at 0940 on 21 June about 4 miles west of Tobruk. (Tracy's Note 10: 162)

The C-in-C South's remark "that the supplies would be procured as required" was probably not made until Hitler's radio message had arrived, instructing the C-in-C South to desist from raising any objections to Rommel's operational plans and to support him with all the forces at his disposal.
"Later -- apparently also during the conference on 23 June -- the Commander-in-Chief South resumed exposing his former concept according to which the seizure of Malta was such an urgent task that it would have to be carried out before the offensive into Egypt. The preparations for this operation, which had to be made on the part of the Luftwaffe, were already underway. Units and equipment had already been deployed to Sicily."

"The support of the advance into Egypt could therefore be made effective only by overcoming many handicaps and long delays."

Field Marshal Kesselring himself made the following report on the conference of 26 June:

"First came a report on the situation by Rommel, who declared that there were practically no enemy forces of any significance opposing him and that his army could reach Cairo within 10 days."

"My reply to this was as follows:

"Even though I realized that Rommel had more insight in the situation on the ground than I, my objections would have to be raised. Any further advance, even if there was only a minimum of combat activity, would result in a maximum loss of armored and motor vehicles. The necessary supplies would not become available for a long time. Even though there might perhaps be no usable British ground force reserves in Egypt, one could be sure that the first

See Footnote No. 176."
reinforcements from the Near East were already now moving up.
I, too, was of the opinion that one ought to pursue the
defeated enemy to the very end, if one was certain that
one would not encounter new enemy forces."

"I felt competent to speak for the Luftwaffe. My flying
force would reach the Nile in a completely exhausted
condition with aircraft that needed overhauling and without
sufficient supplies."

"They would be opposed by fully combat-ready units
which could be further reinforced in the shortest time.
As an airman I considered it madness to attack head on
an airbase that was fully intact. Because of the decisive
importance of the part played by aviation I had to reject
from this point of view alone the continuation of the
offensive that had an objective the conquest of Egypt and
the seizure of Cairo."

"When Cavallero asked Benito to reconsider his position,
the latter adhered to his optimistic concept and guaranteed
that he would reach Cairo within 10 days."

"Marshal Benito and Cavallero agreed. The Duce came
to Africa to be present at the triumphal entry into Cairo."

"I regretted this decision, which according to a radio
message from Hitler I was forbidden to discuss any further.
Essentially, the seizure of Cairo would mean little, if anything, in terms of ENGLIS logistical support.

General von Sintelen, the German Military Attache in Rome, also commented on the question of Cairo versus Malta.

"When I visited Cavallero on 22 June in the morning he asked me whether I was of the opinion that the Panzer Army should continue its drive into Egypt or whether it should stop, as planned, and Malta should be attacked. Without hesitating I answered that it would now be Malta's turn and that the plans made in conjunction with the Armed Forces High Command would have to be adhered to. Cavallero informed me that he only wanted to obtain my opinion. He shared it, and he gave me a copy of an order to the High Command in Libya that had been approved by the Duce and which I transmitted to the Armed Forces High Command."

"But Rommel launched his offensive across the Egyptian border. He answered the inquiry of General Count Barbasetti, the Chief of Staff of the Italian High Command in North Africa, who pointed out to him that the Duce had issued


According to this information there could not have been any differences of opinion with the Italians during the conference between the C-in-C South and Rommel on 22 June. This contradicts the contents of the study prepared by a group of officers after World War II (pp. 329-330).
divergent orders, that he intended to thrust toward the
Gulf of Persia. Rommel also sent me a radio message,
asking that I should obtain from Mussolini that he change
his order because he had found such large quantities of
supplies upon capturing Tobruk that he could reach the
Rila without further resupply."

"I took no such action, but inquired at the Armed Forces
High Command headquarters, where I was informed that the
situation had changed completely since the capture of
Tobruk and that the seizure of Malta was no longer necessary.
It was in vain that I pointed out to Jodi that there had
been no fundamental change, that as a military port Tobruk
had only a small capacity, and that furthermore the naval
routes continued to be threatened."

"Rommel had also asked Hitler to give him freedom
of action. It was understandable that the victorious
leader wanted to pursue closely the withdrawing foe,
but Rommel did not take the supply difficulties of his
army into account, and these problems could be alleviated
only by the conquest of Malta."

"The decision of the Comando Supremo was reversed
by a letter that Hitler sent to Mussolini. Hitler advised
his friend to abandon the Malta operation for the time
being and to venture the thrust toward the Suez Canal.
immediately, "the laurels of victory are only once within reach", stated this letter. "an opportunity once missed never returns. in 1941 the british lost their chance of taking possession of all the libyan territory by withdrawing forces and shipping them to greece instead of using them for a thrust on Tripoli."

"when i presented this letter to mussolini i was sorry to find his only too perspectival, the 'forceful' personality, styrenesiln was only too pleased by hitler's letter. he had disliked signing the order of the command supreme by which the advance was to be halted at the egyptian border. from hitler's letter he meant to read a belated justification of his attack on greece in the autumn of 1940, because this attack had split the british forces and thus saved libya. he looked at me proudly, and was greatly excited at the perspective of attacking egypt immediately and occupying cairo and alexandria. mussolini's confidence in hitler's strategy was at that time still unlimited. cavallero was unable to achieve anything with his opposing arguments. he had no backing for his evaluation of the strategic situation and he felt bandoned by the armed forces high command... "cavallero had to change his orders and postpone the operation against Malta until September. this meant the final abandonment of the plan,
since the subsequent heavy fighting did not permit to
continue preparations for landings, let alone their execution."

"The position taken by the Armed Forces High Command, which
knew only too well the dangers of the cross-Mediterranean
supply routes and the logistical difficulties in North
Africa, cannot be explained, except by mentioning the
stubborn opposition with which Hitler considered Operation
HERCULES."

It was really this preconceived opinion of Hitler which
prevented the execution of Operation HERCULES, General Student
stated on this subject as follows:

"It was soon obvious that the necessary technical and
organizational preparations of the Italians would require
some additional time. Cavallero called the key officers of
the Army, Navy, and Air Force to a crucial conference in
May during which it became manifest that the attack on
Malta could not be executed until August or even the first
half of September because of technical reasons. In concluding,
Cavallero stated: 'This important operation must in all events
be completed before the autumn season.'"

"While I was engaged in these preparations, I was
suddenly called to Hitler's headquarters on one of the first

See Footnote No. 178.
days of June. The exact date escapes my memory. Hitler had
until then not intervened in the preparations, and I traveled
to Rome at noon, thinking that he would now urge a faster
execution, as he often did."

"The conference, that took place on the next morning
in Hitler's presence with a large number of people attending,
lasted several hours. I first explained in great detail the
plans agreed upon in Rome. Hitler listened attentively and
patiently and asked a number of questions during my report.
He agreed that a bridgehead could be formed, and then he
suddenly could not hold back: 'But I guarantee you the following.
When
this attack gets started, the制剂 naval squadron
will immediately take off and the British naval units from
Alexandria will also approach. You should then see what the
Italians would do. As soon as the first radio messages are
intercepted, all ships will return to the Sicilian ports,
both the war ships and the transport vessels. And then you
will sit all alone on the island with your parachutes.'"

"Hitler refused to be convinced that the plan could
be successfully executed, but maintained clearly and
decisively that the operation should not be executed during
1942. At the same time, he refused to let me return to Rome.
by this action he probably wanted to emphasize the decision
he had taken. I therefore flew to my headquarters at Tempel-
hof and reported from there by telephone to Field Marshal
Keitel, giving him in the course of a long conversation
the results of my conference with Hitler. The Field Marshal
was very angry and did not hide his feelings."

"I would like to emphasize once again that this decision
to abandon the attack on Malta was made at a time when Rommel
was still engaged in heavy and indecisive fighting for the
Air-Machira strong point far south in the desert. After the
successful conclusion of these engagements and the subsequent
conquest of Tobruk on 20 June 1942 Rommel no longer had the
choice between Malta and Cairo, but had to decide whether
he would stop at the Egyptian border or pursue the defeated
 Eighth Army 'to the last breath of man and BAMM! more.'
Moreover, if the attack on Malta was to be launched at all,
this operation would not take place until August and prob-
ably not until September."

This description of events gives an entirely new aspect
was to the question "Malta or Cairo?" It is, for the first time
that Hitler criticized so severely in front of a sizable
number of witnesses the Italian Navy — and thus also.

188 Student, sp. cit., End of the October Issue (11) of
"Der deutsche Fallschirmjäger" (The German Paratrooper)
Mussolini. That this criticism was justified cannot be contested, after the Italian Navy had demonstrated its failure. But the proper conclusions were again not drawn, since two "parallel wars" continued to be conducted.

As it was only to be expected of Hitler, he did not inform the Commander-in-Chief, South, of his plans.

In April he had agreed to the seizure of Malta, but some four weeks later he reversed his decision in a sudden change of mind.

If he had been convinced that the conquest of Malta was vital for the continuation of military operations in North Africa, he would have found means and ways to adhere to the July target date. But he hesitated, like all "self-made men," in making decisions WITHOUT CONSIDERING strategic factors of a consistent conduct of operations.

Hitler's negative attitude toward conquering Malta was strongly favored by Goering. The Reichs Marshal's aides and the last Chief of Staff of the Luftwaffe commented as follows on this subject:

General (Col.) von Brauchitsch: "The situation in the Mediterranean theater developed entirely differently. Here the Luftwaffe was faced by an insoluble problem because the available forces were clearly insufficient to satisfy the
manifold requirements. The plans of the top-level commanders were incompatible with the available means. The most difficult problem was the elimination of the British naval strong point Malta and of the air force units stationed on that island.

"The final success was not scored, and the failure of the Italian Navy contributed its share to this result. In addition, the Luftwaffe had to participate in the operations in North Africa and had to assume great air-transportation responsibilities in an effort to overcome the shortage of shipping space."  

General Koller: "The Reichs Marshall took credit for having changed the Fuehrer's mind on the decision of capturing Malta. It is regrettable that he acted in this manner for fear that he would lose his parachute forces in such an operation."

The picture becomes quite clear, if one considers the following statements made by Field Marshal Keitel:

"Apart from the Commando Supreme, both Hitler and the Armed Forces High Command shared the responsibility for this wrong decision. They were, however, in a far more difficult position to evaluate the situation correctly since Kessel's public relations campaign for an offensive..."

(Quoted from "The German Air Force in the Mediterranean Theater:")
toward the Nile valley was under way. This overseas theater of war was strange to the German leadership whose thinking was rooted in the European Continent. The German leaders were not aware of the significance of the Mediterranean and did not realize the difficulties inherent in military operations in that theater. Instead of following a definite plan of operations and holding the initiative in no doing, Hitler and the military leaders acted on the spur of the moment and under pressure, when no other solution than taking action was possible."

"Hitler's personal friendship for Mussolini prevented him from intervening in the conduct of operations in the Mediterranean, although such intervention might have been beneficial. "Mussolini in Cairo" was the motto."

"At that time Rommel exercised an almost hypnotic influence over Hitler, thus almost completely excluding an objective evaluation of the situation based on facts. For this reason Hitler ordered me, as already mentioned, to completely abstain from any objection to Rommel's plan of operations and to support him with all means at my disposal. In issuing this order, Hitler was probably impressed by the Tobruk victory and influenced by Rommel's personal representative, Dr. Berndt."

"Hoering was Hitler's loyal supporter in opposing
the Malta operation subconsciously, Goering was afraid of suffering a second costly KREMLIN "crime" with "triumphant"
losses, although there was no relationship between the two
operations. Hitler was no doubt glad that the Tobruk victory
gave him the excuse to cancel the Malta operation he disliked,
and that without losing face. I informed Goering repeatedly
that, after the air attacks during April and May, Malta
could be seized with the minimum forces and few losses,
whereas far greater and costlier efforts would be necessary
if the attack was postponed. The Italian Comando Supremo
meanwhile met with a series of never ending objections
on the part of the Supermarina."

"With the decision to thrust toward the Nile, the
execution of the Malta operations plan was indefinitely
postponed, it subsequently became impossible, when the
North African offensive failed and the forces earmarked
for the conquest of the island — both ground and air forces —
were committed in North Africa."

"To sum up this problem one might state that it is
of utmost interest to the military historian and the
psychiatrist. The failure to take Malta was to decide the
campaign in North Africa."

The passive resistance of Italian personalities as
well as Hitler's and Goering's aversion to the Malta
operation created the proper psychological climate for

the favorable reception that Nessel's urging for a thrust on Cairo was to find in Axis circles. It is difficult to explain, how Nessel could abandon the Malta operation so light-heartedly, against his better knowledge. His views on the situation, as it presented itself after the capture of Tobruk, have already been stated in detail. But in his justified and sure sense of superiority, he committed a number of shameful blunders.

First, the British had not been weakened as much as Nessel believed. They had certainly suffered heavy losses of men and material, above all of tanks. But, since they were fully motorized, they were able to escape encirclement. Each time they were threatened by an encirclement, sizable elements escaped. Nessel knew this fact and the air reconnaissance units had confirmed it.**

The enemy army had been defeated and its elements were engaged in full retreat.

Not defeated, however, was the British Air Force, which got closer and closer to fully constructed air bases and fully operational ground organizations. Each time the withdrawing ground forces covered another mile in the easterly direction, the repair and maintenance installations, which Lawson had established with such foresight and expert-
home and which were equipped with all technical expections. 
were situated at extremely favorable locations some 100 miles 
distance. Moreover, some combat-ready flying units were stationed 
in the Nile Delta, in Palestine, in Syria, and in Iraq.

The German Luftwaffe was therefore at a considerable 
disadvantage compared with the British. Its overextended 
lines of communication, reaching from Tobruk to El-Daba 
over some 100 miles, lowered its combat readiness; further-
more, its ground organization and signal communications had 
to be established.

This meant a heavy handicap for the German field command 
and should have been taken into account by Rommel. One look 
at the map indicated that between El-Alamein and the 
Qatara depression there was a position that could not 
be enveloped.

Rommel's hope to catch up with the fully motorized 
British forces even before they reached this position, 
to force them to give battle, and to destroy them on 
that occasion, turned out to be a fallacy.

Had the reports that had been coming in and that 
concerned the construction of a defensive position at 
Alamein been forgotten altogether?

"The fortifications underway near Qaret-el-Abyad 
were still being built. About 20 miles southwest of 
El-Alamein there were strong barbed-wire obstacles

See pp. 287 and 339.
about four battery positions, apparently none pill boxes were under construction, and there were also 30 tents and 15 trucks."

"Near Al-Alamein there were field positions and wire obstacles. A road leading southward was being built at the Al-Alamein railroad station." This had been the air reconnaissance report based on aerial photos of the east Egyptian area and dated 20 October 1941.

The German Army issued an intelligence bulletin No. 4, dated 11 November 1941, which stated under paragraph 4e as follows:

a. Near the coast the construction work at Al-Alamein is under way. From there to Qaret-el-Abd extends a 10 - 15 feet wide multiple-bolt entanglement: a major strong point has been built at Qaret-el-Abd. This obstacle probably continues all the way to the Qattara-depression, but its existence along this stretch has not been confirmed."

b. There is also a so-called "Fortification map of Al-Alamein", at a 1:25,000 scale, issued in June 1941 on the basis of aerial photographs taken on 31 May 1941. This map might not have reached the combat forces in time because it had been produced so late. Moreover, it showed only the construction of the Al-Alamein fortifications proper.

Extracted from the situation reports of the Luftwaffe High Command, Intelligence Division, Libya-Mediterranean sector, for the period 19 October to 27 October 1941. Karlsruhe Document Collection.

See Appendix 5a of the first volume North Africa.
and not the source of the entire Alamein position.

Whether the Field Marshal still remembered these data can no longer be established. Since he used to minimize intelligence reports that might impress his own forces, it would be possible but not likely.

Even though the photo map of June 1942 arrived too late in the field, one might assume that its contents were known at Panzer Army headquarters. That headquarters was responsible for its distribution.

Rommel stated after the capture of Mersa-Hatrak as follows: "They were nevertheless able to withdraw major elements of their infantry forces to the Alamein position, which was already occupied by some fresh troop elements and the construction of which had been underway for some time in an all-out effort." *

Even though the booty captured at Tobruk covered the supply requirements for some time, the losses of manpower, guns, and tanks could not be replaced immediately. Rommel knew that.

He also had no doubt about the troops being exhausted and


* See page 300.
even though the men followed Rommel's orders with complete devotion and by an extreme effort of willpower.

But the exhaustion of his soldiers, their thin ranks, the ridiculously small number of tanks and guns they were still capable of directing against the enemy, could not be compensated for simply by the enthusiasm of the commanders and troops. In the final analysis, it was this hard fact that led to the failure of Rommel's plan.

To have ignored the limits of capability and combat effectiveness in a repeat from which Rommel cannot be excused. The effect of his wrong decisions after the capture of Tobruk began to show in the not too distant future.

By approving Rommel's threat against Cairo and by abandoning the plan for the conquest of Malta, the Armed Forces High Command dug the grave of the German-Italian Panzer Army in the North African theater of war.

The responsibility for the defeat and all its consequences that made themselves felt in the over-all situation rests fully with the Supreme Commander of Germany's military forces.
Section 4

The Allied Landing in North Africa

Evaluation of the situation by the Axis powers and measures taken by them; the launching of the second front in Africa; preparations for Operation TORCH and its execution; the advance into Tunisia; the fighting in November and December 1942.

Prior to September of 1942, the Commander in Chief, South, was occupied solely by conducting day-to-day air operations in the Mediterranean. His staff was that of any other air fleet headquarters having only German Luftwaffe units under its command.

In September 1942, however, on the basis of intelligence data pointing to an imminent enemy landing in the Mediterranean theater, the Commander in Chief, South, was entrusted with the control of all German forces (Army, Navy, and Luftwaffe) stationed in the Mediterranean area. The only exception was the German-Italian Faszer Army, which remained under Italian control, with its command headquarters in Africa.

Up to this point, German planners had been aware only of the fact that Russia was pressing for a second front in Europe,
and that Molotov and Stalin had received hinting assurances to this effect from the United States and Great Britain.

It is uncertain how exactly the Wehrmacht High Command was informed of a contemplated landing in the Mediterranean theater.

Nevertheless, it seems to be possible that some information as to the results of the conference held by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 30 July 1943 in Washington had filtered through.

This was the conference which decided on a landing in Africa (originally Operation DESERT, later Operation TORCH), while postponing the invasion of Europe until 1944.

Quite independently from this source, the reports issued by General von Huthsloch’s Luftwaffe Control Commission in Africa (Luftwaffe-Kommando-Kommission Afrika) were the first to mention Allied plans for a landing in French Morocco.

That operation which affected the military situation in Europe most quickly, by introducing a second front, is the landing in Morocco. Now, as before, it is the enemy’s most immediate goal to drive the Axis powers out of Africa, in order to establish a broader base for operations against them in the Mediterranean area and in Italy, to close the gaps in the blockade line.

2. The Army Air Force in World War II, the University of Chicago Press, Volume II, pp 46 and 47. (Author's note: The present study is based in large part on this work.)
to encourage the defection of the French colonies in Africa from the mother country, and to force Italy to sue for peace.\(^2\)

The emission of 32 June 1940 could not be construed as sufficient justification for France to break off diplomatic relations with the United States. Thus, there was no way to stop President Roosevelt's special envoy, Mr. Murphy, from concluding a trade agreement with Morocco in April 1941 as a first step towards increasing the influence of the United States in that country.

Even after Germany and the United States were officially at war (after 11 December 1941), "there was no way to prevent the increasing activity of the four military attachés from the United States embassy at Tangiers, who travelled all over French Morocco on missions obviously connected with the procurement of intelligence data, the opening of a new American consulate at Fez, or the distribution of American propaganda material."\(^3\)

The strangely pro-comital attitude of the French Resident General in Morocco, General Negues, gave rise to the suspicion that he was in sympathy with the American cause. In any case,

\(^2\) Die Landung der alliierten Streitkräfte an 8.11.42 in Nordafrika (The Landing of the Allied Forces in North Africa on 8 November 1942), Study by Branch B, Staff of General Staff, dated 17 February 1943; The Political Background, page 1; Harvard Document Collection.

\(^3\) Ibid., page 10, report dated 23 March 1942.
in view of the inadequacy of the coastal defense system, it was doubtful
that an Anglo-American landing could be repulsed for any length of time.
"Prolonged resistance against an attack by a strong army forces equipped
with up-to-date weapons is out of the question." 4

"The Central Committee in Africa considers an Anglo-American attack
to be inevitable now time during the next few months." 5

"The Italian Government North Africa (Verbindungsbeamte Nordafrika) con-
firm once again the agitating propaganda campaign being carried out by the
American vice-consuls, who are provided with ample funds to finance this
activity. Their primary goal is to alienate Italy from Mussolini, thus
bringing about a final separation of Italy and Germany." 6

"Strongly supported by American propaganda, a "Wandering Navigator",,
contending that resistance to an army landing is futile, is growing stronger
in French Morocco. The country's political leaders are making no attempt
to counter this attitude." (Wandering had been captured by British forces
in May 1942). "General Regnay is obviously beating

4 - Ibid., page 14, report dated 10 May 1942.
5 - Ibid., page 17, report dated 9 June 1942.
6 - Ibid., page 19, report dated 1 August 1942.
his appraisal of the situation on the assumption that the coming winter may involve the Local government in internal difficulties which Local may be unable to master in the event of any additional pressure in the foreign policy sector (an Allied landing in Africa, for example). Under these circumstances, Logan is most anxious to preserve his position by emphasizing his loyalty to the Visby regime and then, when the landing does occur, to be able to save himself by pointing to the fact of his present inactivity.\footnote{\textsuperscript{7}}

We have no way of telling in how far these reports were brought to the attention of the Commander in Chief, South. At any rate, they constitute clear proof of systematic preparations by the United States for a landing in Morocco.

When the Commander in Chief, South, was given full Wehrmacht authority in September 1942, his staff was augmented by a small Army Employment Group (Kriegsgruppe Beer). It consisted of one General Staff officer (Army) and one auxiliary officer.

In addition, an Italian air and naval liaison element (Luft- und Marine-
verbindungsamtsstaffel) was added to the staff of the Commander in Chief, South, to take over the task of coordination with the Italian Ministry of Aviation and the Italian Navy High Command. Its chief mission was the coordination of air escort duty for the ocean convoys. The headquarters of the Commander in Chief, South, were located in Taranto, Italy, at this time.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{7} - Ibid., page 21, report dated 10 October 1942.}
It had now become the mission of the Commander in Chief, South, to direct the coordination and employment of all German armed forces in the event of an Allied landing in the Mediterranean theater, and to utilize these forces to repulse such a landing.

A great deal of thought was devoted to the possible targets of an Allied landing.

A landing in southern France was considered possible, since a successful operation there would be bound to have the fastest and most significant effect on the over-all military situation.

A landing in the Marseilles area would have the advantage that an air base on the Spanish island of Mallorca, only 350 miles away, could be taken in the same operation. A landing any further east, on the other hand, would bring the invaders into that part of southern France occupied by Italian forces—a weak point, in other words. This would probably mean that the island of Corsica would be seized as a base from which to cover the flank of the landing force. A further argument against a landing in southern France was the fact that the French government would be bound to object. Moreover, in the event of a landing there, the Allied troops would have to reckon with fairly quick involvement with strong units of the German Wehrmacht.

8 - The Campaign in Tunisia (Der Feldzug in Tunisien), study prepared by General der Flieger Dedelmann in 1947; Air Lance Document Collection; (the present study is greatly indebted to General Dedelmann’s presentation).
Judging from the data available to them, German military leaders regarded it as desirable that the Allies could have at their disposal the strong troops and technical equipment needed to carry out an invasion in the south of France.

A landing in Greece seemed more probable. The critical situation of the Russian ally could be helped from the Balkans; and the partisan units fighting in Greece could be relied upon to furnish active support.

The airfields which would fall to the Allies in the event of a successful invasion in Greece would enable them to carry out attacks on the Italian airfields as well as on important traffic centers in the rear area of the German forces.

The factors arguing against a landing in Greece were the very poor network of roads and the difficult terrain, in which even relatively weak German forces would be able to slow down an advance effectively. In addition, both the landing itself and the extensive supply operations required to maintain it would have to be carried out via the Suez Canal.

In connection with a possible landing in Greece, it was expected that the Allies—perhaps as an opening thrust—
would seize the island of Rhodes, which was occupied by the Italians. This
would also lead to the "isolation" of Crete by cutting off its supply line.

After weighing these factors carefully, the Commander in Chief, South,
came to the conclusion that Crete would not, after all, be the scene of
the Allied landing.

A successful landing in Italy, on the other hand, might be expected to
have even more decisive effects.

It was certain that the Allies were aware of the internal political
situation, the tense struggle going on between the Fascists and the Socialists,
and the surly and indifferent attitude of a large percentage of
the Italian population.

Mussolini's prestige had suffered severely as a result of the defeats
of the Italian armed forces, and an attempt to eliminate him — and with him
Italy — as an ally of Germany seemed eminently logical.

Seizure of one of the surrounding islands (Sicily, Sardinia, or Corsica)
as a base of operations, and a subsequent landing on Italian soil — near
Naples, Palermo, or Messina — seemed very much within the realm of possibility.

Regardless as Italy had committed herself with her crack troops in France
or on the islands, there remained only weak, second-class units available
for the
defense of Italy proper. There were no full German units at all in Italy at this time. The only German soldiers there were a large number of men returning from leave, convalescents, and replacement troops waiting in southern Italy for their departure to Africa to join Rommel's Panzer Army.

The seizure of Malta, from which Allied forces could provide cover for the aircraft carriers of the invasion fleet, was strongly in favor of a landing in Sicily.

The seizure of Malta would have provided the Allies with a base from which to carry out a landing in central Italy, and this plan was considered feasible by the Commander in Chief, South. This plan would eliminate, for all practical purposes, the danger of interference by the Italian forces still left in the south, and a thrust to the north into the industrial area and perhaps even to the Alps beyond, could be carried out before Germany would have time to transport the necessary defense forces to the scene of action.

In the event that the Allied commanders might be unwilling to accept this risk, the chances of a landing on the spur of the Italian boot would become even greater, with all or a part of the landing fleet approaching from the eastern Mediterranean. If the landing force should approach from Alexandria and Gibraltar simultaneously, it would open a secondary landing on the spur of Italy.
coupled with a main landing in central Italy.

From the Allied point of view, the most serious obstacle to all these plans was the risk of subverting Allied sea routes and supply lines. Within the limits set by their range, the aircraft of the German Luftwaffe devastated the approach routes, both from the Italian islands and from Crete.

The Wehrmacht High Command considered it highly improbable that an Allied landing would take place in French North Africa. The Commander in Chief, South, however, was never able to find out just what reasons the High Command might have for its belief.

Mussolini was of a different opinion, and continued to consider the possibility of such a landing. The Wehrmacht High Command was apparently basing its views in this respect on highly secret information. This may well reflect a successful attempt at deception on the part of the Allies.

The Wehrmacht High Command assumed that the officers and civilian officials serving in French North Africa were loyal adherents to the Pétain government and would do everything in their power to repulse an Allied landing with military means. And an Allied landing involving a struggle against the French troops was viewed as extremely unlikely, for such a turn of events might well drive France into the arms of the Axis.
The German Luftwaffe Central Commission reports cited in the preceding pages were apparently never taken seriously, since they did not correspond to the picture of the situation which the wishful thinking of the Wehrmacht High Command had created.

In view of the fact that intensive preparations were being made for defense against an Allied landing in southern France, in Greece, or in Italy (all of these possibilities having been thoroughly discussed with German and Italian military leaders, and carefully assessed timetables and practice exercises having been devised), it is clear that no steps were taken to prepare to resist an invasion in French North Africa.

"Neither the Germans nor the Italians made any attempt to prepare for a potential Allied landing. And considering the obvious hatred felt by the French for the Italians — and vice versa — it is clear that even the smallest step in this direction would have encountered bitter resistance. As far as the Commander in Chief, South, was concerned, the French colony was a delicate plant which had to be handled with kid gloves. He was not permitted to enter its harbors or even to establish supply lines via Bizerte and Tunis, much less to occupy Tunisia with a German security force.

"While all of this might be viewed as the result of any political policy and thus incomprehensible enough, I was quite unable to understand the opposition brought against me, purely

9 — See pages 535 — 538 of the present study.
military recommendation that at least one division be assigned to Sicily to be ready for any potential hand-to-hand combat. This extremely limited reinforcement of the German air units would, in view of the restricted maximum range of their aircraft, in no case have been able to prevent a landing or to sustain or destroy already landed enemy troops without the additional help of paratrooper or Army forces.¹⁰

The views of Feldmarschall Kesselring, as cited above, are certainly sensible, inasmuch as there were fully operable German units only in the Balkans and on Crete. Some of these units were part of the security battalion assigned to protect the railways. Together with Italian units, they were employed to the last man in maintaining some sort of occupation authority in the face of strong partisan resistance. Thus they could hardly be considered to be free for commitment elsewhere.

In the final analysis, the air units were given very limited reinforcement in the form of torpedo squadrons. The only tangible improvement was in their ground organization, which—in view of their anticipated field of operations—was augmented, brought up to date, and fitted with the equipment which it presumably would need.

The assignment of the German naval forces to the area did represent a gain in personnel strength for the Commander in Chief, South. These naval units had

the following elements at their disposal in the Mediterranean area:

1 destructor (Gavassa)
15 submarines (approximately)
1 motorboat flotilla (about six boats)
1 mine sweeper flotilla (about twelve boats)
1 or 2 landing flotillas.

In October 1942, the staff of the Commander in Chief, South, was transferred to Fascai, near Ross, since the crisis in Africa made it highly desirable that Feldmarschall Bock, by his presence in Ross, exert even stronger pressure on the Italian Supreme Command (Supreme Supremo) in respect to the furthering of supplies to North Africa. Basically, the Commander in Chief, South, was responsible only for providing air cover for the supply transports, which were under the direct control of the Supreme Command (ultimately under that of the Italian Navy). Nevertheless, the best interests of the German-Italian Panzer Army required Feldmarschall Bock's constant intervention with the Italian command headquarters.

From September 1942 on, the Intelligence Branch of the Wehrmacht High Command (O.E.W./Abwehr) began to issue daily reports which included agents' stories of an imminent landing in the Mediterranean area.
Falkenhain Rescuing had the following to say in this connection:

"The Allied invasion in North Africa was preceded by a propaganda campaign which could be interpreted only as an intensive war of nerves. For weeks on end, my headquarters was inundated by contradictory rumors, views, and opinions in which the landing point, the strength of the participating forces, and the efficacy of their equipment varied with artistic alchemy. Fleet movements off the coast of West Africa led to prophesies of a landing on the east coast and a thrust through the middle of the continent. On the other hand, the fact that Gibraltar, already well-staffed, was the goal of more and more troops and ships argued for a landing point somewhere in the Mediterranean. At the same time, the appearance of aircraft carriers and long-range troop transport vessels indicated the likelihood of a large-scale landing somewhere beyond the range of the air bases on Gibraltar, Malta, Alexandria, and Syria. Continued sailings from Gibraltar into the Mediterranean served to augment our uncertainty as to the timing of the operation."^{11}

All of the above represents clear proof of the fact that the Allies had succeeded in infiltrating the German intelligence network thoroughly enough to be able to stage their real operation and to force their enemies to adopt on erroneous measure.

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^{11} Rescuing, Albert, op. cit., pp. 185 and 186.
During the month of October, aerial reconnaissance of the ports of southwestern England revealed the presence of more merchant shipping than was normal. Huge piles of material were clearly visible on the quays and near the warehouses, presumably because there was no more room in the sheds.

Ocean traffic and the influx of troops to Gibraltar were increasing and the unloading of large stocks of material was observed there. Among the supplies put ashore were huge crates which looked very much as though they might contain fighter aircraft fuselages. Tankers were also putting in at Gibraltar to unload. In contrast, the ports of the eastern Mediterranean showed no change in the number of troops stationed there. Aerial photographs revealed that no more ships than usual were putting in at these ports.

This seemed to increase the likelihood of a landing in the western Mediterranean. The probable time and place of the landing could not yet be forecast with any degree of certainty.

Upon receipt of a report that a large convoy had left the northeast coast of England under cover of bad weather and was heading south, the Commander in Chief, South, tightened up his reconnaissance network by having his air reconnaissance patrols fan out over the western Mediterranean.
At the same time a submarine patrol report was received, indicating a 
large convoy in the western Atlantic, moving towards the east.

By then the Commander in Chief, South, had come to the conclusion that 
a landing in the western Mediterranean would be forthcoming within a very 
short time. The Wehrmacht High Command, however, stubbornly continued to 
argue that the development of the situation in North Africa made an Allied 
landing in the vicinity of Tripoli most likely. At this time, Rommel’s 
Panzer Army, having been defeated at El Alamein, was withdrawing to its 
Egyptian border position at Sollum-Halftime.

Nevertheless, the Commander in Chief, South, remained firm in his opin-
ion that the Allies would never try to force their way through the Straits 
of Sicily in the face of Italian resistance and the potential intervention 
of the Italian fleet. The fighting they had encountered during convoy duty 
to keep Malta supplied had given him a clear picture of the strength of the 
German Luftwaffe. Moreover, the air and naval establishments on Malta had 
shown no signs of being increased to the extent which certainly would have 
been necessary in the event of a contemplated landing near Tripoli.

All the same, it proved impossible to sway the Wehrmacht High Command 
in its opinion, while Goring continued to argue for the inevitability of 
a landing on the coast of southern France.
The next report of any significance indicated that a number of military and merchant vessels, their lights dimmed, had moved through the Straits of Gibraltar during the night of 6/7 November. These were sighted by German aerial reconnaissance patrols on the following day.

The most important intelligence of all, from the point of view of German leaders, was the report that a large and heavily protected convoy had halted, facing east, at the approximate latitude of Algiers, while a secondary convoy was approaching Oran. On 8 November, two messages were received simultaneously or in very close succession, one from German aerial reconnaissance and the other from a French radio transmitter in North Africa. Both reported that there was fighting going on in Oran and in Algiers. The mask had been lifted.

The Commander in Chief, South, although freed at last of the tantalizing uncertainty of the preceding months, was now faced with a number of extremely difficult problems.

A new danger-point had arisen in the west, in Algiers; not only did he lack the forces with which to eliminate it, but he was prevented by political considerations from occupying French colonial territory in neighboring Tunisia. René’s defeated Army was no longer capable of changing the course of events in the east; it would be amazing enough if it managed to escape encirclement.
and pursuit by the far stronger enemy.

Thus the only possible answer to the Allied landing was to employ the
Luftwaffe over Algiers and to send the submarines out against the Allied
transport fleet. Oran lay outside the range of the available air forces.

Because of the great distance to Algiers, there was no way of giving
the bombers a fighter escort. This meant that attacks could be carried out
only on a limited scale, during the dawn and dusk hours and under cover of
clouds.

By the time the intelligence picture of the Allied landing operation
was complete, the submarines had already been dispatched to attack the
enemy transport fleets in the western Mediterranean. They were so few in
number, however, that no decisive success could be expected.

On 9 November, the Vichy government had broken off diplomatic relations
with the United States. The Allied landings had been met by armed forces.
It was in Algiers that French resistance broke down first; in Oran and
Casablanca the fighting continued for a few more days, until the defenders
were finally forced to capitulate to the enemy's superior strength.

The uncertainty as to the fate of France and her colonies in Africa, and
the rule
played by some of her top-ranking officers in this connection were factors conducive to the success of the Allied landing.

The American General Clark, for example, had landed secretly by submarine in Algiers towards the end of October and had discussed the details of the capture of North Africa with certain pre-Allied French staff officers.

In accordance with instructions from the Wehrmacht High Command, the Commander in Chief, South, was to make preparations for the transfer of a fighter group, with all its necessary ground personnel, to support the defensive battle being fought by the French forces in Tunisia. The Wehrmacht High Command, however, reserved the right to give the final order to start the transfer operation.

The Commander in Chief, South, was well aware of the poor relationship prevailing between the Italians and the French, and the acute tension characterizing their association in Tunisia was no secret to him. As a result, there was a very real danger that the French would refuse to cooperate in any joint action involving the participation of Italian forces.

In a conference with Mussolini, Fieldmarshal Rommelberg assured the promise that Italy would not send any troops into Tunisia.

During the night of 4/9 November, a message was received from the Wehrmacht High Command to the effect that

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the French government had informed the Resident General of Tunis, Admiral Esteva, of the impending transfer of German fighter aircraft to Tunis. It was not yet certain, however, just what degree of influence Marshal Petain might be able to exercise on the civilian officials and troops in French North Africa. The Commander in Chief, South, was therefore advised to communicate directly with the Resident General in Tunis and to present his case in accordance with the agreement already reached with the French government.

On 9 November, Admiral Esteva was visited by an officer who explained the nature of the agreement with the French government, and before noon on the same day a fighter group and security company (schleppguppe) from the command of the Commander in Chief, South, were airlifted into Tunis. The security company was made up entirely of carefully selected personnel, well-trained and perfectly equipped for ground fighting. As the fighter group landed, a French armed reconnaissance car drew up alongside each aircraft and trained its guns on it.

This action made it clear to the Commander in Chief, South, that the French troops could hardly be counted upon to make common cause with the Germans against the Allies.

The security company, armed with machine-guns and antitank guns, had taken up its defense position behind the hangars of the airfield, and had laid mines around the French reconnaissance cars. The latter were quickly withdrawn, and the airfield
was left in German hands.

In consideration of the facts that the major part of a French division was stationed at Tunis and that the military port of Bizerte was occupied by a fairly strong French garrison, efforts were made to gain time through negotiations while reinforcing the German troops to such an extent that the French would not dare to offer active resistance.

The evacuation of troops in Africa caused by the withdrawal of Rommel's army had been exploited to form new fighting units, some of which were brought to Bizerte by Italian torpedo boats and some of which were flown into Tunisia. In this way, two German forces were formed to capture the port of Bizerte and the airfields of Tunisia.

The first reinforcement group consisted of two parachute regiments (without their jump equipment) from Germany. They were particularly suitable for air transport because of the fact that their heavy weapons could be dismantled for shipment. On 16 November the Regiment Koch, with two battalions, arrived in Tunisia.

Command over all the troops arriving in Tunisia was entrusted to a colonel appointed by the Wehrmacht High Command.

By the end of November, the following troops were under the command of the Air Commissary, Tunis (Fliegerführer Tunis), General Halderhaus:

531 Single-Engine Fighter Wing
51st Single-Engine Fighter Wing
one group of dive-bombers
one group of close-support aircraft (equipped with Me-109's).
It was Fieldmarshal Keitel's intention to extend the new bridgehead towards the west as rapidly as possible. The mountainous terrain, with its easily-held passes in western and southern Tunisia, was conducive to his plan.

Negotiations in Tunis had begun not unfavourably. Admiral Darlan was clearly loyal to the Vichy regime. General Darlan, however, the Minister of War and at the same time commander of the French divisions, seemed uncomfortable about the measures taken by the German command, although he remained from stating his objections openly.

When Germany's representatives, in reply to a direct question from the French officials, explained that no Italian troops would be employed in Tunisia, the French officials promised to provide billets and food for the German troops. At this point they admitted that they were acting on explicit instructions from Marshal Pétain.

Ambassador Palm and General Wallhausen from the Foreign Office (Aussenministerium) were of very great assistance in the frequently difficult discussions with the French. On 13 November, the French promptly broke off the negotiations (which had proved to be even more fruitful) when—about at noon—an Italian fighter group landed in Tunis and Italian forces debarked.
free torpedo boats in Bizerte.

The German representatives were accused of having broken their word.

The French Division Berge left Tunis for Baja.

In the meantime, on 11 November, German and Italian troops had advanced into a hitherto peaceful zone of French territory, which had been kept free of military operations as far as in compliance with the terms of the armistice. This was the death-knell to any thought of combined French-German operations; in view of the situation, occupation had become a military necessity.

The colonel appointed by the Wehrmacht High Command had failed to grasp the meaning of his mission. Instead of extending the bridgehead westwards towards the Celle-Smida and mining or destroying the highways and possess, he kept his forces in Bizerte and Tunis.

On 16 November, he was replaced by General der Panzertruppen Heusing, who was to take over the XX Army Corps, still in process of being activated.

The Air Commander, Tunis, was given the following missions:

a) to stop the advance of the enemy along the east-west highways
   and to destroy buildings of historical interest;
b) to support the advance of his own troops; and

c) to set up fighter aircraft defenses for the port of Bizerte
and the airfields at Tunis.

In addition, he was to follow any orders issued by the Second Air Fleet
with respect to:

d) providing air cover for friendly convoy ships and air transports
approaching the coast; or

e) providing daylight fighter escorts for the heavy bomber units
taking off from Sardinia and Sicily for operations in the
Tunisian theater.

After the capture of Bone, on 12 November, by two Allied parachute
companies, the Allies shifted all unloading operations to Bengio and Bone.
Both cities were immediately raided by German bombers.

The Luftwaffe also took steps to combat enemy day and night fighter
activity at Maison Blanche (Algiers), Bengio, and Bone.

German airships were also transferred from Sicily to Bizerte in order
to protect the Axis sea lanes and to attack the enemy landing force.

The Allied Landing

The pressing difficulties in which Russia found herself in the summer
of 1943 required definite measures on the part of the Allies, the United
States and
Great Britain.

The long-cherished plans for the establishment of a second front on the
Continental in France, had broken down as a result of Churchill's objections.
Thus, on 30 July 1942, President Roosevelt, as Commander in Chief, de-
cided on an invasion of Africa.

Developments in the war in the Pacific had brought the American victory
in the naval battle near the Midway Islands, so that the United States was
now in a better position to place shipping space and troops at the disposal
of Operation TORCH. Tunis, with its ports of Bizerte and Tunis, was the
most desirable target, for it could be developed into an air base from which
to move against central and eastern Europe, and especially against Italy.
At the same time, a successful landing there would threaten the rear of
Rommel's Army, then fighting in Egypt.

Any attempt to approach Bizerte and Tunis directly would mean "throwing
the convoy into the jaws of the Axis air forces based on Sicily and Sardinia
and thus exposing them to extremely heavy losses". Thus the landing forces
would have to go ashore somewhere outside the range of these air forces.

The pleasures of the African invasion contained the landing of one force
on the Atlantic coast of French Morocco.
and of two additional forces on the Mediterranean coast of French North Africa.

In order to placate French resistance to the seizure of the ports, it was decided that TORCH should be principally an American undertaking, with an American commander (Eisenhower) at its head. It was also agreed that American troops should be the first to go ashore.\(^\text{13}\)

The attitude of Spain was still an uncertain factor. Acting independently or under the influence of Germany, it was possible that France might decide to block the Straits of Gibraltar. The airfield there was completely at the mercy of Spanish artillery.

It was for this reason that Eisenhower placed great emphasis on the landing of the Western Task Force on the Atlantic coast. There was no way of destroying contact between Casablanca and America.

Consideration also had to be given to the fact that a concentration of US strength in French Morocco was bound to affect Spain’s attitude.

The Western Task Force, which was to capture Casablanca, was to be made up of American troops; the detailed planning for the operation was done in Washington.

\(^{13}\) - The Army Air Force in World War II.