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REASONS FOR ROMMEL'S SUCCESS

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List of abbreviations (cont'd.)

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- Sources: 1. Personal:
- a. Experiences gained as Commander of the 104th Schuetzen [Rifle] Regiment in Africa, April - July 1941, and in special missions ordered by Rommel at that time.
 - b. Events and conferences in which I participated as member of the Kirchheim Commission (Tropical Region Special Staff) in Africa, April - May 1942.
 - c. Conferences held 1942/1943, in my capacity as Director of Training of the Panzer Troops School, with commanders returned from Africa.
 - d. List of officers participating in the campaign, and their reaction (see Annexes 2 and 3).
2. Documents: "The War in North Africa" (Department of Military Art and Engineering, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York 1945).
- Sketches and overlays: 8 sketches on various scales, mostly 1:500,000
(German Map of the World)
- List of abbreviations:
- | | | |
|----------|---|--|
| D. A. K. | - | Deutsches Afrika Korps |
| Flak | - | Flieger-Abwehr Kanone [antiaircraft gun] |
| Komp. | - | Kompanie [Co.] |
| le Div. | - | leichte Division [light Div.] |
| M. G. | - | Maschinengewehr [M. G.] |
| Mot. | - | Motorisiert [motorized] |

REASONS FOR ROMMEL'S SUCCESSES IN AFRICA 1941/1942

Author: Generalmajor Hans-Henning von Holtzendorff

I. GENERAL SURVEY

Reasons for Rommel's Successes. When studying Rommel's successes, the question straightaway arises: What were the reasons for his successes? This question occupied friend and foe alike even while the campaign in Africa was in progress. The successes surprised everyone, and the British soldier who takes pride in his good sportsmanship spontaneously honored him at that time by calling him "dear old Rommel."

The reasons may be found in three facts:

1. Rommel's peculiar personality, which made him especially fitted for conducting a war under the conditions existing in North Africa. Not only was he unsparing of himself personally, bold in his decisions and possessed of strong nerves, but he also had the gift of discovering new methods of fighting and of employing surprise and improvisation.

2. The British custom of conducting war according to certain methods, which furnished special targets for Rommel's tactics, whereas the British troops themselves were excellent in equipment and morale. This is especially true of the tactics of the armored units.

3. The theater of war itself, with its predominatingly desert character which opened up special opportunities to a daring commander, and was in many respects comparable to the conditions presenting themselves in the conduct of naval warfare.

1. Why Was Success Unexpected?

Colonial Experiences and Equipment

The successes were all the more surprising, as the British were in possession of experiences gained in many years of colonial warfare down to the most recent times, were familiar with the theater of war itself as a result of their fighting with the Italians, and all their equipment employed there was geared for war in tropical regions.

In contrast to these facts, Rommel himself had no experience in overseas theaters of war. The equipment of the German units for campaigning in Africa was spotty. Their units possessed no colonial experience whatever, while the Italian units still located in Africa were inferior in their armament, especially as to armor and antitank defense.

An Italian sector division, for example, which was in line at Sidi Omar in July 1941, had brought along Austrian mountain guns of the First World War to serve as Pak. These were useless for this purpose, because of their limited traverse, their insufficient optical instruments, and low penetrating power.

Relative Strengths. Relative strengths were always unfavorable for Rommel. The forces encircled at Tobruk, in the spring of 1941, for example, were stronger particularly as far as artillery was concerned, than the German-Italian forces encircling them.

Until the battle of Sollum (June 1941) the superiority in numbers existing on the Egyptian border, especially in armored reconnaissance units, was overwhelming. In the battle of Sollum itself about 400 British tanks were opposed to 150 German Panzers. Prior to the summer offensive

of 1942, Rommel made the remark that he was forced "to strike now" [sic], because he had never yet and never again would have such a favorable situation with respect to armor (approximately 300 German Panzers in addition to 100 Italian Panzers of a minimum combat value, as opposed to 600 British tanks).

Supply Situation. The supply situation, which in the case of Africa in particular was of decisive importance, was obviously also in favor of the British. In addition to the supply route across the Mediterranean Sea, which was subject to interference for both sides, the British were able to use the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope which, while long, was almost free of danger. Egypt represented a safe supply base for rations and other items, compared with the insignificant auxiliary sources of supply in Cyrenaica and Tripoli (300 and 1,500 km from the Egyptian border at Sollum).

In addition to communication by road and sea, an efficient railroad line established connection with Marsa-Matruk, directly behind the British front line (400 km). In the course of the winter of 1941/42 this railroad was extended to Capuzzo. The sole German-Italian supply route, the Via Balbia, was cut for about 80 km at Tobruk until this town was captured in the summer of 1942. We were unable to make a temporary improvement in the detour before the summer of 1941.

Air Bases. Finally, the Egyptian airfields made it possible for planes to take off in any weather and in the dark, while the airfields in Italian North Africa permitted neither take-off nor landing in case of "Ghibli" (sandstorm).

Skilful Leadership Sole Means to Offset Handicaps

To gain success, Rommel had to offset all these disadvantages by skilful leadership, exploitation of the good training and devotedness of the German units, and by skilful employment of the Italian troops to the limit of their capacity.

He was able to accomplish all this, until for the first time in the winter of 1941/42 the enemy's superiority in materiel became temporarily so overwhelming that Rommel's forces were simply crushed. Later this situation repeated itself with definitive results at El Alamein. But even then he succeeded, contrary to all expectations, in withdrawing the mass of his troops to Tunisia, a distance of more than 2,000 km.

The following paragraphs will show the reasons for his successes in detail and give examples.

1. Rommel's Personality

Rommel in World War I. Rommel's book "Infanterie Greift An" ["The Infantry Attacks"] which he wrote when an instructor in tactics, for use at officer candidate schools and with troops, and in which he described his experiences in the First World War in a fascinating manner, provides a good clue to the understanding of his personality.

It shows him to be master of minor combat under special terrain conditions. When a platoon leader in the Argonne Forest, he devised his own system of pillbox fighting. As company and battalion commander of a mountain infantry battalion, he was awarded the decoration "Pour Le Merite" for taking Monte Matajur by storm and capturing 10,000 Italians at Longarone with a handful of men. It was an irony of fate that he won

the highest German war decoration when fighting against the Italians, for whom he later regained North Africa.

In the mountain warfare in Rumania he devised an effective new type of combat by the clever use of telephone and machine gun.

The same traits of character which become apparent here, later assisted him in obtaining his successes in Africa on a larger scale.

Personal Activity in Africa. Physically tough and hardened, he recklessly exposed himself to danger and did not spare himself physically. Rommel, the Commander, was encountered in the very front line at all hours of the day or night, suddenly and unannounced. He always exercised his command from the very front line. In the spring of 1941 his command post lay a few kilometers in front of Tobruk; later on, in Bardia with Tobruk in his rear, while the Italian High Command was stationed at Cyrene (200 km west of Tobruk).

In the winter of 1941/42 he had a special armored command group organized for himself, which consisted of three Panzer III's, three Panzerspahwagen [armored personnel carriers], all furnished with special radio equipment. This enabled him to exercise command as the situation required, either on Panzers in an armored fight or in the faster armored reconnaissance cars while on the march, and to maintain rearward communication with his headquarters.

Bold Decisions and Strong Nerves. He astounded commanders on the other side by the boldness of his decisions, which he often based on innovations, and which on many occasions even seemed "extravagant" [sic] to his own subordinates.

An example of this was his march through the desert in the first advance in 1941, when he led some elements of his forces via Mekilli and took several British generals so much by surprise that they drove into the lines of the German troops and were captured.

To be sure, he did make extreme demands on troops and materiel, and his subordinate commanders frequently groaned at his stubbornness and his personal interference.

Thanks to his strong nerves, he was able to endure the numerous crises in Africa and was none the worse for it.

Three times in the spring of 1941 (April, May, and June) the situation hung by a thread. Each time the outcome of the campaign was at stake, because a reverse entailed the abandonment of the siege of Tobruk, if not the loss of the forces at Bardia. Rommel's nerves won out. The most typical example was the battle of Sollum in June 1941. At that time he snatched almost certain victory out of Wavell's hands. This incident also illustrates Rommel's correct estimate of the mentality of the enemy commander and his inventive genius when everything depended on deceiving the enemy!

On 15 June 1941 the British, in vastly superior force, including about 400 tanks, had effected a breakthrough of the line of security then being organized on the Egyptian border, and had taken Capuzzo and Sollum. The counterattack of the mobile forces -- elements of the 15th Panzer Division -- from Bardia on Capuzzo had been repulsed, and Halfaya Pass cut off.

If the British Commander were to keep his forces together and advance west the next day via Bardia along the coastal road, or directly from Capuzzo, Tobruk could not be held, and the troops at Bardia, probably also the greatest part of the equipment in front of Tobruk, would be lost. This would be particularly certain if the large and strong garrison occupying Tobruk were to make a vigorous sortie.

Rommel staked everything on one card. He ordered Halfaya Pass held at all cost, so as to cut the British off from the important coastal supply road to Sollum. In the meantime the British had to resort to the detour through the desert over the hilly ground 40 km east of Bir Habata. The garrison (reinforced 1st Battalion, 104th Rifle Regiment, under the command of Captain Bach) succeeded in carrying out the order.

On the south edge of Bardia, which was not yet fully able to defend itself, he placed only weak engineer forces and immobile Panzers of the 15th Panzer Division.

The armored units of the Italian Division "Ariete," which were not fully capable of going into battle, were ordered to advance from Tobruk in the direction of el Azeiz, producing as much dust as possible, in order to mislead the enemy reconnaissance into the belief that the main forces were approaching from that direction. They were to avoid a fight.

He moved all his mobile German Panzers, artillery, and motorized infantry south into the desert, under cover of a strongpoint (Hill 203 between Bardia and Sidi Omar) which was still in his hands, and attacked the enemy flank via Sidi Omar the morning of 16 June. For this action he had at his disposal about 100 Panzers of the 5th Light Division, which

stood at el Adem as reserve of the besieging army, and about 40 still serviceable Panzers of the 15th Panzer Division from Bardia.

He had not miscalculated the effect of this action on the British, whose sensitivity concerning their flanks he had taken into account.

The enemy became uncertain of himself, as was evidenced by his incautious use of radio which the German command was able to exploit by means of an intercept company immediately following the operations echelon.

Instead of throwing the bulk of the tanks, numbering at least 300, that stood in the area of Capuzzo--Sollum--Sidi-Omar as an entire unit against the attacking group (which was far inferior in force), the enemy diverted to the south several rather small units, which were smashed in detail.

In the evening the British decided to withdraw and succeeded in carrying out their intention as far as the main body of their infantry was concerned. However, they left behind them on the battlefield more than 200 tanks, immobilized by battle action, mechanical damage, or empty fuel tanks, and therefore were unable to execute a large-scale attack until November 1941.

Occasional Reverses. It is comprehensible that Rommel's sometimes excessively daring operations also led to reverses, like the first two surprise attacks on Tobruk in the middle of April and on 1 May 1941. However, it was necessary to risk such daring operations if the situation in Africa was to be mastered at all. This could not be accomplished by ordinary means.

2. Rommel's Methods

New Combat Methods. Another reason for his success was his ability to recognize quickly the necessity of adapting warfare to the conditions of a different kind of theater of war, and to invent new and effective combat methods and expedients and convey them to the troops by rapid and effective training.

Attaching Paks to Unarmored Combatants. In contrast to the European theater of war, the basic difference of the African theater lay in the fact that the unarmored combatant, the infantryman and the man on the ordinary motor vehicle, was helplessly exposed to the Panzer or armored reconnaissance car. Whereas in normal European terrain these men were almost always able to avoid being overrun or seen by taking cover behind organized positions, in villages, woods, etc., on the other hand, in the open terrain of the desert every encounter was fatal for them. It was also impossible for them to dig themselves in quickly, as almost everywhere, scarcely 50 cm under the sand, was hard calcareous rock, in which cover could be had only by blasting or with the pickaxe.

But the organization and equipment of the German units did not take this fact into account and neither did that of the Italians. The latter had made adequate provision only as far as their permanent fortifications in Tobruk were concerned.

New Organization. To meet this situation, Rommel ordered that rifle and machine gun units always have armor-piercing weapons attached to them.

In movements, this arrangement led initially to increasing the number of Paks and antitank rifles in the rifle units, and to organizing

escorts for supply columns on threatened stretches of roads. These escorts were provided with Flak or repaired armored vehicles for the protection of the convoys. Later, the T/Os were appropriately changed and riflemen in particular were reduced in numbers as compared to Panzers, armored reconnaissance cars, and artillery.

New System of Field Fortifications. He introduced a special strong-point [Stuetzpunkt] system for position warfare, which also provided for attaching armor-piercing weapons to the smallest rifle unit (squad). In addition, he demanded all-around defense, and that invisibility be effected by not letting anything appear above ground level.

In giving these orders, Rommel was influenced by the unpleasant experiences he had with the bunkers of the permanent fortifications of Tobruk, which had been skilfully laid out by the Italians and were stubbornly defended by the British in the surprise raid in April and the attack in May.

As early as 4 May -- in the meantime he himself had crawled around through every bunker on the Ras Mdaua Front which had been captured but was still under continuous fire -- he issued the order for the organization of the rearward position at Gazala according to the latest principles, attaching personally drawn sketches indicating how these measures were to be executed. He kept himself currently informed about the progress of the work and how it was meeting the test by flights in his "Storch" [Liaison airplane] and by constant conferences with the German and Italian authorities in charge of the construction of the position.

On this basis the line of strongpoints from Sidi Omar to Halfaya

Pass was organized with improvements after the battle of Sollum in July 1941, as was the investing front of Tobruk.

The system made it possible to contain the enemy even with immobile troops of a comparatively low combat value, or to force him to swing far out into the desert. In this manner, valuable mechanized and motorized units were made available for mobile use in attacking.

88-mm Flak Used Against Panzers. The problem of antitank defense became accentuated when, beginning May 1941, the British infantry tank "Mark II" appeared in rather large numbers at Tobruk and especially on the Egyptian border. Most of the German antitank weapons and tank guns were unable to pierce the frontal 80-mm armor of this tank. In this instance, Rommel started assigning as a regular thing 80-mm Flak units to the strongpoints as well as the mobile Panzer units. This measure proved its value in a decisive manner in the battle of Sollum in 1941. Later, the 88-mm Flak guns which could no longer be used for anti-aircraft fire because of excessive wear on the barrels, were kept in Africa and continued to be used in the strongpoints as antitank batteries.

Italian Field Guns Captured at Bardia Used as Pak. The temporary equipment of the strongpoint line Sidi Omar -- Halfaya Pass with anti-tank weapons is a good example of Rommel's "system of improvisation" [quotes sic].

Initially, these strongpoints were occupied by German units. They were to be relieved by Italian units. The relief threatened to turn into a failure because of the fact that the Italians had brought along Pak equipment which was wholly inadequate, while the Germans needed their

Pak for the mobile missions. Rommel then issued orders that the Italian field guns, hundreds of which were still lying around in Bardia (British booty from the winter of 1940/41 and only partially destroyed), be salvaged by an Italian artillery repair shop which was brought to Bardia. This made it possible for every battalion strongpoint to be equipped with a non-motorized German company, at first with six, and later with twelve such guns, and at the same time to train it by the German artillery regiments. In view of the fact that good German personnel was available, and the method of laying was simple, the first phase was completed in two weeks and the strongpoints were now able to defend themselves at least to some extent. The German motorized units could now be withdrawn.

3. Rommel and the Italians

Situation of the Italian Africa Army at the Time of Rommel's

Arrival. When Rommel went to Africa in February 1941, he found an Italian Army that was completely demoralized and in process of dissolution. Despite its superiority in numbers as compared to Wavell's British Army, and despite the fortifications in Bardia and Tobruk, it had been driven back within a few weeks from Marsa Matruk as far as Syrte and had lost two thirds of its strength. A high-ranking German officer sent to Tripoli preceding Rommel to estimate the situation, had been of the opinion that it was not possible to hold Tripoli in view of the condition of the Italian Army.

First German Units in Africa. At first Rommel brought with him only a special unit intended to serve as a blocking unit for Tripoli: The 5th Light Division had been organized for this purpose alone and possessed

equipment which was inadequate for desert warfare, owing to inexperience with Africa. Compared to the troops organized for the campaign in France, it did not amount to even so much as half a Panzer division.

The 15th Panzer Division did not arrive until April and May, partially without vehicles, as the 104th Rifle Regiment and the 33d Panzer Engineer Battalion had to be moved to Tobruk by air.

Therefore, as far as numbers are concerned, Rommel had to depend on the Italians, especially in regard to infantry.

Relationship with the Italian High Command. With these weak German forces Rommel not only held Tripoli, but swept the Italian High Command and troops along with him and in less than two months recaptured all the territory the victorious British Eighth Army had gained, with the exception of Tobruk.

This he did despite the fact that, for reasons of prestige, he was nominally under the Italian High Command and continuously met with difficulties from that quarter which can be traced to the comprehensible inferiority complex of the Italian High Command following their defeat.

In the second offensive in the winter of 1941/42, the Italian High Command in Africa as well as the Italian Chief of Staff desperately opposed the idea of a counteroffensive. As Rommel personally told the writer in April 1942, the Italian authorities considered the plan to be sheer madness and appealed to Mussolini. A few weeks later Cyrenaica was again in the hands of Rommel, who had paid no heed to any objections.

What was the secret?

Reluctant Recognition by the Italians. The secret consisted primarily of the powerful personality of Rommel, who again and again brought under his spell the Italian Command that was placed above him, although he was not a diplomat by any means, but often decidedly abrupt and uncivil. However, he always preserved the outward appearance of prestige, and his personal unpretentiousness and unequalled personal indefatigableness commanded respect and appreciation even from those who at first were reluctant to admit his merits. Two instances will serve as examples:

a. The writer was present at a conference between Gariboldi, the Italian Commander in Chief, and Colonel Lami, the Commander of the Italian Special Service Troops for Road Construction and Water Supply. Gariboldi had just returned from a conference with Rommel, in the course of which an agreement had been reached concerning the employment of these troops which were directly under the Italian High Command. Colonel Lami was called outside and returned with the information that an amending order had just come in from Rommel. Thereupon General Gariboldi remarked: "We agreed to something different half an hour ago, but if Rommel wants it that way, do it that way."

b. A sector division arriving from Tripoli in July 1941 was receiving its instructions from the writer as to its missions in the strongpoints. At the very start, the division commander displayed copies of Rommel's sketches for the construction of military works and remarked: "The Rommel System! We have already been informed about it."

Employment of Italian Units Within the Limits of Their Capacity.

Within a very short time Rommel formed a clear picture as to the weaknesses and strengths of the Italians and the demands he could make upon them. He acted in accordance with the observations he had made and was able to extract surprising results from his Italian units. The Italian soldier was willing and made few demands. Aside from a few exceptions, his combat training did not prepare him for stiff fighting. He was inclined to be panicky, as was shown back in the days of the Spanish War, but in general did not fail to put up a good fight, if he had someone to lean on and had energetic commanders and good rations.

The intermediate and lower commanders of the Italians were, with the exception of a few experienced colonial soldiers, lacking in initiative and adaptability.

The materiel was inferior in every respect, particularly the tanks and antitank guns which play a decisive role in desert warfare.

The divisions varied utterly in combat value, depending on their place of origin -- Northern or Southern Italy.

For missions which required skilful command and good combat training, and in regions where stiff fighting lay ahead, Rommel employed German troops as far as possible, particularly at the beginning.

In mobile warfare the Italians were "hooked on," and in position warfare they were supported by "corset stays" of small German [Kampfgruppen] combat teams.

During the fighting in front of Tobruk in the spring of 1941, Rommel had inserted the few German infantry units which were not needed for

mobile defense on the Egyptian border at the two decisive locations -- in the west, between Via Balbia and Ras Mdaa; in the south, north of El Adem. He placed the Italian division weakest in morale on the east front with its rear toward Egypt, where a "trickling to the rear" [quotes sig] did not lead back home. The others were distributed to the more or less important sectors of the investing front according to their combat value. The especially good Bersaglieri and artillery units of the "Ariete" Division were employed on the Egyptian border even at that time, while the outmoded tanks remained in front of Tobruk as reserve.

When the line Sidi-Omar -- Halfaya Pass was organized, the bulk of the forces garrisoning the strongpoints (infantry and artillery) was provided by Italian nonmotorized divisions. In every battalion strongpoint a German oasis company and 88-mm Flak platoons had been placed. These formed the backbone of the antitank defense. The oasis companies had originally been organized from volunteers as static infantry units with numerous machine guns and their own supply to garrison isolated desert posts. They formed the backbone of the infantry combat and, as they were in direct communication with the German sector command, they constituted at the same time a reliable system of communication for reporting the progress of combat.

During the successful defense of Halfaya Pass in June 1941 an Italian infantry company and an Italian artillery battalion, attached to the German rifle battalion there, fought excellently.

The employment of units of the battle-weary "Ariete" Division in the battle of Sollum in 1941 for feinting purposes without a serious combat mission has already been mentioned.

In subsequent fighting the Italian motorized organizations had to carry out more difficult missions, as command and training had both been improved. In this they performed satisfactorily. However, they never became equal in value to the German and British units, owing to their equipment as well as their training, command, and morale.

Good Results Obtained with Italian Special Troops. On the other hand, the labor and water supply units were excellent. Familiar with the terrain and used to the climate, they achieved much more in their special field -- construction of roads and of military works, and well-boring -- than the German engineers who suffered considerably from the heat in summer, although they worked unsparingly.

As early as May 1941 Rommel established recognition of his preference for Italian labor troops to such a degree that, although they were officially under the Italian High Command, they were actually employed as he directed.

The smooth operation of the water supply system at Tobruk and on the Sollum front, which was of decisive importance in desert warfare, the speedy construction of the Gazala Position -- designed as a withdrawal position in the event of a reverse at Tobruk -- the construction of the Tobruk detour (80 km through the desert), and the speedy completion of the strong points on the Egyptian border in July can be traced primarily to the proper employment of these units. As a result, the two weak

German engineer battalions, which had suffered considerably during the fighting at Tobruk, were released for important missions on the fighting front, especially mine laying.

In like manner the Italian motor vehicle columns, in some instances under German command, performed very satisfactorily. In view of the constant shortage of transportation, which forced us to use combat vehicles of the Panzer divisions as supply columns, this was a substantial aid.

Employment of Italian Units for Feinting Operations. The difference in the use of German and Italian units was soon noted by the enemy. Under ordinary circumstances, it enabled him to determine where the main effort would be made in a situation involving attack or defense.

This fact in turn gave Rommel opportunity to resort to feints. Prior to the attack on Tobruk, he moved the German attack troops on the evening of 30 April 1941 from the Via Balbia 20 km to the south, and then with these forces executed an attack upon Ras Mdaa from Acroma in the former Italian sector. The deception was successful, if only partially, since the Tobruk garrison had received reinforcements across the sea.

Rommel's Later Nimbus with the Italians. As a result of his successes in the spring and summer of 1941, the Italians almost surrounded him with a halo. The simple soldier trusted him blindly, and the Command accepted as final, instructions from him which it did not even understand.

Even at that time his name was worth a division.

Later in the warfare of movement he often exercised command by attaching himself, with his Panzer command echelon and a small assault

assault
of command

detachment consisting of the most modern Panzers, to the Italian motorized units. He issued instructions personally to the latter, carrying them up to the front with him, while he gave his orders to the German units by radio and allowed them a longer rein.

2. Weaknesses of the British Combat Methods and How Rommel Exploited Them.
Combat Value of the British Army in Africa

The British Army in Africa confronting Rommel was an opponent that had to be taken very seriously.

The morale of the troops was excellent. It was on the same level as the morale of the German units, was far superior to that of the Italians, and furnished the impetus for a victorious advance.

This statement applies in the same measure to the English as well as to the Australian and South African units. In some respects the two last-mentioned forces were superior to the English units, as they were accustomed to the hot climate, while the Indians were rather inferior.

The English soldier of long service was a master in small-scale warfare (commando raids, long-range reconnaissance in the desert) and worked with sportsmanlike skill.

As a result of years of experience in the colonies, his equipment was up-to-date and appropriate. It was superior in many respects to that of the Germans, and so far above that of the Italians that no comparison could be made.

Many months of fighting had made the British familiar with the theater of war and the climate. They were in possession of the Italian

fortifications and had made appropriate improvements. Tobruk was fully capable of defense and Bardia partially so. They had to fear no surprise from that direction.

British Weaknesses. Only two weaknesses could be discerned in the British:

a. The very methodical leadership of the British, not only on the part of the top-level command but also on the part of the intermediate and lower command authorities.

b. The mistakes in the use of armored units.

The British Leadership. From their campaigns in the colonies the British had learned that time worked in their favor. Their superior means were best brought to bear, if they were moved up and accumulated without haste, and if the blow was not struck until success was assured by superiority in materiel and a reliable system of supply. Such procedure required somewhat more time but saved losses which were deeply felt in view of the high-class human material and the equipment involved, both of which are hard to replace in remote theaters of war.

This method of the British was completely successful even against the Italians who were even more cautious than they.

However, at the same time it did prevent them from rapidly exploiting favorable situations whenever any risks were involved.

This holds true for the launching of operations in general, as well as the exploiting of tactical opportunities in the course of the fighting.

Rommel's Exploitation of these Weaknesses. Rommel was a master at exploiting this inflexibility of the enemy command. Almost always far

far inferior in numbers and materiel, he never gave the enemy the opportunity to overrun the German forces frontally.

Either he himself executed a surprise attack before the British were completely ready for battle and in so doing forced mobile operations upon them, thus giving full play to the versatility of the German Command in uncertain situations. In such instances a sure instinct led him to detect a momentary weakness of the enemy, as in the case of Cyrenaica which was twice retaken, once at the beginning of 1941 and again in 1942.

Or he struck the decisive blow with such boldness and feinted with such cleverness that he managed to confuse the enemy commander for a time. He would then exploit the tactical advantage thus gained and turn it into a success, as he did in the battle of Sillun in 1941, when he exploited the sensitivity of the British for their flanks, or in the summer of 1942, when he dared to envelop the south flank and overpowered the British tanks at Knights-Bridge, deep in the rear of the Gazala Position.

In the same manner he correctly appraised the commander of the opposing forces, Cunningham, in the fall of 1941 and completely outmaneuvered him in the first phase of the battle, so that the latter wanted to order a retreat to Egypt. Only the fact that Cunningham was relieved on the battlefield by his Commander in Chief, and that Ritchie possessed strong nerves and disposed of materiel reserves which had just arrived, decided the outcome of the battle in favor of the British. Wedged in between Tobruk and the main body of the superior British

forces, Rommel's forces seemed lost. But again he succeeded in breaking out at the last moment, because the British Command did not act quickly enough.

The attack on Tobruk collapsed twice in the spring of 1941 owing to the surprising strength of the Italian fortifications and the stubborn British defense. When he attacked for the third time in the summer of 1942, Rommel again invented a new plan, taking the mentality of the British into account. Then, he advanced with the main body of the mobile forces in the direction of Gambut, by-passing Tobruk to the south, turned around the next night and attacked Tobruk from the southeast. He left only the 90th Light Division remaining opposite the enemy on the Egyptian front. This time the enemy was taken by surprise, and the fortress fell within a short time. The defense on that part of the front which was attacked had not yet been sufficiently organized by the British, as they had expected only a siege as in 1941 or an attack from the west and south for the time being. Immediately following this, Rommel again surprised his opponent with another feint.

As early as 21 June 1942, that is, immediately after the surrender of Tobruk, Rommel moved the German Africa Corps toward the southeast into the desert, seemingly against the south flank of the El Alamein Position, while the 90th Light Division captured Marsa Matruk. During the night 29/30 June he moved the Corps north, and on the following morning made a surprise attack, directly from march column, against the center of the fortified front, and seized its middle works.

Methodical Preparations of the British for the Attack. The fact that the British never attacked until they had completed their preparations, the different stages of which could usually be discerned, usually gave Rommel time to take countermeasures.

From April until June 1941 he never had enough troops available to besiege Tobruk in sufficiently strong force and at the same time resist the enemy forces on the Egyptian border which were steadily increasing in number.

Three times the British advanced in superior force against the German-Italian units securing the position of Capuzzo--Halfaya Pass.

But they came at such regular intervals (15th of the month), and the tactics of their approach were so similar each time, that on every occasion Rommel was able to effect troop movements between the Tobruk and Sollum fronts in time and repulse the enemy in a counterattack. The British action was always preceded by reinforcing the screen of armored reconnaissance cars and establishing dumps on the plateau. Traffic also increased on the nearest ascending slope east of Halfaya Pass (at Bir Habata).

After the battle of Sollum some of the German subordinate commanders expected another British advance the middle of July 1941, and felt concern because the front was not yet fully capable of defense. Rommel had a different opinion. He said: "They won't come yet," and allowed his overworked engineers a rest in mine laying. Disregarding the objections of the sector commander, he even took the risk of withdrawing Pak units from the strong points for the mobile divisions without immediate replacement.

His estimate of the situation proved to be correct: The enemy was not yet prepared.

Uncertainty in the Minds of the British Command Caused by Rommel's Reputation. It can be assumed that the feeling of being confronted by such an incalculable enemy also exerted an unfavorable influence on the British Command at one time or another. In conversations between German subordinate commanders the remark was often made: "I would not like to have Rommel for an opponent. He always does the very thing that is least expected."

The British Inventor of Tanks. British tank tactics were the second weak point on the enemy side. There is an element of the tragic in the fact that it was an Englishman -- Fuller, later made a General -- who recognized the importance of the tank in modern warfare for the first time and pointed out the correct manner of its use, and that the British gained the first big success with the new weapon -- in the tank battle of Cambrai on 20 November 1917. Here, too, the "prophet is not without honor save in his own country." As early as 1918 his suggestions were disregarded and the tanks were attached to the infantry. Fuller's idea of independent mixed tank units was kept alive in England for a short time following the war. Then Fuller was pushed aside, and the tank became more and more an auxiliary weapon of the infantry, as in France.

German Panzer Tactics. When the German Panzer arm was organized, Fuller's ideas and the first regulations gotten out by him were applied. The book by Guderian (now Generaloberst) that appeared just before the war, gives information on this subject.

The two main points were:

a. Welding together of Panzers and their auxiliary weapons (motorised infantry, artillery, engineers, Pak and signal communication units) by peacetime organization and training.

b. Keeping Panzer Units Intact in Battle. The German Army owed its superiority in Europe from 1939 until 1942 to these two factors, constantly drilled in during peacetime and soundly applied in war. They also formed the basis for Rommel's successes in Africa against the British, despite the fact that Rommel himself did not come from the Panzer arm but from the infantry. He did not get a Panzer division until the campaign in France, and even in Africa he used to have many an argument with his Panzer commanders about some impossible demand made on the Panzers.

Comparison of Numbers and Types of Tanks on Both Sides. Materiel superiority was always with the British as far as numbers were concerned, and in the case of the armored reconnaissance car this superiority was in fact overwhelming. By attaching the latter to artillery as mobile armored observation, the British used them in a very clever way.

As far as the different types of tanks are concerned, the advantages and disadvantages on both sides were about even. The German Panzers III and IV were slightly superior to most of the British tanks, while the Panzer II was weaker. On the other hand, the British infantry tank "Mark II" was so heavily armored that its front could not be pierced by tanks and antitank guns. It could only be attacked by frontal fire

simultaneously with a flank attack, as its speed was less than that of the German Panzers III and IV. Here, too, the outcome depended on the manner in which they were employed in general, and on the armored tactics applied in the individual unit as a result of better training.

The British Tendency to Disperse Tanks. The British showed a tendency to apportion tanks to groups, sometimes splitting up units, as they did when developing for the battle at Sollum in June 1941. Consequently, they were unable to assemble them in time at decisive points and fell easy prey in local actions to the German Panzer assault group that was held intact under close unit control. In these actions they proved to be weaker despite their superiority in total numbers.

Frequently contact between British tanks and infantry was lost. Consequently, initial successes of the tanks could not be exploited.

Cooperation Between Tanks and Antitank Weapons. For a long time the British were unable to cope with the German method of using Panzers and either Pak or 88-mm Flak together. They hurled themselves against the strongpoints at Halfaya Pass and on Hill 203 in the battle of Sollum, or against Pak units among the Panzers, as they did in the spring and summer of 1941, where they bled themselves to death.

Not before the fighting at El Alamein did they learn how to adapt themselves to the German tactics. At that time they disposed of such superior numbers, reinforced by high-class tank and antitank materiel, that no skill in command was able to offset this superiority.

To this was added the increasing superiority in the air, which was numerically so tremendous and had gained such importance because of the proximity of the airbase in Egypt at El Alamein, that it exerted a decisive influence on ground warfare, including the art of command.

3.

The Theater of War

Warfare in the Desert. Some of Rommel's critics say that he was not a great general.

This may be true if we understand by that term the planner of grand strategy who thinks in terms of armies, as one has to do when dealing with the concentration of a field army counting millions.

The African theater of war did not require such a plan. Instead, it made other demands on the commander, which Rommel's personality was able to meet in an exceptional manner.

The North African desert presented a topography that was almost entirely lacking in natural subdivisions and which was traversable at any season. Therefore, with the exception of El Alamein and Tunisia, both sides fought with an open south flank, a situation which made rigid defense impossible and favored bold operations.

The terrain, which afforded a view over wide expanses, gave the advantage to the commander who exercised command well up at the front and made quick decisions based on personal observation. The circumstances more closely paralleled the conditions in naval actions than those in normal warfare on European terrain covered with vegetation.

Here Rommel was in his element and the versatility at the lower levels of the German Command also came into full play. In addition, Rommel's extraordinary personal faculty for orientation was of value.

The desert presented an ideal terrain for rapid operations and the employment of rather large Panzer and motorized units as complete organizations. The German divisions had been trained to operate in this manner and possessed experience gained in two such campaigns.

The time-consuming preparations which often had to be made by infantry and engineers in order to pave the way for the decisive Panzer attack, could be disregarded as a rule, except in those instances where permanent fortifications and field positions protected by mines were involved.

This fact accelerated the tempo of battle and favored the bold commander rather than the methodical one.

Great Distance from Home. Great distance from the resources at home, and limited opportunities for transportation on account of dangerous or long lines of communications overseas and extensive stretches of territory without railroads, are no drawback to one who knows how to help himself and husband his resources.

In this remote theater of war, where no communication existed with the homeland other than the radio, Rommel was able -- at least until El Alamein -- to conduct operations along elastic lines and abandon territory if the situation demanded, an advantage not shared by most commanders in other theaters of war since the winter of 1941/42.

Repair of Vehicles. Rommel was a master of improvisation. The

experiences gained in two major wars of movement by the repair service for motor vehicles and especially for Panzers, proved to be of value in the present instance. As early as 1941, captured British reports told us that one of the factors to which the British (not incorrectly) attributed Rommel's success was the much greater speed the Germans had developed in reconditioning damaged tanks.

In this manner the numerical superiority in the theater of war, which was always on the side of the British, was considerably lessened as far as the actual battle was concerned, especially after fighting that resulted in the gaining of ground. After the battle of Sollum in June 1941 more British tanks abandoned on the battlefield because of mechanical trouble fell into German hands than tanks that had been demolished by gun fire.

Conclusion.

Comparison of Hannibal to Rommel. We have to look far back in the military history of the past to find a soldier comparable to Rommel as to successes, personality, command methods, and circumstances of fate.

But when we do so, we come to one who shows a surprising parallelism -- Hannibal.

The similarity begins with personal traits: Unpretentiousness, no regard for self, popularity with the troops, compelling influence on the allies -- in the one instance the Italians, in the other the Gauls; these traits we find in both.

Like Hannibal, Rommel owes his victories to wily tactics and the correct appraisal of the mentality of the enemy commander. (Battle of Lake Trasimene.) Like Hannibal, Rommel had to gain his victories in the face of the numerical superiority of an enemy of high quality, with a few hand-picked troops from his native country and with allies of little combat value, whom he knew how to employ with psychological correctness.

The Gauls placed in the center at Cannae to receive the assault gave the African cavalry and infantry the opportunity to execute the enveloping attack in the same manner as the strongpoints with their Italian garrisons allowed Rommel to commit his Panzer units in a flank attack at Sollum and later.

Both were masters in the employment of their "mobile troops," and were not defeated until the enemy learned to apply the experience gained from his failures and fought with the same methods, supported by a crushing superiority in numbers.

Zama was not decided by the famous Roman legionary, but by the cavalry of the Roman Allies on the flanks, which at that time was in superior force and better. Similarly, El Alamein was decided by the numerically far superior Panzer forces of the British, which were not dispersed as before, but were now concentrated and to some extent were equipped with American materiel.

Hannibal like Rommel fought in a very remote theater of war and suffered from lack of support at home. The difficulties arising for the one as a consequence of the jealousy and pueriousness of the

dominating class in Carthage, were equaled in the case of the other by the lukewarmness of the Italians in their conduct of the war. This was especially true of the Italian Fleet, with very decided effects as a result of the inadequacy of the protection it afforded the line of supply. Moreover, there was the fact that, with the beginning of the Russian Campaign, Africa from necessity became a "secondary theater of war." [sic quotes]. This was most clearly demonstrated in the critical times of the fall of 1941, when two Panzer divisions destined for Africa with complete equipment for the troops were diverted to Russia at the last moment.

Both men fought in the Mediterranean region and both fought their last battle at almost the same spot, -- Zama, Kasserine Pass.

Still more peculiar than the similarity of their military careers is that of their demise: Both of them Africa-fighters, they died from poison administered by their own hands; one of them driven into exile by the political hatred of his own people and harassed to death by Rome, the other a sacrifice to a system which had "run amuck." [sic quotes].

We know the great Carthaginian only from the historical writings of his mortal enemies, the Romans; nevertheless, we gain the impression that he was a great soldier with a distinguished and extraordinary personality.

The history of Rommel's military achievements will not be written by his own people until a long time hence, if at all. But even at the present time, despite the existing war psychosis and the comprehensible

endeavor of his opponents to minimize their defeats, we can discern in the accounts of the War in Africa, particularly those written by soldiers, the respect which Rommel's leadership and personality have wrung even from the enemy.

Signed: von HOLTZENDORFF

Translated by L. A. Nowak

August 1948

Annex 2

Garmisch, 27 March 1947

Annex to "Reasons for Rommel's Successes in Africa 1941/42."

The following commanders which served under Rommel in Africa, agree in principle with the portrayal of his personality in the study "Reasons for Rommel's Successes in Africa 1941/42."

Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Nehring, C.G., German Africa Corps, March to Sept. 1942

" " " v. Vaerst, C.G., 15th Pz. Div., Dec. 1941 to May 1942 and Aug. to Nov. 1942

" " " Kleemann, C.G., 90th Light Div., April to Sept. 1942

Gen. Lt. [Maj. Gen.] Count Sponeck, C.G., 90th Light Div., Oct. 1942 to March 1943

" " " Weber, C.G., 334th Div., February to March 1943

" " " Mueller-Gebhard, Commandant of Army Rear Area and Commander (a.I.) of the German Africa Corps. (April to September 1941)

" " " Boettcher, Artillery Commander, German Africa Corps, fall 1941 to August 1942

Gen. Maj. [Brig. Gen.] Krause, Artillery Commander, German Africa Corps and Panzer Army, Dec. 1941 to March 1943

" " " Baron v. Liebenstein, C.G., 164th Light Div., fall 1942 to March 1943

" " " Jordan, Engineer Commander, Africa Panzer Army, August to September 1941

" " " Schnarrenberger, Commandant of Army Rear Area and Commandant of Tunis, Oct. 1942 to March 1943.

Annex 2Garmisch, 27 March 1947Annex to "Reasons for Rommel's Successes in Africa 1941/42."

I.

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Annex 2

II.

Gen. Maj. [Brig. Gen.] Bolbrinker, Battalion and Regimental Commander of the 5th Panzer Regiment from March to August 1941 made the following statement:

I concur in general!

1. Rommel's constant personal efforts and his practice of exercising command from the front line proved him to be highly qualified as a Kampfgruppen [combat team] commander, but seriously impaired his efficiency as an Army commander. In critical moments, orders were received from the Headquarters of the Africa Corps which often disagreed with Rommel's orders.

2. His attitude toward the Panzer arm and its employment suffered from the lack of knowledge of its technical capabilities. This attitude and his constant rejection of material and fully justified objections on the part of the Panzer commanders repeatedly caused heavy losses in materiel (especially Panzers), which then jeopardized the very idea of the mission.

In this connection, Gen. d. Pz. Tr. Nehring (himself an old Panzer regimental commander) stated:

As far as the year 1942 is concerned, the criticism as to the excessive demands on Panzers is not justified. The Panzers were suitably employed within their divisions.

Signed: von HOLZENDORFF

Translated by L. A. Nowak

August 1948

FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES - # D-024
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Annex 3Garmisch, 7 April 1947

Comments of Oberst im Gen. Stab [Colonel, General Staff Corps]
Rainer Kriebel, then Major and 1st Gen. Staff Officer of the 15th Panzer
Division from April 1941 until February 1942, on the study "Reasons
for Rommel's Successes in Africa."

1. ROMMEL'S PERSONALITY

According to my observations, the troops had great confidence in
Rommel's energy and his almost proverbial good luck. He knew how to
impart his own toughness, his optimism and will-to-conquer to every
soldier, down to the last man. His optimism often made him see the
situation in a more favorable light than it really was: However, I
have observed several times that even decisions based on an optimistic
estimate of the enemy situation, have led to great successes.

Rommel was master in the technique of deceiving the enemy. He
never tired of inventing new ruses to this end. It was his specialty
to have "dust" [sic] made by trucks, in order to simulate more Panzer
forces than were actually available. In this manner he succeeded in
causing the British always to overestimate our strength and for many
months to take our Volkswagen [general purpose cars]* for tanks.

Furthermore, Rommel's skill in employing radio intelligence and
radio deception deserves special praise.

He displayed especial skill in appraising the experiences through
which the troops passed and putting them into practice in all units
without delay. The successful method in tank fighting, involving

* Editor's note: Volkswagen, similar to Jeeps.

Annex 3

cooperation of Panzers with artillery, Flak, and armored cars, can be traced to the experience of the divisions that were engaged at Sollum.

II. THE BATTLE OF SOLLUM, 15 - 17 JUNE 1941

Beyond any question of doubt, Rommel deserves the greatest credit for the success of the battle, owing to his coolheadedness in all crisis and his employment of the 5th Light Division against the British flank. However, he scarcely interfered with the command of the 15th Panzer Division in the course of the battle, and was actually unable to do so because communication between the division and the corps was exceptionally limited. The decision to hold the encircled strongpoints and open a third counterattack with the last mobile troops of the 15th Panzer Division in the afternoon of 16 June, as well as the commitment of every last man for this counterattack, was due to the initiative of the Division Commander, Colonel Neumann-Silkow.

III. ESTIMATE OF THE BRITISH

In the beginning we were under the impression that, until June 1941, the British thought that because of their experience in the desert they were superior to our troops. It was not very long, however, before they changed their opinion. As shown by captured documents, the British later translated the regulations for armored combat in the desert that had been developed by the German troops, and used them for their own troops.

Of the British troops, the New Zealand Division deserves mention as being especially good, while the South-African Division was of lesser

combat value at that time.

In judging the value of the tanks on both sides, I want to state that the "Mark IV, V and VI" employed in the Winter Campaign of 1941/42 were superior to our tanks in speed and radius of action, equal to them in armament, but, on the other hand, were considerably inferior in armor and ammunition. Furthermore, the crews of the British armored units were inferior in marksmanship. The principal disadvantages of the heavily armored "Mark II" were its limited radius of action and its poor optical instruments.

Signed: KRIEBEL

Translated by L. A. Nowak

August 1948

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE PAPER "REASONS FOR ROMMEL'S SUCCESS IN
AFRICA, 1941-42"

by
Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin

Generalmajor [Brig. Gen.]

MS # D-084

Where written:

Garmisch (Germany)

Date SUPPLEMENT TO "REASONS FOR ROMMEL'S SUCCESS IN AFRICA

Sources:

1941 - 42

a. Personal:

By

Personal experiences as G-2 and
deputy G-3 of Panzer Army Africa.

Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin, Generalmajor a.D.

Sketches and overlays:

None

Translator: B. Bailey

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE PAPER "REASONS FOR ROMMEL'S SUCCESSES IN
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- I. Author: Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin
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 - B. Documents: Personal experiences as G-2 and deputy G-3
of Panzer Army Africa.
- V. Abbreviations: None

As former G-2, from 1 July 41 to 31 May 42, and as deputy G-3, from 1 June 42 to 31 August 42, of Panzer Army Africa, I present the following supplement to the essay by Generalmajor von Holtzendorff, "Reasons for Rommel's Successes in Africa, 1941-42."

In his presentation, von Holtzendorff gave an accurate picture of Rommel's character and personality. I wish to add the following observations in order to supplement and emphasize certain of von Holtzendorff's statements.

Rommel was the logical commander for desert warfare. His main strength, the immediate command of forces right on the battlefield, could be given full play in such broad, open spaces. Army field orders which failed to keep pace with the developing situation could, therefore, be given bold, rapid, and flexible revision on the spot by a direct order from Rommel.

The direct command by the Army Commander, while offering this advantage, was also accompanied by serious disadvantages in regard to the over-all operations of the Africa Army. Decisions affecting the Army as a whole were likewise made in the midst of tactical situations, and were strongly influenced by the success or failure of the local operation. Following is an example:

On 23 November 1941, during the defensive battle in MARMARICA, Rommel gave an on-the-spot order because of a local success near BIR EL GUBI, where elements of the German Africa Corps had succeeded in destroying a South African regiment. He ordered the Africa Corps to

give pursuit through BIR SCHEFFERZEN and on into Egypt. The complete failure of this thrust showed that, because of the over-all situation, the time in no way was ripe for such a decision. Rommel, together with the Army Chief of Staff, advanced with the point of the pursuing forces and experienced in a very personal manner that the enemy resistance, as a whole, was far from being broken.

The German panzer divisions suffered considerably on this raid, and Rommel divorced himself from the command of the over-all situation for a period of about five days. The Army headquarters, which was located near EL ADEM at this time and out of all contact with Rommel, had the burden of conducting the over-all operation and particularly the defensive engagements in the TOBRUCH area.

The general staff officer had to guard against any exaggeration in his reports on the enemy or on the own situation, for Rommel was likely to arrive at extreme conclusions in such cases. The G-2 had a pleasant, gratifying job, since Rommel devoted much interest to this field. The best intelligence source, the reports of radio intelligence submitted by the intercept company, influenced his decisions decisively. The Quartermaster occupied a difficult position, for not until 1941-42, when reserves were suffered in this field, did Rommel give more attention to the supply situation. Typical of the importance which he placed on the supply problem is the following statement from Rommel: We'll get our gasoline from the British!

In conclusion it may be said that Rommel was a commander blessed

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-5-

with a special talent for leading mobile forces in desert warfare.

(signed) Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin

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ROMMEL'S SYSTEM OF FORTIFICATION

IN NORTH AFRICA 1941/1942

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Africa) 1941/1942.
- III. Ordered: 4 May 1947.
- IV. Sources:
- A. Advisors: none
- B. Documentation (Amer., German, Documents; Diaries, others, etc.)
(Own experiences as company commander and battalion
commander of the 104th Rifle Regiment) Personal
diary for the year 1941/1942.
- V. Abbreviations: (See next page).

HISTORICAL DIVISION SEAL.

ROMMEL'S SYSTEM OF FORTIFICATIONS IN NORTH AFRICA

(also a contribution to the study: "Reasons
for Rommel's Success in North Africa").

1941/1942

(Manuscript No. 00 24)

by

Werner Reissmann,

Major, Retired.

Written at: Mittenwald (Germany)

Completed on: 13 May 1947

Ordered on: 4 May 1947

Sources:

a) Personal: Experiences gained as company commander
and battalion commander of the 104th
Rifle Regiment.

b) Documentation: Personal diary for the year 1941/1942

Sketches: 6 sketches in various scales

Abbreviations: See next page.

HISTORICAL DIVISION SEAL

1. Rommel's System of Field Fortifications in North Africa.

Schematic representation of the permanent fortifications at Tobruch. They were used as model for the new type of field fortifications.

Schematic representation of a squad strong point in a field fortification (for the smallest combat unit), known as "Rommel triangle" (Rommeldreieck).

Schematic representation of a strong point for a reinforced company. Example given: The strong point "Abu Talaqu" between Sidi Omar and Halfaya Pass on the Sollum front at the end of June 1941. Following instructions given personally by Rommel, the author reconnoitered this strong point and staked out the terrain for its construction.

Proposed strength:	9 light machine guns	}	1 company
	2 heavy machine guns		
	2 heavy mortars		
	3 Pak		
	1 Panzer battalion		

reinforced by 1 Pak platoon
and 1 light infantry gun platoon

4 Pak
4 light machine guns
2 light infantry guns.

Schematic representation of a battalion strong point.

Schematic representation on showing organization of strong points based on "Mine boxes" [see sketch] as they had been laid out on the northern flank of the El Alamein position (from the coast to the northern Ruweisat Ridge) between about August and October 1942, pursuant to instructions from Rommel.

Purpose: To smash the enemy armored attacks by frontal and flanking defensive fires, to hinder the enemy in his reconnaissance of the location of our mine fields, and in his efforts to clear or destroy them by artillery fire, - all this brought about by creating confusion among the enemy forces.

Example of strong point organization, using a captured British mine field on the southern flank of the El Alamein position (October 1942) - 21st Panzer Division sector, Ariete Division, Parachute Brigade "Ramke".

2. Rommel's Maneuvers to Deceive the Enemy.

The following episode which occurred during the offensive of 1942 is being added since it seems to be a typical example of Rommel's methods in deceiving the enemy by raising dust in the desert.

The 3d Battalion of the 104th Rifle Regiment had been disposed since 18 June 1942 with front to the east on both sides of the Via Balbia, 5 kilometers east of Gambut. Here it had been providing security for the forces of the German Africa Corps which had assembled for the attack on Tobruch. On the basis of results of its reconnaissance in the area Bardia - Capuzzo - Sollum, this battalion was ordered by

Rommel in person toward 1800 hours, 19 June, to start marching immediately for the purpose of seizing the fortified area of Bardia.

When the battalion commander stopped about half way to Bardia in order to send out flank security to the south across a rise of the Dschebel [mountain] that ran up close to the march route, Rommel came up from the rear in a personnel carrier but driving off the road.

He called out to the battalion commander who was coming up to report to him, not to bother, stating that he, Rommel, was "just kicking up dust". Whereupon he turned about and drove off toward the west, once more proceeding off the road and leaving a long dust cloud trailing behind.

Rommel did this in order to mislead the enemy armored scout cars on the Dschebel southwest of Bardia into believing that the advancing forces were stronger than this one battalion consisting of only 2 companies.

[Signed:] Werner Reissmann

(Werner Reissmann)

[Translated: July 7, 1948: M. Bauer]

[Reviewed: HFME 19 July 48]

Sketch 1/left top/

Stuetzpunkt	-	strong point
Drahthindernis	-	wire obstacle
Pz. Graben	-	antitank ditch
Minenfeld	-	mine field

/right top/

betonierte Kampfanlage mit 3 Kampfkanzeln. Unter- staende unterirdisch.	-	concrete prepared position with 3 firing pits. Dugouts underground.
Panzergraben (Betonwaende)	-	antitank ditch (concrete walls)
Drahthindernis	-	wire obstacle

/middle of page, all across:/

Schemat. Grundriss-Skizze - einer Tobruch-Inf.-Kampfanlage -
Aufriss-Skizze

Schematic plan of an infantry combat installation at Tobruch
(cross section)

/middle of page, left/

Stufen	-	steps
Leiter	-	ladder
Unterstaende mit Betondecke	-	dugouts with concrete ceilings
offener Verbindungsgraben Laufgang	-	open communication trench approach trench
offene Kampfkanzel	-	open firing pit

/middle of page, right/

Kampfkanzel	-	firing pit
Laufgang	-	approach trench
Betondecke	-	concrete ceiling
Unterstand	-	dugout

L.M.G. Stand	-	light machine gun emplacement
Verb. Graben	-	communication trench
Pak Stand	-	Pak emplacement
Unterschlupf	-	dugout
Munit.-Nische	-	ammunition niche
etwa 50 m	-	approximately 50 meters

Pz. Minenfeld	-	antitank mine field
Drahthindernis	-	wire obstacle
Gruppen-Stützpunkte	-	squad strong points
800 m	-	800 meters

M.: 1:20000	-	Scale 1:20000
0 500 1000 m	-	0 500 1000 meters
Drahthindernis	-	wire obstacle
Pz. Minenfeld	-	antitank mine field
Pz. Minen	-	antitank mines

Sketch 4, cont'd

Schuetzen-Minen	-	antipersonnel mines
im Streueinsatz	-	laid at random, not according to regular pattern
Btr.	-	battery
s. Pak	-	heavy Pak /antitank gun/

Sketch 5

Pz. Minenfeld	-	antitank mine field
Schuetzenminen im Streueinsatz	-	antipersonnel mines not laid according to regular pattern
Pz. Minen im Streueinsatz	-	antitank mines not laid according to regular pattern
s. Pak	-	heavy Pak
7,62 Pak V.od. 8,8 Flak	-	7.62 Pak V or 8.8 Flak /anti-aircraft gun/
Kp. Pz.Jg. bewegl. einsatzbereit	-	T.D. Co., mobile, in readiness.
Btl. Stuetzpunkt	-	battalion strong point
l.u.s.Art.	-	light and heavy artillery
Inf. Sicherung	-	infantry security
Feind	-	enemy

Sketch 6

Minenfeld	-	mine field
eigene H.K.L.	-	our main line of resistance
eigene Stuetzpunkte	-	our strong points
etw. Verlauf feindl. St.	-	approximate trace of enemy position