

# DESERT WAR BOOT CAMP

## AFTER-ACTION REPORT AND RESEARCH

### "OASIS FORCE"

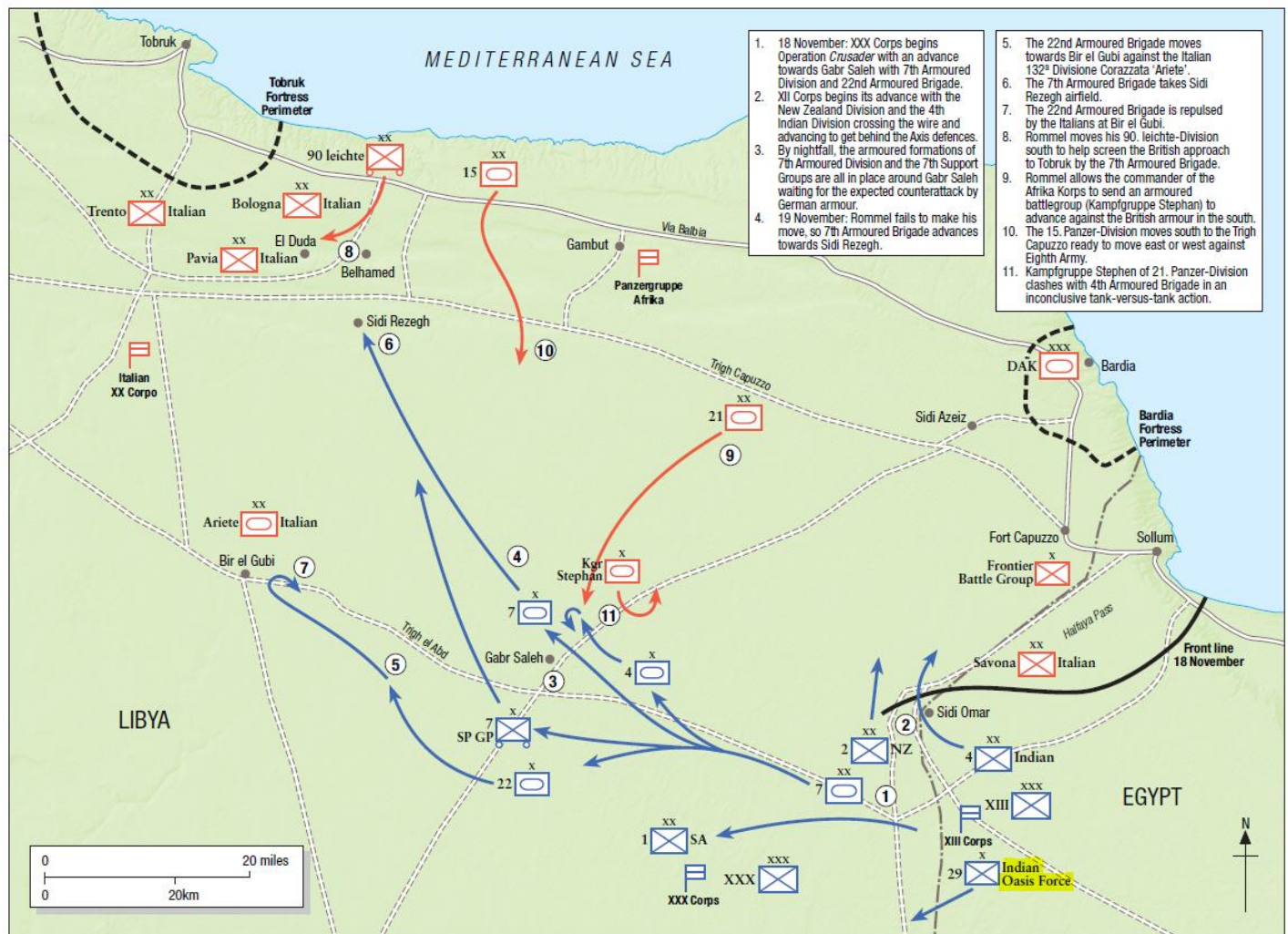
Composition, Mission, and Part in Operation Crusader  
(requested by Michael @intelligentmistertoad)

The Oasis Force was an independent mixed-arms operational manoeuvre group employed by the British Eighth Army for the "Operation Crusader" offensive of November-December 1941. As an independent group, they did not belong to either of the two main constituent corps of Eighth Army at that time, the infantry-heavy XIII Corps or the tank-mechanized heavy XXX Corps.

The overall mission of the group was two-fold, to advance along with the XXX Corps as they advanced on the Eighth Army's left (southern) wing. As the XXX Corps pushed west, then turning northwest to link up with and relieve the Tobruk Garrison (the overall objective of Operation Crusader), the Oasis Force would advance along with them, screening their outside flank and protect its exposed supply lines from any mobile German or Italian battlegroups lurking in the deep desert.

Although the XXX Corps, and especially its spearhead unit (7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division) was the primary punching unit of Operation Crusader, as they made this northwest turn their exposed left flank would be murderously vulnerable. Thus, the mission of the Oasis Force was crucial to the overall success of the mission.

Opening moves of Operation Crusader (source: *Operation Crusader: Rommel in Retreat* – Osprey Publishing, Ken Ford and John White: © 2010)



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### OPERATIONAL COMPOSITION:

The Oasis Force was comprised of two basic brigades, plus supporting artillery, antitank, antiaircraft, recon, and armoured car formations. As a result, it was slightly smaller than a full-sized Commonwealth division, although again it reported directly to Eighth Army command, and not XXX or XIII Corps.

Each battalion listed below would contain four line rifle companies, a platoon of engineers, a platoon of machine guns (in addition to Bren guns in the line rifle companies), a battery of 3-inch mortars (in addition to the 2-inch mortars included in the line rifle companies), and trucks and Bren / Universal Carriers. In all, each battalion would have a bayonet strength of about 750 men.

#### 29<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade

- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion / Worcestershire Regiment
- 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Battalions (mixed), Frontier Force Rifles (Indian / Pakistani Punjab troops)
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion / 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab Regiment

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> South African Infantry Brigade

- 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion / Natal Mounted Rifles
- 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions (mixed), Natal Field Force Brigade
- Cape Town Highlanders

In addition, 2<sup>nd</sup> South African Infantry Brigade included:

- Field Company, South African Field Engineers (150 men, trucks)
- 4<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment (x24 25-pounder howitzers + "Matador" trucks)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Battery, 1<sup>st</sup> South African Antitank Regiment (x12 2-pounder towed antitank guns and trucks)

#### Oasis Group Headquarters and Support

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Field Regiment Artillery (x24 25-pounder howitzers + "Matador" trucks)
- 60<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment Artillery (x24 25-pounder howitzers + "Matador" trucks)
- Elements, 7<sup>th</sup> Medium Artillery Regiment (x6 5.5-inch howitzers + "Matador" trucks)
- "C" Battery, 76<sup>th</sup> Antitank Regiment (x12 2-pounder towed antitank guns and trucks)
- 1<sup>st</sup> Light Antiaircraft Regiment (x36 Bofors 40mm AA guns and trucks)
- 6<sup>th</sup> Light Antiaircraft Regiment (x36 Bofors 40mm AA guns and trucks)
- Elements, 6<sup>th</sup> South African Armoured Car Regiment (x12 Marmon-Herrington armoured cars Mk II)
- Elements, 7<sup>th</sup> South African Recce Regiment (x12 Marmon-Herrington armoured cars Mk II)

\*Source: Gregpanzerblitz.com

### COMBINING FORCES:

In most situations, units of the two brigades (29<sup>th</sup> Indian and 2<sup>nd</sup> South African) would have stayed more or less self-contained and would not typically be seen on the same Bolt Action table. However, any units of the Oasis Group Headquarters and Support group could easily be seen *in moderation* supporting any units of the two brigades.

Most likely these would include either off-board fire support artillery missions delivered by either the 25-pounder howitzers or the much heavier (and more rare) 5.5" howitzers, supporting (for example) Indian, Punjabi, or Worcestershire Englishmen at the front lines of 29<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade force.

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### TACTICAL COMPOSITION:

Line battalions of both the 29<sup>th</sup> Indian and 2<sup>nd</sup> South African Brigades would have been constructed basically along standard British Commonwealth orders of battle of the period.

- Each battalion is built of four line rifle companies, plus a Headquarters Company, plus a Support Company.
- Each line company is built of three platoons, plus a headquarters platoon.
- Each platoon is built of three sections (squads) of 10 men, plus a headquarters section of 5.

### PLATOON

x3 sections of 10 men, each with one Bren LMG and an NCO in command

x1 HQ section, which would include (1) Boys AT rifle team and (1) 2-inch light mortar team.

35 men total, commanded by either a Warrant Officer or Subaltern

### RIFLE COMPANY

x3 platoons of 35 men

x1 HQ platoon, which would include the trucks, universal carriers, and command group.

145 men total (approx.), commanded by either a senior lieutenant or captain.

### BATTALION

x4 rifle companies

x1 HQ company, which a headquarters platoon, a signals platoon, and an administration platoon.

x1 Support company, which would include:

x1 medium mortar platoon - usually including x4 to x6 3-inch (76mm), +more antitank rifles

x1 anti-aircraft machine gun platoon (more Bren guns or heavier Vickers .303 or .50 cal MGs)

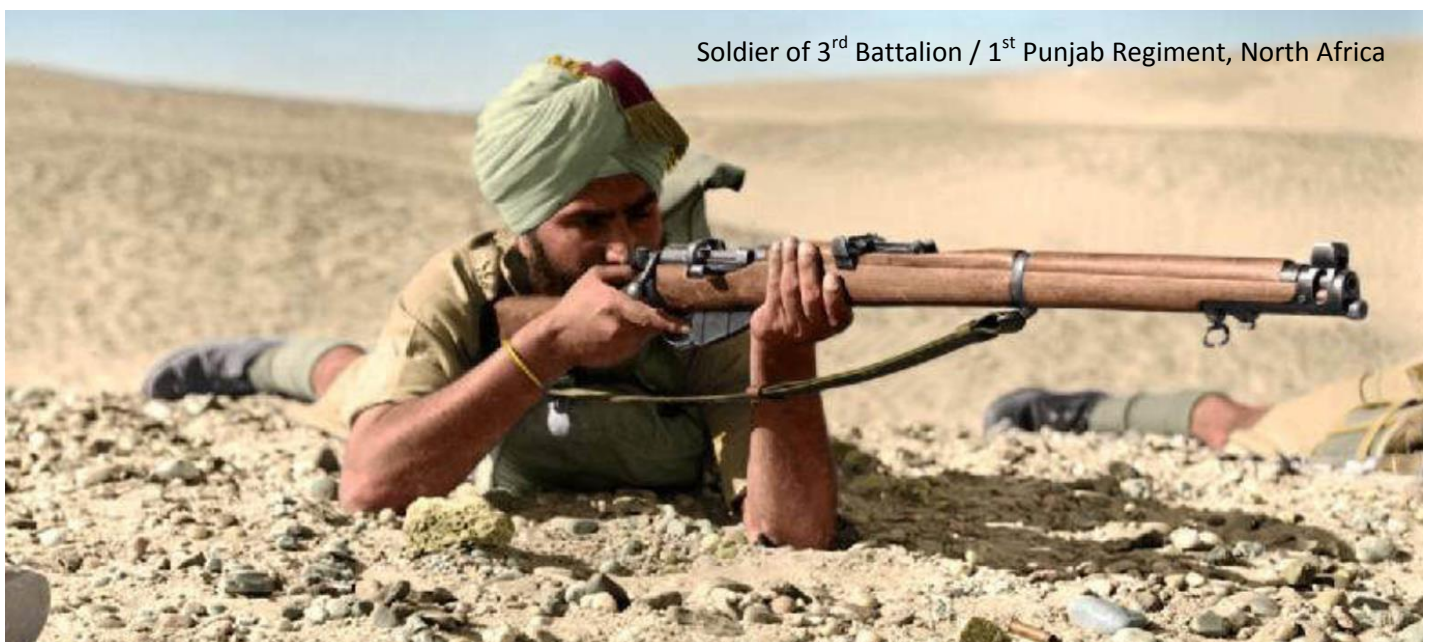
x1 Pioneer platoon (combat engineers)

x1 carrier platoon (universal carriers with Bren LMGs or Vickers MMGs)

In all, a line battalion would field about 750 men, commanded by a Lt. Colonel, with a Major as 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command.

This would also include adjutants (a command staff of captains) and a regimental sergeant-major.

\*Source: <http://www.niehorster.org>



Soldier of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion / 1<sup>st</sup> Punjab Regiment, North Africa