

The very big movement of United States 2 Corps from Gafsa area to the north, right across the lines of supply of First Army, the provision of all the necessary American types of ammunition, supplies and rations, and the dumping of huge quantities of ammunition for the guns of 2, 5 and 9 Corps within such a short period were great feats which the Staffs concerned have every right to be proud.

Meanwhile, on 30th April, General Alexander told me that in view of the difficult country opposite Eighth Army he had decided to transfer formations across to strengthen First Army for the final blow.

My first task was still to capture Tunis; thereafter to exploit eastwards to prevent the enemy establishing himself in the Cap Bon area. Eighth Army to co-operate in this phase as best it could. 7 Armoured Division, 4 Indian Division, 201 Guards Brigade, with the necessary divisional and administrative troops, were to be transferred at once to my command, with Lieutenant-General B. G. Horrocks, M.C., from 10 Corps (to succeed Lieutenant-General J. T. Crocker, C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C., 9 Corps, who had been wounded).

This, of course, was a big reinforcement to the forces I already had in hand for my breakthrough.

The transfer and regrouping of formations began immediately, as did also the dumping of 450 rounds a gun for over 400 guns. Again an enormous task was accomplished by my Staff without a hitch, and by nightfall of 5th May all was completed and the Army regrouped ready for the assault. The composition of the various Corps is given in Appendix "B."

My orders in outline were as under:—

5 Corps to hold a firm base on their present line and, as a preliminary operation, to capture the dominating Djebel Bou Aoukaz on afternoon 5th May, so as to cover the left flank of 9 Corps in its subsequent attack.

9 Corps during night 5th-6th May to break into the enemy's position on a very narrow front with 4 British and 4 Indian Divisions. This to be followed up immediately by breaking out through the breach with 6 and 7 Armoured Divisions, with the object of seizing and holding the high ground 6 miles due west of Tunis and so breaching the inner defences of Tunis, before the enemy had time to man these defences.

5 Corps thereafter to keep open the corridor and to be ready to use one or more infantry divisions to sustain the attack of 9 Corps.

I emphasised that speed was vital.

United States 2 Corps to continue their attacks on Chougui (and then to exploit towards Djedeida) and Bizerta.

French 19 Corps to attack on 4th May to capture the Djebel Zaghouan—a most formidable mountain massif.

1 British Armoured Division to be in Army Reserve in area Sebkret el Kourzia.

In the hope of confusing the enemy, from whom I could scarcely hope to conceal the colossal traffic movement (reminiscent of Derby Day) and the dust around Medjez, I arranged for a large dummy concentration of tanks and transport (with the usual movement) to be installed near Bou Arada. While making no attempt to conceal 1 Armoured Division near the Sebkret I hoped to make the enemy think I had moved 6 Armoured Division to the Bou

Arada area, and to conceal altogether the arrival of 7 Armoured Division west of Medjez.

Subsequent events proved that this stratagem had a considerable measure of success, as the enemy did not suspect the heavy concentration of armour at Medjez and kept his 21 Panzer Division near Zaghouan to cover the imagined threat to Pont du Fahs. Captured staff officers from German General Headquarters later stated that although they had, in fact, seen tanks in laager south-west of Medjez yet they thought they were only a portion of 1 Armoured Division, and they placed 6 Armoured Division at Bou Arada. Thus, thinking that I had split my armour, they were under no particular apprehension of an immediate attack. I rather stress this point, as it emphasises first, the ease with which one can deceive the air reconnaissance: second, perhaps it explains in some way the later complete surprise which otherwise is almost incomprehensible. But, of course, the primary reason for the enemy's failure to detect our concentration was our overwhelming air superiority which practically kept the enemy out of the air except for a few isolated sorties. In the same connection, it is interesting to recall that I had usually failed to find warning signs of German attacks against me throughout the campaign, despite most active air reconnaissance.

Of the final assault there is little to narrate.

5 Corps' attack on the Bou was successful and it was held against counter-attack.

The attack by 4 British and 4 Indian Divisions in the dark at 0330 hours on 6th May on a front of 3,000 yards went smoothly. Scorpions and four battalions of Churchill tanks came up at dawn on 6th May. The final objectives, to a depth of 5,000 yards, were all taken by 1100 hours with very small losses, under a terrific artillery concentration—deepened by an unprecedentedly intense air bombardment. In the later stages German infantrymen broke and ran, throwing away their rifles. The prolonged and heavy fighting from 22nd April had well prepared the way for this hammer blow.

The two armoured divisions passed through the gap at once and after 6 Armoured Division had engaged enemy tanks (including "Tigers") south of the Tunis road, Furna was cleared and by nightfall Massicault was in our hands, pockets of resistance being by-passed.

On 7th May, at 1540 hours, the Derbyshire Yeomanry and 11 Hussars entered Tunis. On 8th May 7 Armoured Division moved northwards of Tunis and cleared the country towards Protville, while 6 Armoured Division moved south-east towards Hammam Lif—where it met fierce resistance in the strong and narrow pass. On 10th May 6 Armoured Division had broken through, captured Soliman and that night reached Hammamet and at once pushed south towards Bou Ficha.

Meanwhile I had moved up 4 British Division and placed it once more under orders of 9 Corps. This Division was moved rapidly up to Soliman and, in a lightning sweep, cleared the Cap Bon peninsula.

At the same time I also placed 1 British Armoured Division from Army Reserve under 9 Corps, ordering it to move northwards via Ain el Asker and Mohammedia. On 9th and 10th May it advanced via Creteville on Grombalia.