

Libya 1940: O'Connor's Offensive

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PanzerArmee Afrika realistically shows the impact of Rommel's first offensive in Africa and the battles afterward. Yet the most decisive offensive of the war came earlier, when Major General Sir Richard O'Connor led 30,000 men of Western Desert Force against Marshal Rodolfo Graziani's 150,000 men in Cyrenaica and western Egypt.

Attacking on the night of 9 December 1940, by 7 February 1941 the Commonwealth troops had advanced 300 miles, smashed ten Italian divisions, taken 130,000 prisoners and suffered barely 2000 casualties. If not for the political necessity of transferring British troops to Greece, the North African War could have been finished by March. As it was, it dragged on into '43.

The *PanzerArmee* Variant is two Game Turns in length, with the Allies first player. The British are immune from Command Control (this being factored into the troop strength available). Italian units do roll for Command Control; affected units may move but not attack. British armor (only) may voluntarily move out of supply.

The Italian force consisted of five "leg" infantry divisions (60, 61, 62, 63, 65), four Blackshirt Militia divisions (1, 2, 3, and 4 *Camicia Nera*), two Libyan police divisions (1, 2), three *ad hoc* armored brigades (1, 2, and Babini *Raggruppamento*) and one motorized *Raggruppamento* (Maletti).

The "leg" divisions are binary (two-regiment) in the variant. The other, inferior infantry are represented as single units, as are the brigades. The brigades should have been more powerful than the infantry, but they contained almost no support units and disintegrated in combat. Also, the tanks were mostly worthless machine gun carriers.

The British force was small but powerful. The understrength 7th Armored Division was the strike unit, with the weak 4th Indian Infantry Division accompanying it. Selby Force, an *ad hoc* brigade, advanced along the coast road. Midway in the campaign 4th Indian was transferred to Somaliland and replaced with 6th Australian, again understrength. It was a tiny army, but it had one enormous advantage-it was not an Italian Army unit.

Initial Set-up, Italian:

Most Italian units have only 25 movement points.

I(Supply)-1906,

I(Sup), 2(1-25)-2319,

1(Sup), 2(1-25)-1925,

2(1-25)-1730,

2(1-25)-1530,

2(1-25)-1331,

2(1-25)-1333,

1(1-25)-1533,

3(1-25), I(Sup)-1634.

2(2-40) may be stacked with any units in Egypt; each 2-40 represents two brigades.

No reinforcements.

Initial Set-up, British:

2(3-50)-1135,

2(2-50)-1235,

1(2-50)-1537,

1(Trk), 3(Sup)-1440.

2(2-50) are withdrawn Game-Turn Two, replaced with 2(2-50) from Alexandria.

VICTORY:

British get 40 points for capturing El Agheila.

Italians get 10 points for each unit exiting hex 0701.

British get 5 points for each destroyed Italian unit.

Highest total wins.

- Phil Kosnett