

of 18th April. Eighth Army was to start its attack on the night of 19th-20th April with 50 Division on the coast, 2 New Zealand Division just west of Enfidaville and 4 Indian Division, with "L" Force under command, west of Takrouna. 7 Armoured Division guarded the western flank, made contact with XIX Corps and was available to exploit success. XIX Corps was to attack three mountain positions commanding Pont du Fahs from the south; no date was set for this attack and it was not to be launched until First Army considered that the enemy in these strong positions had been sufficiently weakened by the attacks on either flank. First Army was to attack on 22nd April. 9 Corps would begin in the early morning with 46 Infantry and 1 and 6 Armoured Divisions. The infantry were to destroy the enemy positions west of the salt marshes of Sebkret el Kourzia and the armour was then to follow through as quickly as possible directed on Gebel Mengoub, an eight hundred foot feature fifteen miles from the north end of the marshes and the same distance from Tunis. 5 Corps would attack in the evening of 22nd April with 1 and 4 Divisions south of the river, directed on Massicault, and 78 Division in the mountains north of the river with Gebel Ahmera ("Longstop") as their first objective. II Corps' attack was timed for the next day, 23rd April, with 1 Division attacking on the Sidi Nsir road with its final objective the pass above Chouigui, and 9 Division on the axis Sedjenane-Mateur. In order to control the battle I had moved my Headquarters to a wood near Le Kef, after a short period at Haidra, between Tebessa and Thala.

When speaking of the plans for the final battles of the campaign I must take the opportunity of recording my obligations to my Chief of Staff, General McCreery. He had accompanied me from the Middle East where he had filled the same appointment. Both as a personal friend and as a brilliant Staff Officer he was invaluable to me in the whole course of operations in Africa, and was later to show, both as a Corps and an Army Commander that he added to his intellectual qualities the highest gifts of command.

General von Arnim still disposed of over two hundred thousand troops for a front of a hundred and twenty miles. Messe's Army held the southern front with German and Italian infantry in line from the sea to west of Takrouna: 90 Light Division was responsible for the coast road and 164 Light Division was on its inland flank; there were various Italian remnants, organized mainly under command of Headquarters Trieste Division, interspersed with the German troops and continuing the line westwards. The German Africa Corps, which had now taken under command the Superga Division, held the angle between the two fronts. The order of battle of von Vaerst's 5 Panzer Army was relatively unchanged. The Mantuffel Division faced II Corps in the northernmost sector, then 334 Division in the mountains on the north bank of the Medjerda and 999 Africa Division, now almost complete, astride the river. In the area of 5 and 9 Corps was the Hermann Goering Division, reinforced with additional infantry and tanks, including part of a very recently arrived heavy tank battalion. As soon as Messe was back on his Enfidaville line von Arnim removed 10 Panzer Division,

still his strongest armoured formation, and transferred it to the area between Sebkret el Kourzia and the Medjerda. This was clearly the most threatened point and it was vital to have an armoured reserve to cover the plain of Tunis. It was, however, the only reserve that Army Group Africa had and it is a little surprising that von Arnim made no effort to create a larger one by shortening his line at the less important points. Nor did he attempt to construct any defensive systems in rear of his present line except for some not very impressive perimeter defences round Tunis.

Eighth Army's attack on the Enfidaville position began at 2130 hours on 19th April. 50 Division captured Enfidaville itself and pushed forward patrols beyond it. The New Zealanders advanced to a point three miles north-west of the town. 4 Indian Division, further west, had a very fierce struggle for Gebel Garci; the enemy counter-attacked continuously and, at the cost of very heavy casualties, succeeded in holding the attack. It was noticed that the Italians fought particularly well, outdoing the Germans in line with them. The New Zealanders next day had an equally bloody struggle for the hill village of Takrouna. In spite of severe losses from our massed artillery fire the enemy kept up his policy of continuous counter-attacks and it became clear that it would cost us heavily to advance further into this tangled mass of mountains. General Montgomery therefore decided late on the 21st to abandon the thrust in the centre and concentrate on forcing the coastal defile.

This change of plan would involve fairly extensive regrouping and at the same time he wished to send back to the Delta one of the divisions which would be needed for the invasion of Sicily. 50 Division was selected as it had been weakened by its losses in the Mareth and Akarit battles. It was to be relieved by 56 Division, which had had no previous operational experience. The plan was to relieve 4 Indian and New Zealand Divisions opposite Gebel Garci and Takrouna with 51 Division brought forward from rest; this division had also had fairly heavy losses and was to be restricted to a holding role. The two former divisions, with the 56th, were to make the assault on the right. The first stage was on the night 24th/25th April when the New Zealanders and 201 Guards Brigade captured Gebel Terhouna, a strongly contested hill feature overlooking the coast about five miles north of Enfidaville. The main attack was planned for 29th April and its object was to establish all three divisions in the area of Hammamet, at the base of the Cape Bon peninsula. On the 29th, however, I received a signal from General Montgomery saying that, as a result of a failure by 56 Division on that day when coming under artillery fire as it was about to take up positions for the attack, he now felt unhappy about the possibilities of success. As this was not going to interfere with the plans I was already forming for finishing off enemy resistance in the Tunis plain I authorized the abandonment of the attack. 1 Fighting French Division was brought forward on 6th May to relieve 51 Division and the Eighth Army front became a holding front except for the western flank where the New Zealanders carried out local operations to assist XIX Corps and attract enemy attention.