

None the less, I decided my plan as follows:—

5 Corps to make the main attack from Medjez and to break into the enemy's main defensive system between Peter's Corner and Longstop.

9 Corps to capture the high ground west of Sebkret and then to push its armoured divisions across the Goubellat plain, in the hope that by speed of movement they might get through the hills to the east, swing north towards Massicault and in that area engage and destroy the enemy's armoured reserves and act against the rear of the defenders opposite 5 Corps. If the armour did not progress quickly north of the Sebkret I was not prepared to press home this attack; but instead to keep the armour to break through on 5 Corps front, after the enemy there had been fought to exhaustion. 46 Division to revert, in any case, to Army Reserve after the initial attack.

United States 2 Corps to make its main effort eastwards, to seize the high ground east and west of Chouigui and cover the left flank of 5 Corps. United States 2 Corps also to advance on Bizerta via the Sedjenane-Jefna and the Oued Sedjenane Valleys.

French 19 Corps to advance on the axis Robaa-Pont du Fahs. But this was not to start until I considered the attacks by 9 Corps (and by Eighth Army near Enfidaville) had softened the resistance opposite French 19 Corps.

My attack to be supported by 242 Group Royal Air Force, 12 Air Support Command and the Tactical Bomber Force, all working under Air Commodore K. B. B. Cross, D.S.O., D.F.C. Western Desert Air Force was also available by mutual arrangement.

The composition of the Army and United States 2 Corps is given in Appendix "A."

The attacks were timed to start as under:—

0400 hrs. 22nd April	...	9 Corps.
2000 hrs. 22nd April	...	5 Corps.
0400 hrs. 23rd April	...	2 U.S. Corps.

Not surprisingly, the enemy apparently was aware that trouble was brewing and on night 20th-21st April he launched a strong spoiling attack between Medjez and Goubellat and also against 9 Corps, using his Hermann Goering Division with tanks of 10 Panzer Division. He lost heavily, including 33 tanks destroyed by us and over 450 prisoners. That he did not succeed in seriously disorganising our final deployment for the big attack was a tribute to all units concerned, as naturally the confusion at one time was considerable when enemy tanks appeared in the dark amid our batteries, being deployed ahead even of our Forward Defended Localities. But the fighting against 46 Division on 9 Corps front did delay the launching of the attack there for four hours and created some confusion and fatigue amongst the troops of 138 Infantry Brigade forming up for the assault.

Without going into details of the very fierce fighting which developed all along the front from 22nd to 30th April, I can summarise the story as follows:—

9 Corps.

46 Division attack north of Bou Arada failed on the right, but on the left succeeded sufficiently to allow 6 Armoured Division to pass through by nightfall, 22nd April. During 23rd-24th April, 6 Armoured Division was followed by 1 Armoured Division, and both

moved eastwards, meeting opposition but destroying many enemy tanks. However, we were not quick enough, and a strong enemy anti-tank gun screen in the broken country north-east and north of the Sebkret el Kourzia and near Djebel Kournine prevented eventually all further advance, despite many attempts. The enemy withdrew from the Seba Argout position opposite the right of 46 Division. Seeing that no further progress was likely, on 26th April I ordered 9 Corps to stand fast and to return 6 Armoured Division and 46 Division (less one Infantry Brigade Group) to Army Reserve. This attack by 9 Corps only just failed to achieve its object. It did, however, inflict severe tank losses on the enemy, drew his armoured reserves to the south and (based on subsequent statements by captured senior officers) seriously frightened him. It also had the effect of leaving the enemy opposite 19 Corps in a pronounced salient, from which they hurriedly withdrew on 25th April. Our losses were not severe.

19 Corps.

The enemy withdrawal just forestalled an attack by 19 Corps, which therefore followed up rapidly, and by 28th April had again come up against stiff resistance and strong artillery fire on the general line Djebel Derhalfa-road Enfidaville to Pont du Fahs-Station de Thibica. An advance of 18 miles.

5 Corps.

In a series of grim hand-to-hand attacks and counter-attacks against the Hermann Goering, 334 and 15 Panzer Divisions, the British 1, 4 and 78 Divisions with Army tank support advanced between 22nd and 30th April to a depth of about six miles and captured most of the enemy's main defensive positions facing Medjez in a semi-circle from Peter's Corner to Longstop. Every attack was given very heavy and concentrated artillery support. Losses were heavy, especially in commanding officers, but by the end of April I felt the enemy was nearly ripe for the break through. Almost the fiercest fighting of all took place on 29th April. On 1st May, Hermann Goering Division asked for an armistice to bury its dead. This was refused.

For the break-through I had then in Army Reserve 6 Armoured Division and 46 Division (less one brigade group), while 5 Corps had still in hand one infantry brigade of 4 Division and the best part of an Army Tank Brigade. And at last I had room to deploy armoured forces east of the river Medjerda, over which two more bridges were built.

2 U.S. Corps.

As the result of constant pressure and proper use of the big numerical preponderance they enjoyed to outflank the enemy defences, 2 U.S. Corps by 2nd May had cleared the enemy from Hills 609 and 612 north and east of Sidi Nsir and from the strong Djebel Ajred and Azag positions: Goums and the Corps Franc had reached the hills north of Lake Garaet Achkel. The capture of Point 609 by United States 34 Division was a particularly fine piece of work, against fierce opposition from the formidable Barenthin Regiment.

On 3rd and 4th May the enemy withdrew all along the front under heavy pressure to the line of hills west of Bizerta-east of Mateur-east of Oued Tine valley. Mateur was occupied by United States 1 Armoured Division.