

60,000 men to keep the tribes quiet, and the danger that any tribal disturbance might tempt SPAIN to intervene against our very insecure lines of communication. Moreover, if Darlan's assistance could solve these problems for us by bringing NORTH AFRICA to our support, he might well be able to gain us DAKAR in French WEST AFRICA as well, not to mention the French Fleet in TOULON.

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Finally, apart from granting us a secure base from which to move towards our next objective, there appeared to be a reasonable chance that Darlan might be able to intervene effectively with Admiral Esteva, the French Commander in TUNISIA, to forestall the Axis and to assist our own occupation of that important land. We had heard that Admiral Esteva was willing to obey Admiral Darlan, and we badly needed his support. Our plan, to rush light forces from ALGIERS to TUNISIA in order to anticipate the Axis, was a bold scheme, which had in it many of the elements of a gamble. It called for an effort to exploit initial success with the hope that we might gain a great prize at low cost, and might induce the French to provide us with one of the surest guarantees of complete success by resisting strongly any attempted landings by the Axis in TUNISIA. We hoped that such resistance as this on the part of the French would materialize because of the important military advantages that we had already gained through our negotiations with Darlan.

THE RACE FOR TUNISIA

Our chief hope of anticipating the Axis in TUNISIA lay in our acting with utmost speed. Indeed, we were involved in a race, not only against the build-up of enemy forces at TUNIS and BIZERTE, but against the weather as well. Northern TUNISIA is a country of high mountains with narrow plains between the ranges; and it has few roads, and there is in the land very little scope for armored action. The coastal mountains and the valleys a few miles inland, as well as the coastal plain which opens at TUNIS and BIZERTE, are an area with a heavy rainfall that totals more than 25 inches annually. The period of heaviest rains begins in late November, or early December and continues through February. During this season the lowlands become a particularly glutinous sea of mud. On the one hand, the date and places of our landings in NORTH AFRICA gave us practically no margin. There was less than a month of fair weather ahead; and Axis Air and ground forces were within easy striking distance of TUNIS and BIZERTE, less than 100 miles away from these places across the SICILIAN narrows. All the same, our Easternmost force was at ALGIERS, 560 miles West of TUNIS. Necessarily, therefore we had to rely on a rapid advance of very light forces, understrength in both personnel and equipment.

Even with all these odds against us, we only just failed to win the race. What finally tipped the scales decisively against us was the fact that the French, whose resistance to our forces at ALGIERS, though feeble, continued for two days, offered no resistance at all to the first German landings at EL AOUINA airport on November 9th, with the result that German forces began their build-up in TUNISIA before we were able to begin the move east from ALGIERS. Although French forces in TUNISIA under General Barre, Juin, and Koeltz finally joined our own about November 18th, it was too late to overcome the fatal effects of that almost morbid sense of honor which had led the French initially to resist us, their deliverers, while they were leaving their back door open to the enemy.

On November 9th, after the landings had been effected under American auspices, Lieutenant General arrived at ALGIERS from GIBRALTAR to take over command of Anderson's

UNCLASSIFIED

58
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plan was to seize as rapidly as possible all the ports to the East, BOUGIE, PHILIPPEVILLE, BONE, and LA GALLE, in that order, and then was to rush his forces forward by motor transport, landing craft, and troop-carrying aircraft. For the success of the operation it was essential also to seize coastal airfields and to install fighter aircraft in order to provide adequate cover. Therefore, he ordered Major General V. Evelyn, Commander of the British 78th Division, to carry out the prearranged plan for simultaneous action against the port of BOUGIE and against DJIDJELLI airfield, a short distance further along the coast. He directed that this officer should act with the assistance of naval forces under the command of Captain W. V. Dickinson, R.N.

The 36th Brigade of the 78th Division—our floating reserve of the original Eastern Task Force—was still aboard its ships in ALGIERS harbor, so late on the evening of November 10th this force sailed Eastward to accomplish its mission in the race for TUNISIA. Landing by this force on the following day was unopposed, but one battalion which had been assigned the mission of capturing DJIDJELLI from the sea was unable to get ashore because of a heavy swell, and therefore returned to BOUGIE in order to make the approach by land. DJIDJELLI could not be taken until November 13th, and during the interim, when little air cover could be provided, the enemy bombed and sank three United States Combat Loaders in BOUGIE harbor. Also he inflicted slight damage on H. M. Aircraft Carrier ARGUS whose pilots had shot down 11 enemy planes for the loss of 3 of our own. Personnel losses were not serious but as the result of losses of equipment, our infantry for some time had none but what they carried, and no clothing but what they had been wearing when they left the ships.

Our initial rush was made with a force that at its strongest was the equivalent of scarcely more than a single infantry division, and one tank regiment, neither of them at full strength. The 78th Division was not complete until December 1st, and the British 6th Armored Division was not fully established in the forward areas until December 15th. We first occupied BONE with two companies of the 3rd Parachute Battalion and with the 6th Commando Battalion. The former was dropped by air to hold the airfield and the latter was landed by sea on November 12th to seize the port. On November 11, C-47's of the United States 65th Troop Carrier Command landed British Parachutists of the 3rd Battalion at MAISON BLANCHE airport, after a flight from ENGLAND by way of GIBRALTAR, and the day following successfully dropped these Parachutists at the BONE airfield. The operation was a complete success, but that night a heavy and prolonged bombardment by Axis planes threatened to make the field untenable. The situation was restored on November 13th by the return of the C-47's ferrying much needed supplies of anti-aircraft guns and petrol for fighter planes.

Other forces moved up quickly. One battalion of the 36th Brigade had arrived by sea from BOUGIE by November 13th, and another had by that date reached SÉTIF by rail. Also some artillery and servicing units had arrived by sea, but none of the vehicles and motor transport of the Brigade had then as yet been able to land. By November 15th, a small column of all arms from the 11th Infantry Brigade Group—known as the HART FORCE—arrived by road from ALGIERS; they had acquired their mobility by monopolizing all of their own brigade's transport.

Our rapid advance continued, and by November 15th, leading elements of the 36th Brigade had occupied TABARNA, only about 60 miles from TUNIS, with other battalions following closely. On the same day,

UNCLASSIFIED

59
47

the British 1st Parachute Battalion attempted to land at SOUK EL ARBA airfield, due South of TABARKA in the MUSDJERDA valley which runs north-east to the GULF OF TUNIS, and, although thwarted by weather in the first attempt on the 15th, successfully landed the day following. By November 17th this force had advanced Northeast beyond the important communications center of BEJA, where it first gained contact with German troops.

Meantime, by November 20th, the follow-up convoy of ships had arrived at BONE, bringing the balance of transport of the 78th Division (less one Brigade Group), the armored BLADE FORCE, (Composed of the 17/21st Lancers Regimental Group), and the 1st Parachute Brigade (less one battalion). Units and sub-units of the 78th Division and of BLADE FORCE were moved West as fast as the necessary transport could be unloaded. By November 20th, BLADE FORCE was established in the SOUK EL ARBA area, and the 11th Brigade Group of the 78th Division was concentrated in the BEJA area two days later.

Similarly we took steps to secure airfields farther South. On November 15th, Colonel Edson D. Raff's United States 503rd Paratroop Battalion dropped at YOUS LES BAINS without opposition, and began to operate offensively from its newly won base. Two days later detachments from the same Battalion occupied GAFSA airfield, far to the South, and mobile patrols roamed widely over the entire Southern area in requisitioned transport, meeting small Italian forces. The same group established cordial relations with a French garrison at TEBESSA, and that garrison thereupon promptly gave signs of their good will by arresting the Italian members of the Armistice Commission in that area, and by cooperation in the frequent patrol activity.

Signs of French cooperation had already begun to appear at this same time in the North. On the 16th reports were received from General Koeltz' XIX Corps, that his forces were in contact with a German motorcycle reconnaissance patrol between BEJA and DJEBEL ABOID, to the North; and, on the same day, French forces at OUED ZARGA and MATEUR—the latter not more than 20 miles from BIZERTE—drove off German patrols. Our plans for offensive action were now able to count on at least some measure of French assistance. Although General Barre, as Commander of all French Forces in TUNISIA had negotiated with General von Arnim ever since the arrival of German forces, he now agreed that his forces would cover the concentration of our 78th Division in the TABARKA-SOUK EL ARBA-CHARDIMAOU area and that they would likewise cover, to the best of their ability, our right flank during our subsequent advance on TUNIS. On November 17th, General Anderson issued orders to the 78th Division to complete its concentration in the forward area in preparation for an advance on TUNIS to destroy the Axis forces.

As quickly as the first signs of French tactical cooperation began to appear I proposed to Giraud that the whole Eastern front be placed under General Anderson's command. I met the most bitter opposition to the idea. Giraud even said that any such attempt, at that time, would result in open French rebellion. Instead, he proposed that he take command of the front. Manifestly, I could not agree.

Around the middle of November we estimated Axis strength at 500 to 1,000 fighting personnel in the area of TUNIS, and at about 4,000 at BIZERTE, with some tanks in each case, and with aircraft which had been flown in; at the time JU-52's averaged more than 50 landings a day at BIZERTE. The enemy had occupied MATEUR and had pushed out West and South, gaining contact with advance elements of our 36th Brigade Group West of DJEBEL ABOID, and with the French at

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60

SIDI N'SIR and MEDJEZ EL BAB. Subsequent operations took place along three clearly defined axes: along the Northern road directly East from TABARKA via DJEBEL ABIOD to MATEUR; along the more Southerly road Northeast from BEJA to SIDI N'SIR and MATEUR; and along the main road due east from BEJA to TUNIS, via MEDJEZ EL BAB and DJEBEL ABOD.

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It was the enemy who seized the initiative, by attacking the French at MEDJEZ EL BAB on November 18th and 19th. Von Arnim sent two separate ultimatums, demanding French surrender, which was not conceded by General Barre; and the ill-equipped French, assailed three times by infantry supported by tanks, artillery and dive-bombers, suffered 25 per cent casualties. They sent us urgent pleas for air support, which we could not supply, and after a gallant stand retired to QUID ZARGA. During the same period an enemy attack at DJEBEL ABOD, to the North, was contained by the leading battalion of our 36th Brigade. In the engagement on this occasion our forces destroyed 8 of the 30 enemy tanks that they engaged, and, supported by British parachute elements, by a British Armored Car Column, and by a battery of United States Field Artillery, the French counter-attacked at MEDJEZ EL BAB.

Though we were able thus to hold the enemy in check, it was clear, however, that our 78th Division was not as yet strong enough to press the advance. Hence they were ordered to delay temporarily any move forward until the build-up of forces and supplies was sufficient to give the assault on TUNIS a reasonable chance of success. We had also to straighten out the considerable intermixture of French and British units which had occurred as a result of rapid improvisation following the French decision to act with us. Our intention was to relieve all French forces operating in the 78th Division area, so that they could be concentrated under General Barre's command for the protection of our right flank on the line LE KEF - TEBOURSOUK - SOSTOUR. By November 23rd we had reached a preliminary verbal agreement, by which all troops remaining North of the line LE KEF - ZAGHOUAN should be under the command of the British First Army, while all troops South of the line should be subject to French command.

This was unsatisfactory, not only tactically, but also logistically, since there was a single line of ammunition from rear to front. However, it was the best that could be achieved at the moment; and I had to accept personally the additional burdens placed upon me by the French refusal to serve under a British commander.

By November 24th General Anderson had completed the forward concentration of the 78th Division and BLADE FORCE, with provision for follow-up by the British 5th Armored Division, then en route to TEBOURSOUK, and by Combat Command "B" from the United States 1st Armored Division, which was then on the way up to SOUK EL ARBA. General Anderson ordered immediate attack with a first objective in the capture of the line TEBOURBA - MATEUR.

During the night of November 24th-25th, BLADE FORCE, operating in the center, penetrated the enemy outpost position to a point midway between MATEUR and TEBOURBA; and the 11th Brigade, on the right, advanced Northeastward in the MEDJERDA valley where it overcame stubborn resistance and captured MEDJEZ EL BAB. For the first three days progress was steady. The 11th Brigade with the 2nd Battalion, 13th United States Armored Regiment, and the 58th Reconnaissance Regiment (less than two Squadrons), moved astride the river toward TEBOURBA, which was taken during the night of November 26th-27th, and was successfully defended against counter-attack on the following day. On November 28th, our forces reached the outskirts of DJEBELIDA, less than 16 miles

UNCLASSIFIED

61