

reasons, on a line running east and west through Sfax, sending the armoured cars of 4 Light Armoured Brigade to flood the country to the north. On the 12th the advance was resumed again with 10 Corps while 30 Corps halted round Sfax. Sousse fell on 12th April and by next day our leading troops were in contact with the first defences north of Enfidaville. XIX Corps had also joined in the attack, working in close harmony with 9 Corps, and had driven the enemy from the Eastern Dorsale as far as ten miles north of Pichon. 9 Corps made contact with patrols from Eighth Army on 11th April.

*Preparations for the Final Assault.*

I had now achieved my first object in the capture of the whole of the coastal plain and we were in a position to exploit from there our air superiority. A striking demonstration was given on 18th April when our fighters intercepted off Cape Bon a large flight of German transport aircraft carrying troops and shot down over fifty of them; it was also a significant confirmation of the fact that the enemy, so far from thinking of evacuation, was using every possible means to rush troops into his now much diminished Tunisian bridgehead. My next object was to complete the destruction of the forces still opposing me as quickly as possible, in order to obtain the use of the ports of Tunis and Bizerta for the invasion of Sicily. The enemy positions presented to us two fronts at right angles, facing west and south, with the salient angle protected by the tangled mountain country of the Gebel Mansour and the Gebel Fkirine. I decided, for topographical reasons, to make my main attack on the western face of this perimeter. My intention was to break through to Tunis from the west and thereby split the enemy forces in two. I would then leave the smaller body of enemy to the north to be mopped up by the Allied troops on the spot and, turning southwards with the greater part of my forces, drive the larger body of enemy on the right flank of the penetration against the line firmly held by Eighth Army. It was particularly important in carrying out this manoeuvre to prevent the enemy establishing himself in the peninsula terminating in Cape Bon, where he might have been able to hold out for some time.

I had rejected the idea of making my main thrust with Eighth Army partly because an advance against the southern face of the perimeter would drive the enemy in on themselves rather than split them and partly because of the difficulty of the terrain. From the sea just north of Enfidaville to the Gebel Fkirine massif the mountains present a continuous wall of abrupt peaks. This wall is pierced by three roads, all starting from Enfidaville: the only good road follows the coast, with salt marshes on its right and mountains on its left; the other two run via Saouaf and Zaghouan through a series of narrow passes. On the First Army front there are also three routes to Tunis, but more widely separated. The southernmost runs from Bou Arada to Pont du Fahs and thence north-east. This could be blocked by the enemy fairly easily at the Pont du Fahs defile and commanded from the mountains on the south side of the Bou Arada plain. The second route starts from the Goubellat plain, which gives good opportunities for deployment. It would then be possible to advance north-eastwards,

north of the salt marshes of Sebket el Kourzia, and enter the plain of Tunis by various minor roads running south-west from the city. The difficulty here was a belt of broken country without roads which interposes to the north-east of the salt marshes. The third route follows the axis of the Medjez-Massicault road, the main road to Tunis from the west. This was the most direct route and gave the best opportunities for the use of tanks; we had fought all winter for our foothold at its gate. For these very reasons, however, the enemy defences were here at their strongest.

In order to develop their full strength for the decisive blow First Army had to be more concentrated and reinforced. For the former purpose I had already decided to relieve 46 and 4 Divisions on its northernmost flank with two divisions from II Corps. On 3rd April I ordered General Patton to be prepared to despatch his 9 Infantry Division to take over from 46 Division as soon as Eighth Army had broken through the Wadi Akarit line and to follow as rapidly as possible with the rest of II Corps. 9 Division, after regrouping and re-fitting, assumed command of the northernmost sector on 14th April and on 19th April 1 United States Infantry Division began to relieve 4 Division; on the same day II Corps assumed command of the area north of the Oued et Tine. I intended that simultaneously with First Army's offensive and Eighth Army's holding attack II Corps should also develop operations down the Sedjenane road and the Béja-Mateur road to contain the enemy there and, if possible, to accelerate the capture of Bizerta. I must mention here that the way in which four United States divisions were transferred from one end of the line to the other, crossing at right angles the lines of communication of First Army, was a considerable triumph of staff work. Reinforcements for First Army could only come from Eighth Army. On 11th April I informed General Montgomery that the main effort in the final phase of operations would be by General Anderson and ordered him to make available to join 9 Corps as soon as possible an armoured division and an armoured car regiment. 1 Armoured Division and the King's Dragoon Guards were nominated, being well placed on the Faid-Sbeitla road for such a transfer.

On 12th April I ordered General Anderson to prepare a large-scale offensive to capture Tunis, with a target date of 22nd April. I informed him that I was placing 9 Corps under his command, reinforced by 1 Armoured Division, and that II Corps would simultaneously be attacking in the direction of Bizerta. First Army was to give such assistance as should be possible to II Corps' attack but the latter was remaining under Army Group command. I indicated that the area for the main attack, by 5 and 9 Corps with four infantry and two armoured divisions, would be on the front from Medjez el Bab to north of Bou Arada with 5 Corps attacking north-east on the axis Medjez-Massicault and 9 Corps north of the Sebket el Kourzia on a parallel axis. XIX Corps would be prepared in the event of success to advance towards the Pont du Fahs defile.

After discussion with the two Army commanders and General Patton, commanding II Corps, the final plan was worked out in the following form as reported by me in a signal