

sion entered Mateur. The enemy tried to hold a line on the high ground east of the Mateur-Tebourba road and especially the pass leading to Chouigui, which was strongly defended by the Barenthin Regiment. North of Mateur, however, 1 Division to the south and 9 Division to the north of Garaet Achkel continued to make progress. The Moroccan Goums attached to 9 Division were particularly useful in the mountains to the north of the lake. These were strong positions by nature but the German defenders had been too much weakened by their losses round Jefna. On the morning of the 7th May resistance broke, on the edge of the last hills, and the American Corps started the final attack which was to bring them into Bizerta.

At first light on 7th May 6 and 7 Armoured Divisions moved forward once more from Massicault. Despite his best efforts the enemy had been unable to organise a defence in the area of the break through, though he was hastily summoning back the forces cut off to the south of our penetration. 6 Armoured Division fought a stiff action south-east of St. Cyprien while 7 Armoured Division, advancing north of the road, captured the village by 0830 hours and pressed on for the suburb of Le Bardo. There was a sharp skirmish at the junction of the Medjez and Bizerta roads, a little sniping from isolated houses on the outskirts but at 1445 hours 11 Hussars and 1 Derbyshire Yeomanry entered Tunis. The enthusiasm of the population was unrestrained; it was the first of many experiences we were to have of the liberation of a great city. An hour and a half after the British entry into Tunis 47 Regimental Combat Team of 9 United States Division entered Bizerta. It was a happy coincidence that we should have gained our two main objectives simultaneously and that both the major Allies should have won a notable victory on the same day; I had of course planned this division of the spoils but I had not expected so dramatic a climax.

The fall of Tunis and Bizerta clearly came to the German Command, both in Africa and Berlin, as a most severe shock. It was not until the evening of 8th May that the High Command issued a statement that Africa would now be abandoned and "the thirty-one thousand Germans and thirty thousand Italians remaining" would be withdrawn by sea. I commented in a report to General Eisenhower that night that the Navy and Air Forces would interfere with this programme, which in any event depended on the enemy holding a firm bridgehead in Cape Bon, and reminded him of Mr. Churchill's words in August, 1940: "We are waiting, so are the fishes". In fact no effort of this sort was made, for the enemy's plans of defence had been completely disrupted. The divided forces were not given a moment's pause to recover. As soon as the situation in Tunis was under control 9 Corps split its forces according to the pre-arranged plan and proceeded to mop up to left and right. On the left 7 Armoured Division was directed northwards up the Bizerta road towards Protville and the Medjerda; simultaneously 1 United States Armoured Division was moving towards the same area, north of the Protville marshes, from Mateur. The troops entrapped in this pocket consisted of the Manteuffel Division, 15 Panzer and 334 Infantry Divisions. They

had little hope of resistance and none of evacuation and at noon on 9th May they accepted unconditional surrender. Six Generals were among the prisoners, including von Vaerst, the Commander-in-Chief of 5 Panzer Army.

The forces cut off on the south of our wedge of penetration, between 9 Corps and Eighth Army, were larger than those to the north. In order to deal with these the first essential was to establish ourselves across the base of the Cape Bon peninsula, for should they be able to withdraw into it they might prolong resistance unduly. Provided we followed up our success vigorously, however, there could be no chance for them of withdrawing in time. Accordingly 6 Armoured Division, after passing through Tunis, wheeled right down the road which runs across the base of the peninsula. It was followed by 4 Infantry Division, and 1 Armoured Division came up on its right from the Goubellat area. The first obstacle encountered was the Hammam Lif defile. At the bottom of the Gulf of Tunis Gebel Bou Kournine, the sacred "twin-horned" mountain of the Carthaginians, rises steeply above the road leaving a narrow gap of about three hundred yards between it and the sea shore. The pass was held by some of the remaining troops of the Hermann Goering Division, strongly supported by heavy anti-aircraft guns withdrawn from airfield defence. For two days this exceptionally strong position held 6 Armoured Division at bay but on the morning of 10th May they broke through by sending a body of tanks through the very edge of the surf.

With the forcing of the Hamman Lif defile our advance was rapid and met no further obstacles. 6 Armoured Division poured through the pass down the main road to the south and by nightfall on the 10th had reached Hammamet on the east coast. Next day 4 Division swept rapidly round the peninsula, encountering no opposition and demonstrating that no important forces had withdrawn there. On 12th May 6 Armoured Division attacked southwards from Bou Fichta, 56 Division co-operated with shelling from the south and after a brief resistance the enemy raised the white flag. Our encircling ring had joined up and the only enemy still resisting were in isolated pockets to the north-west of Enfidaville.

Up to this time the enemy facing Eighth Army had held their ground and continued to show resistance; indeed the front had been livelier than ever, for the Germans had greatly increased their artillery fire in order to get rid of as much ammunition as possible.* On the 12th, however, mass surrenders occurred. General Graf von Sponeck, commanding 90 Light Division, surrendered to Lieut.-General Sir Bernard Freyberg of the New Zealand Division, old opponents on many hard-fought fields. General von Arnim, the Army Group Commander, surrendered to the Commanding Officer of 2 Gurkhas. He was brought to my Headquarters at Le Kef, where he still seemed surprised by the suddenness of the disaster. The Italians in the more inaccessible hill-country north of Saouaf held out the longest, and General Messe delayed his surrender until the morning of the 13th; shortly

* Contrary to reports at the time, they were well provided with supplies of all natures.