

covered the main passes through the mountains with small forces of up to a brigade group; the gaps between these defended areas varied from 10-18 miles as the crow flies. These spaces were inadequately patrolled by both sides.

(c) An offensive period, starting with our counter-attack at Djebel Abiod on 28th March, and ending with the final destruction of the Axis forces in Africa on 13th May, 1943.

But before narrating the march of events, I must refer to certain factors which intimately affected my decisions and actions on many occasions. They form the background to the adventure on which First Army was embarked.

(a) First and foremost was the matter of *Command*.\* In the early days, when my forces were weak, General Eisenhower gave me every atom of help in his power by ordering up units of the United States Forces from Oran and Casablanca to help my advanced troops in their forward rush. These United States units arrived piecemeal, as fast as the very limited road and rail facilities could carry them, and had perforce to be employed as part and parcel of the British forces under British brigade or divisional commanders, and not independently as all of us would have wished. That the resulting friction was so small speaks volumes for the real desire to pull together which animated all parties. As soon as possible, United States units were concentrated under United States formation commanders, and continued for many weeks to co-operate closely and happily with our officers and men under command of 78 Division and 5 Corps. But it was long before our total Allied strength reached a point at which each nation could be made entirely responsible for its own particular sector.

The advent of the French as our active allies produced fresh complications in command which grew as the front increased. In the north were six battalions under General Barre, operating with, but not at first under command of, 5 Corps; in the centre the main French forces were concentrating in the Le Kef-Teboursouk area; in the south another force of about eight battalions was in the area Gafsa-Tebessa working with the small mobile United States force operating there, who were nominally under command of the French.

British mobile units were also, later, in the south under United States command for reconnaissance duties, while for several months First Army had to co-ordinate, and in most cases provide, the entire movement and supply organisation and most of the signal communications for all three nationalities.

The more the campaign progressed the more obvious it became that unified command was quite essential to avoid a chaotic muddle. But General Giraud would not agree to placing French troops under British command, while his manifold other responsibilities prevented General Eisenhower personally exercising the command himself from a forward headquarters.

\* The difficulties about command which General Anderson describes arose, in part, from political considerations, and especially from the need to conciliate the French Command. At this stage in the war, however, much had still to be learnt about the command of allied armies in the field. It was as a result of the lessons learnt in this campaign that later organisation was so greatly improved.

So a series of compromises and makeshifts was adopted in the course of which I, gradually and as commander of the only formation equipped and able to undertake the task, became in turn adviser, co-ordinator and, finally, commander of the whole Tunisian front. None of these steps was satisfactory, and even as commander I lacked the physical means to control efficiently so large a front of well over 200 miles.

The situation was not righted until 18 Army Group was formed later under General Alexander, who then took 2 United States Corps directly under his own control, leaving me with the British and French forces only—covering at the time a front of 120 miles.

(b) Another constant hindrance, already referred to, was closely related to the problem of command—the *inter-mingling of units of the three Allied Armies*. Obviously it is hopelessly unsound both for tactical and administrative reasons to mix troops in this way, but the chain of events as the campaign unfolded forced it upon me. It was my constant pre-occupation to tidy up the mess and give each nation its own sector, but this was not finally accomplished until mid-March when the steadily increasing Allied strength at last enabled the final transfers to be arranged—always excepting the retention of a considerable amount of British artillery with French 19 Corps right up to the end of hostilities and the use anywhere on the front, in the mountains, of the specialised Goums from Morocco.\*

(c) *The state of the French Army and feeling throughout the country*.—I have no intention of touching on politics except in so far as they influenced operations. But in the early days of this campaign, politics intruded everywhere. The loyalties of all French officers were sharply divided, and many, even of those who had taken the plunge and sided with the Allies, were still openly expressing loyalty to the Marshal. Even while I was pressing forward with all vigour General Barre was still negotiating with General von Arnim in Tunis. This may have been a clever move to gain time, and I am now inclined to this view; but at the moment it did not inspire me with confidence. Many mayors, station- and post-masters and other key officials with whom we had dealings as we advanced (for instance, the civil telephone was, at first, my chief means of communicating with my forward units and with Allied Force Headquarters) were lukewarm in their sympathies and hesitant to commit themselves openly, while a few were hostile. I can safely generalise by saying that at first, in the Army, the senior officers were hesitant and afraid to commit themselves, the junior officers were mainly in favour of aiding the Allies, the men would obey orders; amongst the people, the Arabs were indifferent or inclined to be hostile, the French were in our favour but apathetic, the civil authorities were antagonistic as a whole. The resulting impression on my mind was not one of much confidence as to the safety of my small isolated force should I suffer a severe set-back.

But from the moment General Barre refused the final German ultimatum on 19th November, the situation began to change. We met henceforth with increasing assistance and courtesy

\* Goums are Moroccan troops trained in Mountain Warfare.