

I had persistently been very reluctant to use up General Anderson's resources by the constant attrition of maintaining pressure on von Arnim at the very time that we were attempting to build up the First Army for a major offensive by the middle of March.

We estimated that von Arnim was receiving 750 men per day with necessary supplies, and that his total forces numbered about 65,000 by this time. To build up our own forces, and to interdict the enemy's build-up, became the guiding, and virtually the sole, principle of our strategy in TUNISIA.

THE BATTLE OF SUPPLY

My first concern came thus to be to straighten out the partial dislocation of bases and lines of communication, which had developed as the inevitable result of the improvisations and emergency measures of the first weeks of the campaign. It was essential that all lines of communication—by air, rail and sea—should be geared up to their maximum capacity, and for this purpose the supply lines for First Army, XII Air Force and United States II Corps, respectively, were separated in so far as possible. First Army was based on BONE with rail and road supply through LA GALLE and SOUK AHRAS; XII Air Force was based on PHILIPPEVILLE and was supplied direct by road and rail to the South; and maintenance supplies and build-up for United States II Corps were moved mainly by rail from ORAN and ALGIERS to the newly established Eastern Base Section in the CONSTANTINE area, and thence by the metre gauge railway to advanced depots at TEBESSA and further East.

This system of supply involved diversion of ocean going vessels to new destination ports, and a considerable coastal shipping traffic from ORAN and ALGIERS to the Eastern ports, but it was designed to shorten road hauls and to obtain a maximum useful capacity from the North African railways, because it was overland transportation that remained the chief bottleneck. Our new system also involved a rapid expansion of the British depots in the BONE area, and an equally rapid development of United States ground and air force depots at PHILIPPEVILLE and CONSTANTINE. Nevertheless, the administrative adjustments and reorganization that were required by the new channels of supply were smoothly and rapidly carried out.

The protection of these extended supply lines during the winter months was a heavy burden on our armed forces. It dictated the closest coordination of the three separate services. What is more, the dominant activity in the North African campaign remained amphibious from the beginning to the end, and the modern form of amphibious warfare is essentially three-dimensional, because of its dependence on air power. Moreover, as the Eighth Army pursued the Afrika Korps closer and closer to the borders of TUNISIA, the Middle Eastern and North African Theaters tended to merge. We had, therefore, not only to coordinate the activities of the three services in separate theaters, but also to work for the closest harmony between the theater commanders. It was agreed at the ANFA Conference that when our separate ground forces actually merged they should form the new 18th Army Group under command of General Alexander, and that there should be a similar integration of both the Naval and the Air Commands at the same time; but meantime there was much to be done in the way of maintaining close contact between widely separated forces.

Naval and air forces moved in cooperation in the two-fold task of protecting our own supply routes and of disrupting the enemy's. Day fighter elements of Eastern Air Command had been organized in 242 Group, and were brought up to strength in support for the

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First Army; similarly XII Air Support Command was brought up to THELEPTE and YOUK-LISS-BAINS airfields for the support of United States II Corps. Bombers from widely scattered bases raided the Axis fields of TUNIS, BIZERTE, LA GOULETTE, and SOUSSE. B-17's, grouped near BISKRA, and mediums based on CONSTANTINE, concentrated primarily on Tunisian targets, but began to range as far as SICILY and SARDINIA in an effort to cut Axis supplylines and to damage Axis bomber bases. Ninth Air Force Bomber Command, advancing behind the Eighth Army, not only struck at Rommel's supply lines directly, but struck far behind at their essential bases in TUNISIA and SICILY. And MALTA's squadrons aided both efforts, striking directly at TRIPOLITANIA and TUNISIA. Also MALTA-based Beaufighters and Spitfires took a heavy toll of Axis "air trains" flying between SICILY and TUNISIA.

Between the middle of November and the end of December, British bombers had dropped 644 tons of bombs on TUNISIAN targets; and United States Twelfth Air Force bombers in 78 missions had dropped 1300 tons. In the same period the United States Air Force accounted for a total of 109 enemy aircraft destroyed, and 26 probables, at a cost of 70 United States lost or missing, while the R.A.F. destroyed 170 enemy aircraft with 41 probables.

Compared with subsequent developments, all this activity was on a small scale. By the end of December the United States Twelfth Air Force had only two groups of Flying Fortresses, three medium bomber groups, and a few A-20's available in the forward areas; but with all the handicaps of bad ground and atmospheric conditions it steadily increased in strength and inflicted increasing damage on Axis bases and communications. During the first half of January, daily sorties of R.A.F. Spitfires exceeded 100, and thereafter, with the further strengthening of the fighter force, that figure was doubled. At the same time the rate of damage inflicted on enemy aircraft was measurably increased. From November 8th to February 18th, British Eastern Air Command and United States Twelfth Air Force compiled the following score.

	<u>DESTROYED</u>	<u>PROBABLY DESTROYED</u>	<u>DAMAGED</u>
E.A.C.	255	55	160
12TH U.S.A.A.F.	384	127	166
TOTAL	639	182	326

In the equally vital task of maintaining our own supply lines, the airforces not only provided cover for convoys, but, during the worst days of our transport difficulties, provided the large C-47 Troop Carriers to ferry both freight and personnel almost to the front lines. This was done frequently without escort and under conditions that would ordinarily have been considered prohibitive.

Necessarily a large part of the burden of protecting our own supply, and of interfering with that of the enemy, fell on the Naval forces. Contrary to popular impression, it was estimated that 90% of the Axis flow of men and supplies across the Sicilian Narrows was seaborne, as compared with 10% flown in by air, and the Axis seaborne route with constant air cover was much less vulnerable than our extended coastal route between ALGIERS and BONE. Nevertheless, British submarines concentrated in the dangerous approaches to TUNIS and BIZERTE, and "Force Q" cruisers and destroyers made repeated shipping strikes at night from BONE, achieving an early success in the small hours of December 2nd when the Cruiser AURORA, ARGONAUT and SIRIUS, with the destroyers QUEBEC and QUIBERON, sank or set ablaze four supply ships or transports and three enemy destroyers. This success was not repeated, but the continued night patrols of "Force Q" restricted the enemy to daylight passages under air cover, which gave opportunities to our aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm Naval Air Stations

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821, 826 and 828 working from both BONE and MALTA. Although these opportunities were limited at first, they steadily increased with the development of our own air power. Finally, British minelayers undertook the hazardous task of mining the enemy waters, and H.M.S. ABDIEL, between the end of January and April 7th, laid eight minefields in the Sicilian Channel, operating without escort and without the usual navigational aids, in waters that had previously been mined, and that were regularly patrolled by enemy aircraft, submarines, and E-boats. During February, the minelaying program was intensified by the use of Motor Torpedo Boats from BONE carrying a limited number of American mines, which were successfully laid in the waters of BIZERTE.

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The Navy's primary task, however, was to protect General Anderson's supply. Convoys escorted by destroyers and by other naval craft sailed Eastward from ALGIERS to BONE once every 14 days, and every convoy had to be protected from heavy air attacks and sometimes from submarine assault as well. From November 8th to December 31st, 86,053 deadweight tons of cargo were discharged at BONE, as well as 4,491 vehicles and 31,085 personnel; and during the seven weeks from December 13th to February 1st--which was the period of the heaviest air raids and a time when BONE received 2,000 high-explosive bombs--127,600 tons of supplies were discharged, and 4,000 tons of food and petrol were loaded and carried forward in naval landing craft to LA GAILE and TABARKA.

As we dared not risk large personnel ships on this run because of the danger both to troops and ships, we employed four small, fast cross-channel steamers in a hazardous shuttle service between ALGIERS and BONE, saving escort vessels and greatly speeding the turn-around of shipping. QUEEN BEA, PRINCESS BEATRIX, ROYAL ULSTERMAN, and ROYAL SCOTSMAN, though listed by the Royal Navy simply as "Landing Ships Infantry," became famous for the gallantry of their service. Carrying some 3,300 troops on every trip, these four ships had transported 16,000 men by December 5th, and between December 13th and February 13th they carried another 36,000. Almost always under air attack, and occasionally under attack by U-boats as well, they continued the steady procession of their voyages until late in March when ULSTERMAN and SCOTSMAN returned to ENGLAND. Other small ships distinguished themselves in the transport of oil, tanks, guns, vehicles and military personnel from ORAN to PHILIPPSVILLE and BONE. These ships included the Tank Landing Craft vessels BACHAQUEBO, MISOA and TASAJERA, the ferry steamer EMPIRE RAGE, and two small merchant tankers, EMPIRE BARR and EMPIRE GAWAIN. TASAJERA was damaged by a torpedo from an enemy aircraft on January 17th.

BONE as the nerve center for General Anderson's supply was the main point of Axis air attack. Throughout November and December there were almost daily attacks; and on January 1st there was a concentrated daylight raid in which the cruiser AJAX was seriously damaged, and in which three merchant vessels were hit, though the damage to one of the latter was superficial. The next day the enemy, in another daylight raid near-missed the AJAX, without causing further damage, but struck four merchant vessels, setting them afire and completely destroying two. The minesweeper ALARM had her back broken and had to be beached. The situation was so serious that Admiral Cunningham wired: "Stick it out. I know you are having an unpleasant time, but if our ships withdraw we are playing the enemy's game. Improved defenses are on the way."

By January 15th I was able to report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff at ANFA, that although we had suffered losses at both BOUGIE and BONE, anti-aircraft defenses had been steadily improved by lay-

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ing hands on all available French AA guns, and by bringing night fighters in from the United Kingdom. The passive air defense in the ports had particularly improved. Ships and seamen of the Navy and Merchant Marine, port parties, and docks-operating personnel kept up the essential work of supply under repeated enemy attack.

THE FRENCH SECTOR

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My most serious concern in mid-January was the French. General Giraud had proposed early in December that the French XIX Corps take over the defense of the critical high ridge which forms the Western barrier of the coastal plain of Eastern TUNISIA, and we were happy to have such assistance as this from that corps, not only because our own forces were, at the time, very thin in the forward areas, but because of the inestimable moral value of allotting the French a definite sector of the front. Though it was not safe to employ them in the valleys, where their lack of equipment made them peculiarly vulnerable to the enemy's armor, we hoped they could defend a mountainous region, where armor had less freedom of action.

The massive Eastern Dorsal which begins with DJEBEL MANSOUR, fifteen miles Southwest of PONT DU RAHS, extends due South to PICHON, where an opening via FONDOUK and PICHON provides connection between KAIROUAN in the coastal plain to the East with the OUSSELTIA valley to the West. Thence the dorsal ridge continues South in milder contour to the Southeast corner of TUNISIA, with openings at FAID and MAKNASSY. Here the French were allotted the honor to occupy a sector which was of crucial strategic importance in itself, and one which was the only link between General Anderson's First Army in the North and General Fredendall's United States II Corps which was established toward the South by mid-January.

The centralized control of communications along this extended front was a vital matter, and although technically Allied Force Headquarters had complete executive control, actually British First Army Headquarters alone had the signal communications necessary to control the entire front. I therefore considered placing executive command of the whole TUNISIAN battle area in the hands of the Commander, First Army, only to discover that the French were unwilling to be subordinated to First Army control. Since I was completely dependent on the good will of the French, in order to maintain a secure base in French NORTH AFRICA, I felt bound to take account of their sensibilities, and, as Commander-in-Chief, Allied Force, I took personal command of the battle area with a Command Post in the Forward area at CONSTANTINE, where I could maintain close touch with all commanders and insure coordination of all ground and air forces.

The most dangerous aspect of the French situation was their appalling lack of equipment, which seriously affected both efficiency and morale. They were completely lacking in the types of weapon needed to cope with German armor, and there was little we could do to supply their needs, because of the pressing urgency of our own. Early in December I tried to muster enough anti-tank and light Flak weapons to supply a single French regiment, but I was unable to do even this much for their material and moral support. Obviously we could not supply aircraft, but we did select the twelve best French pilots to fly our own P-40's. Many of the French were poorly trained, and some, who had families resident in the areas of TUNISIA under German control, were of very doubtful reliability. 132 desertions occurred in a single French battalion. The French Generals Barre and Juin cooperated with General Anderson and General Fredendall, and in early January both Anderson and Fredendall were prepared to give the assistance possible to secure and hold firmly the passes through the mountain ridge from

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