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Hitler's Commanders

German Bravery in the Field, 1939-1945

James Lucas

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Preface

Hitler's Enforcers, which I wrote in 1994, described the ways in which it was possible for Germans to become officers in the armed forces, and because this background information is important I am repeating it here.

The precondition which had been essential in earlier centuries, that of noble birth, was relaxed in the latter years of the German Empire and abolished completely during the time of the Weimar Republic, when education and not nobility was the preferred route. In the period of the Third Reich, these two preconditions were replaced by the demand for National Socialist fervour. Bravery in the field had always been a route to a commission, and in the Second World War many men were promoted as a reward for their heroic acts.

The brief biographies that form the text of this book include men who advanced through the military hierarchy via all three of the routes cited above. They include the aristocratic von Arnim, scion of a family which had supplied the German Army with general officers for centuries; the intellectual Westphal, who served as the Ia to several senior officers; and the paratroop hero Schaefer, a sergeant who held the vital position of Cactus Farm in Tunisia. It should not be a source of surprise that men of quite junior rank are recorded here, for their ability, skill and bravery demanded that they be included in these pages, just as it would be incorrect to assume that only senior commanders were capable of bringing a battle to a successful outcome. Walther Koch, the paratroop commander, was a subaltern officer when he led a battalion-size group which captured the vital canal bridges in Belgium and also seized the fortress of Eben Emaël on the opening day of the war in the West in 1940. Scherer, a major-general commanding a hastily assem-

bled battle group, fought a defensive battle at Cholm during the winter of 1941 and defeated the best strategic efforts of an entire Soviet shock army. These men and others like them are among those described in these pages.

As an aid to the reader's full understanding of the text, it is necessary to outline some part of the recent history of Germany. In 1918 the Imperial Army that had gone out to fight in 1914 sought an armistice, out of which the Great War was brought to an end. A defeated and weakened Germany was forbidden, under the terms of the Versailles Treaty, to have heavy weapons, such as tanks, big guns, aeroplanes or submarines. The Army was restricted in size to just 100,000 men. Germany was, therefore, defenceless against two enemies—first, those nations whose armies invaded her territory, and secondly, a political enemy, communism, which sought to overthrow the elected government. In order to defeat the first type of enemy, groups of ex-servicemen banded together into Freikorps, which fought quite literally for hearth and home. In time the enemy incursions were driven out and there was external peace. The second enemy was defeated by the National Socialists (Nazis) when they came to power.

The German Army had always enjoyed the premier position *vis-à-vis* the other services, the Navy and the Air Force. However, discussions at senior level during the years after the Great War had led to the conclusion that all the services were equally important and that a single High Command, embracing all three, needed to be created. This amalgamation took place in the first years of the Nazi Party's government and well before the outbreak of the Second World War, and that body was called *die Wehrmacht* (the Armed Forces). The Wehrmacht then broke down into three component bodies, an Army High Command (Oberkommando des Heeres, OKH), a Naval High Command (Oberkommando der Marine, OKM) and an Air Force High Command (Oberkommando der Luftwaffe, OKL). Although several of the accounts in this text deal with paratroops who were Luftwaffe personnel, it is true to say that they, *die Fallschirmjäger*, fought a ground war as infantry and have, therefore, been included here as if they were part of the OKH forces. Therefore, we need consider the Army as the body responsible for the operations described here.

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The Army High Command had its own General Staff system, whose branches included, among many others, the department responsible for the planning of military operations, another department conferred with gathering intelligence on foreign armies and others for the issue of supplies and for the procurement of recruits and reinforcements. That hierarchical structure was repeated, although on a diminishing scale, down to divisional level, a division being the lowest formation capable of undertaking operations on its own initiative. That organisational structure was a very flexible one and was suited to the needs of the commander of the military force undertaking a particular mission. The divisional commander was expected, when faced with a difficult military problem, to use his own initiative, and this he not only was able to do but was encouraged to do

This tri-force structure was then complicated by the growth of a party political army, the SS. The Allgemeine SS was, initially, the only type of SS organisation, but when the Nazi Party came to power, as it did in January 1933, a second branch, the Totenkopf (Death's Head) regiment, was created, to staff the concentration camps. It was so called because the Totenkopf soldiers carried on their caps the badge of a skull and crossbones, a device which then passed into general wear by the whole SS organisation. Quite early in the Party's years of government, the Allgemeine or General Branch began to tighten its control over the nation and started to form regiments which would be used to put down a counter-revolution. These units were armed and drilled as a military force and became, in time, the third type of SS unit, the *Verfügungs Truppen* or 'units available'. Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War those groups which had been raised to counter revolutionary activities were combined into a *Verfügungs Division*. This was the birth of the *Waffen SS* (the armed SS), an organisation which grew during the course of the war to become a mighty force of thirty-eight divisions.

Reverting to the immediate pre-war years, it has to be stated that there was hostility on the part of the Army generals to the idea of the SS carrying arms, for they saw the rise of an armed Party militia as a threat to their unique position as the weapons-bearers of the nation. The Army generals had also opposed the setting up of the OKW, which

they saw as a reduction of their power and influence. For their part, the SS commanders despised the generals as reactionary and lacking National Socialist enthusiasm. That mutual hostility very soon faded on the battlefield, where the SS formations proved their fighting capabilities. In time, the differences in attitude between the Waffen SS and the Army were resolved, and, except for certain differences in uniform, both organisations can be considered as one.

Army, Navy and Air Force personnel wore identical badges of rank, with slight variations. The Waffen SS, however, was different. Not only did it have, to begin with, different rank names from those in the Army, but it also had its own particular insignia. The Waffen SS officers carried on the lapels of their tunics a selection of stars and bars which indicated their rank. However, after the outbreak of war it became clear that having two different sets of names and insignia was confusing. Thereupon the Waffen SS adopted Army insignia for their shoulder boards and added the conventional rank names in the description of their title, although the organisation retained the lapel insignia to the end of the war. Personnel in the Army, paratroop branch and Waffen SS, when dressed in camouflage tunics or white winter jackets, carried on the upper sleeve a pattern of wings, oak leaves and/or bars to indicate rank.

In common with other national armies, the German forces not only wore medals as marks of distinction but had cuff titles and also small metal arm shields to denote that the wearer had been in the action for which the arm badge had been awarded. In the case of the Waffen SS, cuff titles bore either the regimental or the divisional name. The paratroops also wore an identifying cuff title, while in the Army cuff titles were bestowed—usually—for campaigns, as in the case of the Africa cuff title. There were two types of that distinction issued, and it was possible for a soldier to have been awarded both patterns, one being worn on either cuff.

Wound badges were issued in black for up to three wounds, in silver for between three and six wounds and in gold for more than six. The German Cross was an eight-pointed star in black and silver, with a swastika set in a wreath in either gold or silver.

All the men described in this book were awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross. The Iron Cross was awarded in a series of stages

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from 2nd class upwards to the Knight's Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords
and Diamonds. The German services did not consider a single act of
bravery to be sufficient grounds for the premier decoration to be
awarded, as is the case in the Victoria Cross. To be awarded the Knight's
Cross the serviceman had to gain each stage of the Iron Cross before
going on to the next senior stage. It was usual for NCOs or men who
had won that decoration to be promoted to commissioned rank. The
logic behind awarding or withholding awards for bravery in the Ger-
man services is confusing. One officer in this book was three times
recommended for the Knight's Cross and had his recommendation
rejected twice. On one occasion he received instead the German Cross
and on the second occasion the Panzer Badge in Silver. This was in
line with a recommendation for a Iron Cross 2nd Class, which was
turned down, despite the man having carried out a daring mission, on
the grounds that, at that time (the early hours of 31 August 1939), no
state of war existed between Germany and Poland. The German Army
was a mixture of petty officialdom and pragmatic action. It is a fasci-
nating army to study.

Generaloberst
Hans-Jürgen von Arnim

The last General Commanding Army Group Africa

Hans-Jürgen von Arnim was born on 4 April 1889 in Ernsdorf, Silesia, the son of a general. The von Arnims were an old military family, and no fewer than thirty of Hans-Jürgen's ancestors had served Prussia, later Germany, and had risen to the rank of General Officer.

As befitted the descendant of such a militarily illustrious family, Hans Jürgen von Arnim was a strong-minded but eminently fair man to his subordinates, with whom he had strong relationships. He did not relish arguments with his superiors, but neither did he avoid them. He was described throughout his service career as ambitious and willing to accept responsibility, and as a calm man who never lost his nerve and who remained unruffled. Early in his years in the Army of the Weimar Republic he was described as having a capacity for hard work and the ability to think and to act decisively.

The young Hans Jürgen was educated in the Görlitz Gymnasium and at Glogau, where he gained his graduation diplomas. He then entered the Army as an Ensign on 1 April 1908, and after completing his officer training course was commissioned, on 19 August 1909, in the 4th Regiment of Foot Guards.

During the Great War he served on the Western Front, first as the regimental adjutant in 1914; then in 1915 he took over as a company commander in the Reserve Infantry Regiment of the 4th Guards Division. During his time with that unit von Arnim was wounded on three occasions. His service won him several decorations for bravery, including both classes of the Iron Cross, the Wound Badge in Black, the Hamburg Hanseatic Order and the Hohenzollern House Order. Later

in the war he was posted to the Eastern Front, where he served in the Guards Jäger Division. He was promoted to the rank of Captain on 27 January 1917, and nine months later he was given command of an infantry battalion, with which he continued to serve when it was returned to France and Flanders during 1918.

At the end of the war he was one of the officers selected to serve in the 100,000-man Army of the Weimar Republic and was employed in the standard German Army fashion, with alternating periods of regimental and staff duties. The latter were chiefly with the 'Troops Department', the cover name for the General Staff. The victorious Allies had ordered the German General Staff to be disbanded and, indeed, the name was discarded, but the structure and the function of that body remained intact.

By the autumn of 1928 von Arnim had risen to the rank of Major in a new regimental post and was given command of the 29th Infantry Regiment in Charlottenburg. His next command was that of the Ortelsburg Rifle Battalion. In 1932 came promotion to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and six months later he began a two-year tour of duty commanding the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment. Three years later he reached the rank of Colonel and an appointment as Ia (Operations Staff Officer) to the 23rd Infantry Division. In October 1935 he took command of the 68th Infantry Regiment, which was garrisoned in Brandenburg, and three years later he received promotion to the rank of Generalmajor (Brigadier-General).

In 1938 von Arnim was appointed—some said it was a demotion—to the post of Chief of the Army's 4th Service Department, another cover name for a staff post and one which saw him as the equivalent of a divisional commander, although he did not lead a division until after the outbreak of war, when his post as General Officer Commanding 52nd Infantry Division was announced on 8 September 1939. The division he was to command was forming in the Saarpfalz region and he led it against the Allies during the war in the West. It was in that campaign that he won the clasps to both of the classes of Iron Cross that he had been awarded during the Great War. He was promoted to Generalleutnant (Major-General) on 1 December 1939, and during 1940 he was given command of the 17th Panzer Division. That forma-

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tion then moved to Poland to prepare for Operation 'Barbarossa', the
 German invasion of Russia.

For the opening battles of the war against Russia, in June 1941, von
 Arnim's division was part of Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group in Army
 Group Centre. The Panzer group had the task of thrusting through
 eastern Poland and advancing through western Russia, via Smolensk,
 and ultimately to attack Moscow. During the advances of those early
 weeks and months, Guderian and the Panzer formations under his com-
 mand took part in the vast encirclement battles that marked the Ger-
 man Army's careering progress in that first summer and autumn of the
 war on the Eastern Front.

But that is to anticipate events. Within days of the opening of the
 Russian war, von Arnim was wounded on the outskirts of the town of
 Schklov, and so seriously that he was first evacuated to Lemberg and
 then to Berlin for treatment. Before that wounding he had already had
 one lucky escape. On 24 June two Russian T-25 tanks appeared sud-
 denly on the western edge of the town of Slonim, which his 17th Pan-
 zer Division had just captured. The enemy machines opened fire upon
 the group of German officers standing at the side of the road discuss-
 ing the next stage of the advance. Among that group was Guderian,
 the Commanding General of the 2nd Panzer Group, Lemelsen, the
 GOC of the 48th Panzer Corps, and von Arnim. The generals man-
 aged to avoid the fire of the Russian tanks, both of which were de-
 stroyed by German artillery. On 4 September von Arnim was awarded
 the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, and shortly afterwards was also
 promoted to the rank of General of Panzer Troops (Lieutenant-General).

The need for convalescence after his wounds had healed meant that
 it was not until 17 September that von Arnim was able to take up com-
 mand again of the 17th Panzer Division, which he then led during the
 encirclement battle of Kiev and, subsequently, in the battles to destroy
 the Red Army holding out in the pockets of Vyasna and Briansk. One
 of the great successes of this period was the capture intact of the Desna
 Bridge as well as the strategically important junction of Briansk. Not
 long after his return, Operation 'Typhoon' began the German offen-
 sive to capture Moscow. In the closing stages of that operation, the
 German Army Group Centre was trying to encircle two Red Army

fronts, Timoshenko's 'West' and Yeremenko's 'Briansk'. These operations were on a massive scale: Timoshenko's force numbered six armies while Yeremenko controlled three. As early as the first week of October, German operations against these two fronts had created two huge pockets, which were in the final stages of disintegration. It was the task of the 17th Panzer to close the ring at Briansk.

On 5 October von Arnim sent out a battle group and ordered it to strike across the Red Army's defences to the north-west of Akulova and to cut the Karachev-Briansk road. Behind that battle group spearhead would follow the main body of the 17th Panzer Division. The battle group made good progress and had halted at Glushy to regroup when the Divisional Ia drove up, bringing with him fresh orders from the corps commander that the battle plan had been changed. It is a measure of the German Army's flexibility and a tribute to the spirit that von Arnim had aroused in his men that this alteration was carried out smoothly and without friction. The new orders were that the division's thrust line was to change so that Briansk was to be attacked from the rear. That operation brought victory, and the town was taken on 7 October. Its main defences had indeed faced westwards, i.e. the direction from which the Red Army had expected the German assault to be made.

As a result of the 17th Panzer's swift assault and capture of Briansk, touch was gained between Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group and the German 3rd Army, and that contact closed fast the ring that had been flung around the Russian mass in the Briansk pocket. Towards the end of October, the 17th Panzer was immobilised because it had run out of fuel for its tanks. Once resupplied, it was posted to Orel but was again held fast at Protova, this time by the thick autumn mud. By the time that the 17th was mobile again, von Arnim had been ordered to lay down command of his division in order to take up a new post. He was given a new command—that of leading the 39th Corps, which was in the line to the east of Leningrad. The 39th Corps was in a parlous state, and the situation in which it found itself was one potentially catastrophic for Army Group North.

To set the background, the German and Finnish governments had planned joint operations by both their armies, and the objective given

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to Army Group North had been to advance rapidly and to seize Lenin-
grad, Russia's second city. The Finns were, however, reluctant to in-
vade Soviet territory and were prepared to advance only as far as that
part of the former Russo-Finnish border which ran along the Swir river.
There they intended to halt and wait for the offensive by Army Group
North to reach them. The German drive, rising from the south, was to
begin at Cudevo, a town in the Volkhov swamp on the Moscow-
Leningrad autobahn. The German advance was then to be carried to
Tikhvin, a town to the south-east of Lake Ladoga on the main railway
line between Leningrad and Vologda. From the railway junction at
Tikhvin, Army Group North was then to advance north-westwards
and gain touch with the Finnish forces along the Swir river. That, at
least, was the OKW plan.

Strategically, the most important town in that area of northern Rus-
sia was Tikhvin, and a measure of its importance was the fact that
Stavka, the Red Army's Supreme Command, had reinforced the area
with élite Siberian divisions, together with masses of tanks and artil-
lery. Stavka was determined to hold Tikhvin at all costs, and the scale
of the fighting for that sector was such that casualties to the Red Army
were said to be the highest of any single major offensive of the Russo-
German war. Despite the most strenuous efforts by the 39th Corps, it
had not been able to reach the Swir river and to gain touch with the
Finns. As a consequence, the corps' right flank was completely open—
a situation which Stavka quickly exploited. It was this heavily embat-
tled corps that von Arnim had been ordered to take over. The journey
to reach his corps headquarters was a difficult one, and it was not until
15 November that he completed it, having finished the last part by
sledge.

The situation he faced was that the Red Army was attacking using
divisions of storm troops marching behind waves of T-34 tanks. Corps,
which had been forced on to the defensive even before von Arnim
arrived, was unable to withstand the onslaught and as early as 9 De-
cember had been driven out of Tikhvin. The Red Army, encouraged
by that success, intensified its attacks, and these came in from both
flanks, creating the danger that von Arnim's corps might be cut off and
destroyed. The only order that the corps commander could give was

for his battered formations to fight their way back across the ground they had gained at such cost and to retreat to the Volkhov river.

Three days before Christmas 1941, von Arnim led the last elements of the 39th Corps back across the river in an intense cold, which dropped at times to minus 52 degrees. The corps structure was intact, but its component units had suffered such terrible losses that one, the 18th (Motorised) Division, had been reduced to just 741 men, while the 12th Panzer Division had sunk to 1,144 all ranks.

The corps did not leave the line until the end of March 1942, and it then moved to another sector of that northern front where a new crisis was building up. The land bridge at Cholm, a junction of several roads in an otherwise swampy area, was not only a sizeable town but also a sector of strategic importance. Recent Russian advances in that area had aimed at capturing the town, but although Red Army spearheads had bypassed and isolated Cholm, they had not been able to capture it. The German defenders, a garrison of some 5,000 men, had been ordered to hold the town and, under the command of Major-General Scherer, had every intention of obeying that order.

Von Arnim, aware of the weakness of the Cholm garrison, ordered an attack to be made to push the armour of the 12th Panzer Division through to Scherer's group. But the tracks of the German Panzers could gain no purchase on the icy ground and the attempt had to be called off. It was left to von Arnim's 122nd Infantry Division to carry out another assault, which they did wading through waist-deep snow. For a brief interlude these infantrymen gained touch with the Cholm garrison and co-operated in helping to beat off the Red Army's attacks, but they were too weak in numbers to raise the siege and were forced to withdraw to avoid themselves being surrounded and cut off in the beleaguered town.

The corps commander, determined to do everything in his power to supply the cut-off garrison, then sent in lorry convoys to take forward clothing, food and supplies, but only one column broke through. The Red Army then managed to cut off Cholm completely, but still the garrison held out and fought on. By 1 May the improved weather had not only thawed the snow but had also dried out the ground. Once again von Arnim launched his corps into an assault and, despite the

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furious resistance of the Red Army, it broke through to reach and re-
lieve the besieged garrison.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1942 von Arnim's corps
was committed to minor actions in and around Rzhev. It was while it
was engaged in that fighting that von Arnim received a signal ordering
him to report to Hitler's headquarters at Rastenburg. On 3 December
1942 von Arnim reached the Wolfsschanze and was surprised by the
news that the situation in Tunisia was such that a new formation, the
5th Panzer Army, was to be set up and that Hitler had chosen him to
command it and had promoted him to the rank of Generaloberst (Colo-
nel-General). Upon being told by the Führer of his new appointment,
von Arnim posed the question whether supplies to the African/Tuni-
sian theatre of operations could be guaranteed and asked, also, how
many divisions would make up the new Panzer army. Hitler assured
him that he would command six divisions, so that, once that force—
three Panzer and three motorised divisions—was in place and with the
lines of supply assured, it would be possible to halt the retreat of
Rommel's desert army and to follow that with a counter-offensive. Why
Hitler considered that the introduction of another new hierarchical body
would simplify the command structure in Africa is unclear.

The situation in Tunisia was at that time certainly menacing. An
Anglo-American force had landed at a number of strategic ports in
Algeria and Tunisia and was heading eastwards. The aim of the West-
ern Allies was to reach Tunis and then by rapid reinforcement to place
a powerful military grouping at the back of Rommel's Axis armies which
were carrying out a fighting retreat through Libya. To prevent that
military disaster, Hitler had ordered troops to be sent to Tunisia. The
first of these, chiefly the battalions of Koch's 5th Parachute Regiment,
Witzig's Para Engineer Battalion and the Barenthin Glider Regiment,
together with miscellaneous German and Italian groups, were flung
into battle and had soon established a flimsy perimeter to the west of
Tunis.

There was fighting in northern Tunisia along a line running inland
from the Mediterranean Sea as the Axis troops endeavoured to expand
their perimeter westwards while the Allied invasion force, driving east-
wards out of Algeria, sought to destroy it and to capture both Tunis

and the major port of Bizerta. During January and February Rommel's Axis army was finally driven out of Libya and began to enter southern Tunisia, where it proposed to take up positions in the French frontier defences at Mareth. The race to take Tunis had failed, and the Allied host eventually divided along national lines, with Anderson's British 1st Army (an army in name only) in the north of the country and the American 2nd Corps in the centre. The British 8th Army, coming up out of the desert, would eventually join up with the Americans and the Axis troops would then be encircled. In the American sector of the front there were several passes through the mountains, and it was clear to the Germans that the Americans would debouch from these in an endeavour to reach the sea and thus strike Rommel's Panzer Army Africa in the back. In the winter of 1942 the fighting in Tunisia was, therefore, in the north, by the British 1st Army—represented by the 5th Corps—around Medjez el Bab, with the objective of capturing Tunis, and with a second Allied effort, by the US 2nd Corps, which was to drive through the mountains and to reach the sea. The American effort was reinforced by French forces.

Hitler had assured von Arnim of both men and supplies and had, indeed, already given the same guarantees to Lieutenant-General Ziegler when he came to report to the Wolfsschanze in Rastenburg. Ziegler had also been told that a 5th Panzer Army was to be created, and that the extraordinary military situation in Tunisia made it imperative that that army be led by an officer capable of rising to the challenge of such a command. Hitler then told Ziegler that he proposed to make von Arnim the General Officer Commanding that new army and that he, Ziegler, was to be the commander's official deputy. In that way, Hitler went on, the problem that had always existed with Rommel—that he was so frequently absent from his headquarters without giving clear orders to his Ia—would be overcome, because whenever the army commander visited his troops in front-line areas there would always be an official deputy at the army's main HQ empowered to act on the army commander's behalf. Ziegler then put to Hitler the questions of the supply position and of the flow of reinforcements to the new theatre of operations. He was told that within a short time there would be three new Panzer and three new motorised divisions in Africa. Armed with

January and February Rommel's army began to enter southern positions in the French frontier. Tunis had failed, and the Allied lines, with Anderson's British in the north of the country and the British 8th Army, coming up with the Americans and the 1st Army—represented by the 42nd Infantry Division, which had the objective of capturing the beachhead by the US 2nd Corps, which had to reach the sea. The Americans.

Both men and supplies and had, as to Lieutenant-General Ziegler's plan in Rastenburg. Ziegler's army was to be created, and that Tunisia made it imperative that of rising to the challenge of such that he proposed to make von Ziegler's new army and that he, Ziegler's official deputy. In that way, Hitler's relationship existed with Rommel—that he had headquarters without giving clear because whenever the army came to these areas there would always be an empowered to act on the army to Hitler the questions of the reinforcements to the new theatre of war. In short time there would be three divisions in Africa. Armed with

this information, Ziegler asked whether for so great a number of troops a flow of supplies could be guaranteed. Hitler reassured him, and Ziegler felt confident that he could believe the word of his Supreme Commander.

Let us, at this point, consider the terrain in the Tunisian battle area. In the north of the country this consists of a mass of mountain peaks, many of which are over 3,000 feet in height. Those mountains are bisected by the Medjerda river, which flows into the Mediterranean between Tunis and Bizerta. In southern Tunisia the mountains are more regular in shape and they divide into two chains, the Eastern and the Western Dorsals. These stretch like an inverted V, and between them the ground becomes a plain. The Eastern Dorsal ends in a vast salt marsh, which provides an ideal defensive position.

When von Arnim and Ziegler met in the Wolfsschanze later that day there was an immediate rapport between them, a mutual trust which was strengthened when they flew to meet Kesselring, the Supreme Commander South, in his headquarters in Frascati, near Rome. From Frascati von Arnim and Ziegler then continued their journey and arrived in Tunisia on 8 December. There they had discussions with General Nehring, commander of the 90th Corps, who had created the perimeter around Tunis with only a handful of soldiers, mostly paratroops and a miscellany of fragments of units that had been stationed in Sicily, Italy and Greece. The arrival of the two senior commanders was a shock to Nehring, who had not been told that he was to be replaced. He had planned an offensive designed to expand the area of the perimeter and showed the battle plan to his two superiors. They agreed it and confirmed the details.

The battle that opened on the following day seized the 900-foot high Longstop Hill, and it was the quick capture of this feature by the 2nd Battalion of the 7th Panzer Regiment and elements from the 754th Infantry Regiment that secured the northern sector of the Tunisian battle zone. As a result of this swift operation the Allies were unable to strike for Tunis until they had recaptured the Longstop peak. The January rainfall then brought an end to the major military operations of both sides, the Italo-German Axis on the one side and the Anglo-American-French forces on the other. By 31 December the 5th Panzer Army,