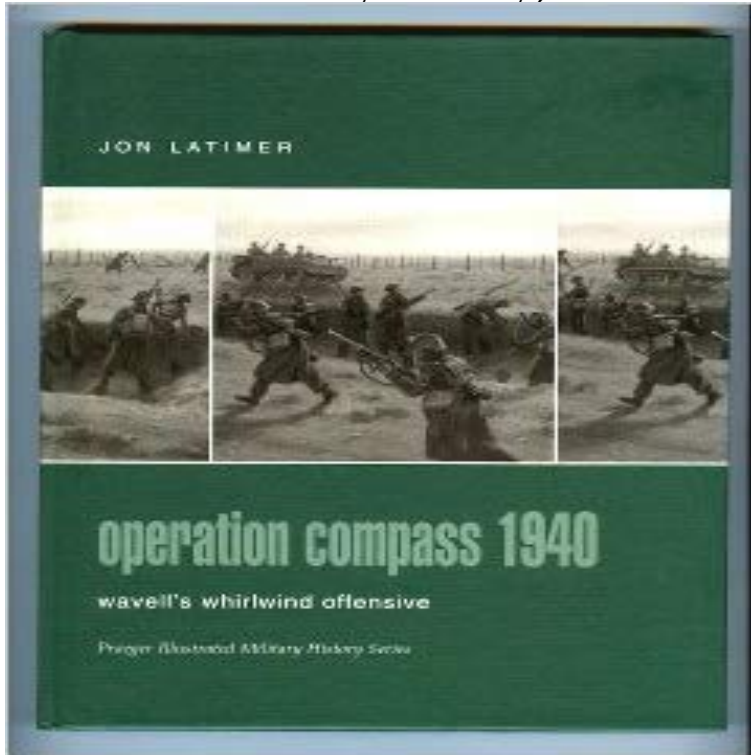


Operation Compass 1940: Wavells Whirlwind Offensive (Praeger Illustrated Military History)



The first battle of the desert war, Operation Compass was originally envisaged as a spoiling attack, combined with a reconnaissance in force to disrupt the Italian forces that had advanced into Egypt in September 1940. Lt Gen. Richard O'Connor launched what amounted to a British blitzkrieg. Instead the British forces swept 500 miles along the coast of North Africa. The 7th Armored Division raced across the desert to cut off the retreating Italians, and O'Connor's men destroyed 9 Italian divisions, and took 130,000 prisoners--forcing the Germans to intervene with the Afrikakorps, led by the legendary General Rommel. The first battle of the desert war, Operation Compass was originally envisaged as a spoiling attack, combined with a reconnaissance in force to disrupt the Italian forces that had advanced into Egypt in September 1940. Lt Gen. Richard O'Connor launched what amounted to a British blitzkrieg. Instead the British forces swept 500 miles along the coast of North Africa. 7th Armored Division raced across the desert to cut off the retreating Italians, and O'Connor's men destroyed 9 Italian divisions, and took 130,000 prisoners--forcing the Germans to intervene with the Afrikakorps, led by the legendary General Rommel. This is an operation that tends to be overlooked in favor of later campaigns involving Rommel and the Deutsches Afrikakorps. It was a humiliating defeat for the Italians, but success for the Allies was to turn sour when their success led directly to German intervention led by General Rommel and the Afrikakorps. The campaign as a whole highlighted the strengths of the British modern, forward-looking military machine as opposed to the Italian military which was rooted in the past. Despite the stereotype of lacking courage, Operation Compass showed that the Italians on an individual basis were not cowards and they consistently proved their strength of

fighting spirit.

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