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## Part I

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- V. Sketches and Overlay: Composition of Staff OB Süd.
- VI. List of Abbreviations:
- |        |                              |                             |
|--------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| OB     | - Oberbefehlshaber           | - Commander in Chief        |
| OKW    | - Oberkommando der Wehrmacht | - Armed Forces High Command |
| U-Boot | - Unterseeboot               | - U-boat                    |
| Stuka  | - Sturzkampfflieger          | - Dive-bomber Pilot         |
| Ju     | - Junker-Flugzeug            | - Junker aircraft           |
| Flak   | - Flugabwehrkanone           | - Anti-aircraft gun         |
| MG     | - Maschinengewehr            | - Machine gun               |
| Pak    | - Panzerabwehrkanone         | - Anti-tank gun             |
| Rgt.   | - Regiment                   | - Regiment                  |
| Batl.  | - Bataillon                  | - Battalion                 |
| Inf.   | - Infanterie                 | - Infantry                  |
| to     | - Tonne                      | - Tonnage                   |
| m      | - Meter                      | - Meter                     |
| d.h.   | - das heisst                 | - that is                   |
| z.b.V. | - zur besondere Verwendung   | - on special assignment     |
| z.B.   | - zum Beispiel               | - for example               |



Paul Deichmann  
General der Flieger

Appointment of OB Süd to Joint Battle Command  
in North Africa after the Allied Landing

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\*) Translator's note: According to Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, Shott is a shallow saline lake in one of the closed basins of North Africa.



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I. Introduction

The study rests on the following basic considerations:

1. Charge of OB Süd with Supreme Command in the Mediterranean Theater by order of the Führer in December 1942, and

2. the Bases of Operation for the German Air Forces in the Mediterranean Theater after the Allied landing in French North Africa.

It is supplemented by a number of other studies concerning supply of German troops across the Mediterranean, including questions of navigation, system of communication, employment of air forces, etc.

The study still needs supplementing, especially in regard to the time element. This supplement can follow only after the necessary records will have been made available here.

II. Events in November 1942

1. Opposition to the Allied Landing in French North Africa by the German Air Force Units and by the Axis U-boats.

After units of the Allied landing fleet had come within range of the German bombing forces in Algiers, on November 6, 1942, the latter were employed to oppose them. The great distance from the take-off base to the target made it impossible to provide the German bombing force with fighter escort. But since the Allies could bring their fighter planes into action (first of all, from aircraft carriers), the employment of German bombing units was possible only when weather conditions were exceptionally favorable (cloud cover, attacks at morning and evening twilight). Already in the afternoon of November 8, 1942, the Allies succeeded in transferring one



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British fighting unit to the Maison Blanche airfield, near Algiers. The Allied landing and supply bases were during the entire time of the engagements that followed the main objectives of the heavy German bombing units.

The ready-for-sea German and Italian submarines were ordered into the west Mediterranean several days ahead of the landing, in order to oppose the expected landing fleet.

To begin with, the requisite political set-up for intervention in the territory of French North Africa did not exist.

The political situation gave OB no possibility yet of taking any measures on his initiative at this time. This colony was a component of unoccupied France, with the government of which Germany had concluded an armistice agreement.

2. Measures for Support of the French Troops in French North Africa in the Combat against the Allies.

a. Arrival of Armed Forces High Command (OKW) Instructions at OB Süd for Transfer of one Fighter Group to Tunis.

In the meantime the German troops entered the part of France until then unoccupied.

Thereafter OB Süd received approximately the following instructions from the Armed Forces High Command:

"To support the defense of the French fighting forces in Tunisia, preparations will be made to transfer a fighter group with the corresponding ground personnel. No action will be taken in this direction until further orders."



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These instructions were supplemented by an explanation that negotiations were in progress with the French government with the object of prevailing upon the French to continue fighting against the Allies in French North Africa. Hence it is important to support the French, and this should begin with a fighter group.

Mussolini's Promise Not to Send Italian Troops

OB Stüd knew of the bad relations between the Italians and the French, especially of the extreme tension which existed between the French of Tunisia and the rather great number of Italians living there. The French could not have been ignorant of the Italians' covetous glances toward the French colonies in North Africa.

It was feared therefore that the French would refuse united action if Italy were to participate side by side with the Axis.

OB Stüd therefore sought out Mussolini in order to bring this to his attention and induce him to refrain from sending Italian troops to Tunis. Mussolini definitely agreed. This question, according to my knowledge, was not touched upon by the German Armed Forces High Command.

Further Instructions of the Armed Forces High Command  
to OB Stüd

During the night of November 10/11, 1942, OB Stüd received the following directive from the Armed Forces High Command:

"The French government has instructed the Resident General, Admiral Esteva, that German fighter planes are to be transferred to Tunis for support of the French troops. However, it is not entirely clear what



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influence the French government has on the French officials and troops in French North Africa. OB Süd is therefore to make contact with the Resident General in Tunis and to act in the given case according to the agreement."

b. First German Landing in Tunis

During the night approximately the following order was received from OB Süd:

"At daybreak of November 11, 1942, the II Fliegerkorps (Air Corps) will dispatch to the Resident General in Tunis an especially qualified officer, who will inform the Resident General that, according to the agreement between the German government and Marshal Pétain, a German fighter group will shortly land in Tunis. The officer will be dispatched in a plane of a commercial model (Ju 52). He will carry a radio. If the officer becomes convinced that the French will let the fighter unit land without armed resistance, he will radio an agreed code word. It is immaterial whether the French officials agree or not to the landing of a fighter group."

Simultaneously a fighter group was alerted in Sicily with the necessary ground personnel and an air force guard company with the corresponding transport planes (Ju 52). This guard company was a special unit of the OB Süd; it consisted of especially selected personnel which had received splendid training for ground fighting, and was suitably equipped (6 light MG, 6 Pak).

In the course of the morning the word in code came in from Tunis that the French would probably not offer any active resistance.



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The order to the alerted fighter plane unit for the crossing and landing in Tunis was given by OB Süd with instructions that the unit was also to remain reachable by radio. This indicates best the uncertainty of the situation.

Meanwhile, the OB Süd had taken steps to reinforce the fighting forces in Tunis immediately after a successful landing. To this end the combat units formed from the Africa -"overflow"\*-) were dispatched the night before by motor transport to the airfield in Sicily. Two Air Force parachute regiments (without jump equipment) rolled in from Germany by express train. These regiments were especially well suited for air transport owing to their portable heavy weapons. Of these regiments the Koch Regiment had arrived with two battalions on November 16, 1942. During the morning OB Süd received a radio message that the landing of the fighter group had been successful; however, that a French armored reconnaissance car had come up beside every plane, aiming its guns at the plane. This indicated to OB Süd what it did not expect, namely that the French troops in common with the German units would fight against the Allies.

c. Reinforcement of the First Fighter Plane Group to Land

The transport planes with the air force guard company landed at the airfield in Tunis immediately after the fighter planes. From behind the cover of the hangars this company laid its MG's and Paks on the French armored reconnaissance cars; it also laid mines around them. Soon thereafter

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\*) Translator's note: Context does not help precise understanding of German which is here "Afrika-Stau." Believed to refer to a stream of reinforcements headed for Africa from Italy via Sicily, that because of the Allied naval and air power in the Mediterranean, were "dammed up" in Sicily. (Staudam)



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the French armored reconnaissance cars received orders from French authorities to leave the airfield. Hence, the airfield was in German hands.

It was now necessary to gain time through negotiations and to reinforce the troops in Tunis to the point where the French would not gain dare an active resistance.

In view of the fact that strong units of a French division were stationed in Tunis and that the military airfield in Bizerte boasted of a strong French garrison, this decision presented a big risk.

To expedite transportation, the Commando Supremo made available torpedo boats, each loaded with 200 German troops, which went to Bizerte. A German dive bomber group was also moved to Tunis. All bombers and reconnaissance planes returning during daylight hours from a raid had to fly over Tunis for demonstration purposes.

Owing to the distance between Tunis and Bizerte, two groups of the German forces were formed, one in Tunis by air transportation, the other, in Bizerte, by sea transportation. Thus, the German troops were now in possession of the two airfields and the two harbors in Tunis and Bizerte.

d. Continuation of Negotiations with French Headquarters

Meanwhile negotiations with the French officials continued in Tunis. On orders from OK S41 the Commanding General of II Fliegerkorps personally intervened in these negotiations.

It became plain that negotiations had to be carried on with two French headquarters which were obviously not in agreement with each



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other. Admiral Esteva, the person in authority, was manifestly loyal to Vichy; General Barrès, War Minister of Tunis and at the same time Commander of the Barrès Division appeared on the contrary to be against the German measures, not expressing however his viewpoint clearly. It could not be established from either side whether - as the Armed Forces High Command agreed - orders from Marshal Pétain existed and whether they should be followed.

OB Süd gave orders to prolong the negotiations as much as possible, without coming to a decision. Meanwhile both German groups, Tunis and Bizerte, were being reinforced. OB Süd was now determined to seize both strong points, in Tunis and Bizerte, and if necessary get complete control of them, in spite of the extraordinary numerical inferiority of the German forces.

On the second day approximately, after the landing, the negotiations tended to be more favorable, after the German representatives, questioned by the French officials, could inform them that Italian troops would not arrive in Tunisia. The French officials obligated themselves to quarter and feed the German troops. The French now admitted also that Admiral Esteva had received orders from Marshal Pétain.

In Tunis the armistice commission with its valuable information stood at the disposal of the German headquarters. It had only one German major, all other members were Italians.

e. Italy Breaks Promise and Sends Troops to Tunisia

The telephone message received on November 13, 1942, from the Italian Commando Supremo, that Mussolini had also decided to send Italian



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troops to Tunisia, struck OB Súd like a bomb; that a fighter plane group was already flying across; and likewise, that some torpedo boats with troops were on the way. Obviously Mussolini regarded the situation as changed, that, according to all appearances, the French troops would not fight the Allied troops. Mussolini himself could not be reached.

Feldmarschall Kesselring appealed to the Italian Commando Supremo to recall this action in view of the possible consequences it might have at this particular moment, since the German forces were not yet strong enough to maintain themselves successfully against the French. At 0900 hours the Commando Supremo declared that it is a physical impossibility to recall the units, as they were already on the way and could no longer be reached by radio (it was established later that the fighter group did not take off from Sardinia until 1100 hours.

f. Effecting the Italian Measures in Tunis

With the withdrawal of the first Italian unit the French broke off abruptly the negotiations with the German representatives and accused them of breach of faith.

The Barrès Division left Tunis, moving in a northwesterly direction toward Beja. The OB Súd now called upon the Foreign Office over the head of the Armed Forces High Command, in order to prevent through Marshal Petain the extreme consequences of this Italian move.

The command of the Army unit in Tunis was taken over by a colonel assigned by the Armed Forces High Command. He was supported by the Air Force commander of Tunisia under whose command the fighter and dive bomber units stood.



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### III. Influence of Tunisia's Geography on the Fighting

"Description of Military Geography" of the country, published by the German General Staff, served the OB Süd as the chief base for the action taken in occupying Tunisia and for planning the operations. The data of this description was supplemented by frequent flights to Tunis of the Commander-in-Chief Süd and his technical staff officers.

Due only to especially favorable geographic conditions was it possible to succeed in occupying the country, even after the landing of the Allies.

#### 1. Western Part of Tunisia

The western part of Tunisia is predominantly mountainous in character. It is marked by a number of mountain ranges running parallel from southwest to northeast, the elevation of which diminishes toward the northeast. The open hill country of Tunisia, south of the Medscherda River, stretches west deep into the mountains, as far as the Teburba-Gubellat, Boa Arada and Pont du Fahs line, presenting to an aggressor coming from the west an objective of great value.

Therefore, possession of the extending ridge to the west in sufficient depth was to the defendant of first importance. Accordingly, fighting for its control and extension dominated the picture of the months that followed. Farther south the corridors and passages on the mountain front to the west, near Faid, Maknassy and Foudonk, offered objectives for the possession of which both sides were fighting.

The mountains are divided into a great number of separate ranges and massifs by numerous valleys, slopes and depressions. They frequently take



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on very rugged forms. Toward the north of Tunisia their inaccessibility grows, mostly owing to the growth of dense underbrush and woods. In western Tunisia these mountains extend from the coast in the north to the Shott line and great salt lakes in the south.

The mountains present considerable obstacles to be avoided only by railroads and highways. Beyond the highways they are mostly impassable for motor vehicles and tanks. This terrain is excellently suited for checking, even with a weak force, an enemy attacking from the west, but making at the same time difficult one's own operations toward the west.

The Medscherda plain deserves special attention; it stretches from east to west and, apart from the river with its 10 - 12 meters high clay banks, does not present any terrain difficulties.

In the northern part of Tunisia the central mountain chain is 700 to 900 meters high, while in the south the mountains command a height up to 1700 meters. Woods and dense scrub offer good camouflage possibilities in the north, but cover is scarce in south Tunisia.

The possibilities for attack operations from Tunisia toward the west with a rather strong armored support are limited. Only in the south can the attack proceed from the Gafsa area through the Kasserine Pass toward Tebessa where the Constantine plateau is reached and where there are no obstacles to greater expansion, the area being also passable off the somewhat numerous roads and highways. Another possibility for attack is from Gafsa over Negrin toward Biskra.

A defensive position in western Tunisia that stretches in the north toward the sea is protected against landings for the greater part by the



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steep coastline which extends from Cape Negro (30 kilometers northeast of Tabarka) to Bizerta. The so-called Mareth and Shott position in the south of Tunisia gives the necessary flank protection.

In the eastern part of Tunisia, south and southwest of Tunis, an open hill country extends to the south border, to the Mareth position. It expands and reaches the length of 300 kilometers (180 miles), with the greatest width of 115 kilometers (70 miles) near Sousse and Karouan. This area, including the Bone Peninsula, affords ample possibility for construction of airfields for single-engine air force units. In the same vicinity are situated also the completed large airfields of Bizerta, Tunis, El Aouina and Gabes which are equally suited for bombers.

This more or less flat terrain is crossed from west to east, along the line Le Kef to north Enfidaville, by a hilly country, the elevations in which attain to 500 meters, so that a switch position pointing south is conspicuous against the open hill country of Kairouan.

## 2. Mareth Position

In the south of Tunisia, at the Libyan border, is the Djefara, a coastal lowland, uneven and hilly in character, a destitute stretch of desert. In form the terrain presents no obstacles for movements. However, the passableness is limited because of large, sandy plains, dunes and numerous deposits of saliferous clay (Salztonpfannen); these are flooded during the winter rainfalls and then become impassable for motor vehicles; but they dry out comparatively fast in dry weather. Further obstructions offer the sunken brook beds of several meters deep and for the most part dried out. At the narrowest part of this coastal plain the French had constructed,



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according to peacetime regulations a defense line, the so-called Mareth position. It had concrete emplacements, supply sheds, sub-standard-gauge railroads, storage sheds, etc. For details, see Generalmajor Fritz Krause's writing (Gruppe Nordafrika), submitted before-hand. In its northern section on this position did not correspond to the German tactical viewpoints, as an extensive and high-rising hilly country offered a view there far into the rear of the Mareth position. This highland had not been included in the defense. It was, therefore, immediately drawn into the defense system and consolidated as an advance position.

The Mareth position inclined in the west against the plateau south of Matma, extending far south and flanking the outposts of the Mareth position.

This plateau is a gradually ascending, toward the east, limestone plateau; it is greatly cut up by a great number of brook beds and their ramifications; it drops against the Djefara in a rugged, broken-up precipice of over 300 meters relative height. This precipice forms a decided terrain obstacle which is passable for motor vehicles only along a few fairly good trails. The passes are partly formed by a sort of wadis and can easily be closed. In the west this plateau descends to an area which is but slightly cut up, but is heavily covered with sand.

It was known to the German authorities that a strip of land, averaging 10 to 12 kilometers in width, crossed the latter area and was passable for motor vehicles, and that it was possible to outflank the Mareth position through it.

Farther west it connects with the Great Erg, a closed sand dune region, which is impassable for motor vehicles. It stretches as far southwest as



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Gademes and is crossed by only a few difficult camel paths.

### 3. Shott Position

Furthermore, the Shott depression in southern Tunisia forms a natural barrier with the Melghir, el Gharsa, el Fejaj shotts, as do also the Gerid shott with the adjoining Great Erg, the dunes of which are thrust out between the shotts. The Gerid shott presents a particularly great traffic obstacle. Passage is possible only on the Kebili-Kriz track (passable for trucks throughout the year, except after heavy rainfalls) and on the Kebili-Gafsa track (passable only in dry weather). Both tracks can easily be blocked. Beside the above-named tracks, the surface of the shotts is passable for trucks, partly also for heavy tanks, only after complete drainage of previously reconnoitered routes (generally not before March).

One can go around the Gerid shott only with especially equipped vehicles. The sandy desert south of the shott depression in the Great Erg is completely impassable, only a few caravan roads cross it.

The isthmus between the El Fejaj shott and the sea is closed by the highland of Dsrh. Tebaga and its eastward spurs.

An aggressor against this ridge overlooking the plain will have to distribute his troops, including his artillery, in a plain without cover nor protection; the Shott position could be designated therefore, as to terrain, as the strongest position in the south of Tunisia.

Intelligence as to the passableness of the shotts was at the time not to be had in its entire extent. Only the results of reconnaissance carried out on instructions of OB Süd and the questioning of natives gave within a few weeks after the landing, clarity.



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4. Highways and

The few existing first-class highways in Tunisia are of gravel; their condition is good and their width is mostly adequate for a two column traffic. The bridges are built to carry 12 to 15 tons. Construction work renders the highways easily vulnerable.

The coastal highway Tunis - Gabes on the eastern coast forms the continuation of the Italian Via Balbia; but it is not as well constructed as the latter (graveled without asphalt layer, width of highway sufficient for two columns). It is of special importance in supplying Rommel's Army in Libya.

The non-metal roads in Tunisia are for the most part passable only during dry weather. In the southern part of Tunisia all roads (except the causeways) are trails, i.e. improved natural roads which are impassable after heavy rains, turning into beds of mud; besides, they lack bridges.

Along the mountain ranges the highways and roads have frequently long stretches of narrow passages which can easily be blocked. In most cases these narrow passages cannot be enveloped. This fact decidedly contributed to the success of the German troops of checking even with a weak force the Allied push into Tunisia.

In studying the railroad and highway net in Algeria and west showed that the Allies had at their disposal for the bringing up of their forces only one railroad in usable condition and a few large highways. These led over numerous construction works that could easily be demolished. The point in question are mainly the two highways in the northern part of Algeria.



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#### 5. Railroads

Along the highway from Tunis to Gabes runs a narrow-gauge railroad (one meter width of track), which can be used for supply purposes. In order to get the rolling stock it was necessary to break [sic]\* in time the narrow-gauge railroad net with the net in Algeria near Tebessa.

It was essential to render impossible to the Allies the use of the standard-gauge railroad of Fez - Oran - Algiers - Bone - Constantine and the north - south junction of Constantine - Batna - Biskra.

#### IV. Climatic Conditions in Tunisia

While the summer climate in French North Africa is sub-tropic, dry and warm, in winter there occur regular, periods of rains which frequently keep on for 8 to 10 days. Often cool, stormy winds from the northwest bring in cold air, mostly at four to five weeks' interval. Near the ascending highland of the Atlas is causes not insignificant rains, as for instance, in Constantine, where the rainfall averages 80 to 90 liters to the square meter during the months of November and December.

Low clouds, often 200 to 300 meters above sea level, envelop elevations and mountain passes and hinder considerably flying operations.

Even the lesser rainfalls in the autumn and spring months (40 to 50 liter to the square meter) suffice to soften the upper surface of the marl layers to the point where traffic with rather light vehicles even, except along the highway, is prevented, becoming in places impassable. The use also of the airfields, the landing of planes outside runways becomes limited.

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\*) Translator's note: Meaning, apparently, to switch from one line to the other.



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On the lee-side of the mountain range, southeast of the Enfidaville - Kairouan - Gafsa line, the weather conditions are even in winter much more favorable. Prevailing fair, dry and warm weather is only interrupted by shift of wind to the northeast - east; this happens seldom and then brings low clouds and rainfalls which last but 1 to 2 days. In that area rainfalls during the winter months November - March amount at most to 1/4 of the annual precipitation (20 to 25 liters to a square meter), for the greater part only at 5 to 7 weeks' interval.

V. Mission of the German Forces in Tunisia

The colonel in command received the mission to push forward regardless of the situation in Tunis and Bizerta on all roads and highways leading west with all his available forces using emergency transportation requisitioned in the country. The object of his push was to be the encounter of the Allies far in the west in order to delay their advance. The western slopes of the range, along the general line Calle - west of Tala, were to be reached and held under any circumstances. To this end mines were to be utilized on a large scale; they were already given to the first air transports and then currently supplied for this purpose. Further, anti-tank obstacles were to be installed. Demolition troops were to be pushed forward as far west as possible, in order to blow up the improvement works of roads and railroads available to the Allies' advance.

It has already been mentioned that the colonel in command did not carry out his mission properly. Impressed probably by the high figures for enemy tonnage and by the size of the enemy forces estimated on that basis, he neglected to push west all available forces, as the mission assigned to him implied, without regard to the situation in the rear area. He had available



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for this purpose in the city traffic of Tunis the necessary means for moving his forces (omnibuses operating with gas generated from wood, horse cars, in some places electric railroads). Instead of doing this he assembled all his forces in and around Tunis and Bizerta. This tactical blunder was destined to affect all fighting in Tunisia later on.

The Air Commander had as mission:

- a. To hold up the enemy's advance on the roads and railroads.

This mission included destruction of road improvement:

- b. To support the ground force units in their advance.
- c. To insure fighter protection for the harbors and airdromes in Tunis and Bizerta. Furthermore, in case of any special instructions, that might be issued by Air Fleet 2.

- d. To protect ship convoys moving to Tunisia and air transports approaching the Tunisian coast.

- e. To insure fighter cover in the Tunisian area for heavy bomber units taking off from Sardinia or Sicily in daytime.

OB Süd held in readiness parachute commands for missions of destructions. Special experts for the demolition missions were assigned to OB Süd at the end of November 1942 and after reporting there were sent as advisers to the commander in Tunisia.



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VI. Shifting of Allied Landing Points to Bougie and Bone

After Bone had been occupied on 12 November 1942 by two Allied parachute companies, the Allied unloading was shifted to Bougie and Bone, where it was immediately attacked by German bombing units. In order to eliminate this very unpleasant job of defending against day and night fighters we attacked Maison Blanche, at Bougie and at Bone.

To protect our own contact with the sea and to carry out attacks against the Allied landings the German speed boats were shifted from Sicily to Bizerta.

VII. German Agreement with the French Resident General

Following the dispatch by plane of a rather high-ranking officer to Tunis by Marshal Pétain, an agreement was reached between the German commander and the French Resident General; this agreement was confirmed by OB Súd.

According to this agreement, the French soldiers who remained in the German sphere of influence and who were willing to fight against the Allies were permitted to keep their weapons. These French were charged in particular with the defense of the Bizerta seaward defenses, comprising the guns available there. Those French soldiers who were not willing to fight were, after their discharge, given freedom. They could find work in labor units for their own and their family's support. As far as transportation facilities allowed, they had the opportunity to return with their families to France if they desired.

Thus it happened that in the area of the Bizerta fortress with its large subterranean installations a French strong point continued to exist which was



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closed to the examination of the German authorities.

Political Adviser

At OB Sūd's wish the German Foreign Office assigned Envoy Rahn as political adviser to the commander in Tunisia.

VIII. Report of OB Sūd in Hitler's Headquarters in the Field as to his Interpretation of the Situation

OB Sūd was summoned into Hitler's Headquarters in the field for a conference to give his interpretation of the situation and his intentions as basis for force requirements.

1. Supposed Enemy Strength and Intention

The strength of the Allied forces and equipment that have landed in French North Africa is estimated, on the ground of established 400 transport vessels at approximately 700,000 tons, to be about five divisions. To this are added French units of unknown strength whose combat value is insignificant owing to their poor equipment. The enemy's intention is no doubt to take possession as soon as possible of Tunisia, especially of the harbor cities Tunis and Bizerta, before the arrival of more German forces. His large-scale intention is, by achieving this objective, to end the war in Africa.

The greatest danger in the situation is the possibility of the enemy pushing himself into the presently unprotected area of Sousse, Sfax, or Gabes, between the German North Tunisian forces and Rommel's army. This can be effected either by parachute landings, by assault with motorized units, or the combination of both; it would practically lead to the loss



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of the German-Italian Panzer Army.

2. Intention of OB Süd

OB Süd has the intention therefore to take advantage of the favorable terrain and to delay the enemy's advance by every means, while building up along the Tunisian western front strong points as a defense line. By utilizing all possibilities, the defensive operation should consist of rather small offensives, from strong points to strong points. Simultaneously, a strong motorized group is to be formed behind the front, prepared to clear up the situation if the enemy does break through the German defense; but this group must above all, by mobile operations in the south of Tunisia, maintain contact with Rommel until a defensive front has also there been completed. This mobile group will be reinforced by all means and to the degree of readiness as soon as for an attack against the rear or flank of the Allied forces in Tunisia from probably the most suitable territory in south Tunisia. This group's attack objective will be determined by the forces available to it.

To carry out these intentions the OB Süd considers it necessary to have besides the Italian units at least five German divisions, if possible, motorized or Panzer divisions.

In view of this plan the German-Italian Panzer Army must be assigned the mission of holding the British Eighth Army as far away from the Tunisian border as possible. This mission can only be carried out by constant offensives, since all positions in question here are to be enveloped.

As the situation develops, the group that is to be formed in Tunisia - near the German-Italian Panzer Army - may temporarily be called into action



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for a counterattack.

In planning all these measures it is essential to provide security for the necessary transport tonnage and for the crossing.

3. The Armed Forces High Command (OKW) hold out prospect of seven Armored Divisions

The point of view of OB Süd was approved by the Armed Forces High Command. For carrying it out, seven Panzer divisions were figured on. The Armed Forces High Command assumed the responsibility for their sea crossing transport from Italy to Africa.

The transport movement to Italy was to begin immediately; the call of the troops devolved on OB Süd that was to comply with accorded transport facilities from Italy to Africa. The first division that began to arrive at the end of November 1942 was the 10th Panzer Division.

It should be mentioned beforehand that, owing to the fighting operations at Stalingrad, only the 10th Panzer Division was at first placed at disposal, later the Hermann Göring Panzer Division (less armored detachments); in addition, several personnel replacement transfer battalions.

IX. Reorganization of the OB Süd Staff

To accomplish the mission OB Süd Staff was reorganized and was completely separated from the staff of the Air Fleet Command 2; but the combined command of the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the General Staff for both staffs was continued.

(For organization of the Staff of OB Süd, see Annex 1)



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The administration of all sections that had to do with the transport and supply to Africa was united under the General for Special Assignment; while the authority of command remained with the Commander-in-Chief and with the Chief of the General Staff.

X. Ship Tonnage from Southern France Harbors Placed at the Disposal and How it was Employed

The Armed Forces High Command (OKW) sent the information that on the basis of the Laval Agreement the required tonnage from the harbors of Southern France will be accorded. There was in all 600,000 tonnage available. Of this, owing to various reasons, only a part was suitable for the mission to Africa. The Reichkommissar for shipping was charged for distribution to the Mediterranean (Italy) of the mission to Africa. He placed for this purpose an agent in Rome.

Due to an order from the Fuehrer the entire shipping tonnage remained for political reasons, and in spite of unfavorable experiences, in Italian hands. Vessels sailed under the Italian flag; after arrival in Italian ports German crews had to be therefore replaced by Italian personnel; this caused a great loss of time.

Therefore the transport of German troops across [to Africa] and of the supply depended exclusively on the Italian headquarters. And since the Italians themselves laid claim for their own troops to a big part of the tonnage in Africa, the OB Süd had to negotiate continually with the Italians regarding the German participation in loading. In addition, the Italians had to provide sea convoy escort for the transport; this led often to delays.



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The Reichkommissar's Agent for Shipping had the following missions:

a. Operation of several ships in the Mediterranean under the German flag - mainly for economical purposes - for instance, the fetching of pitch blende from Sardinia.

In this connection the question of foreign exchange played a decisive part.

b. Care of the entire German civilian sea personnel in the Mediterranean area.

As to the distribution of ships and the allotments to the Italians connected with it, the OB Süd had a right of order for the agent of the Reichkommissar for shipping.

Delay in Bringing up of Tonnage

The arrival of the first ships from French harbors was delayed most undesirably because the southern French harbors were mined with mines that were hard to clear away; their purpose was to prevent landings, especially of warships in the occupation of Southern France. Therefore, OB Süd brought up temporarily ships from the Aegean. In addition, the few usable small military boats that were in the Mediterranean, such as Siebel ferries and naval ferries, were ordered into the western Sicilian harbors.

Transport Missions Across the Sea

The call of individual units from Germany in compliance with the situation in Africa and their transport across the sea became in the immediate future one of the most important missions of OB Süd. As much as it was



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desired to move the units to Africa in tactical unity and with the full equipment or motor vehicles and baggage, the extremely restricted transport space imposed the greatest limitations and the separation of large units. So it happened that the elements which were intended first of all for organization of a defensive line were not used for that purpose. Instead, their primary responsibility became the transport across the water of as many men and weapons as possible, also vehicles and baggage, as well as other means of increasing mobility. Of necessity vehicles and baggage were left behind, and vehicles had to be requisitioned from the country in Africa. The equipping of units with vehicles presented a special emergency; thus, each battery, for instance, received only two to three tractors for towing and for loading.

On the other hand, the units provided for the formation of a mobile combat group had to be supplied with the necessary vehicles. In order to make them more mobile a great number of conveyances which took less space, such as bicycles and motorcycles, were also moved.

## XI. The German-Italian Panzer Army is near Capitulation

### 1. Impossibility of Supply by Air

The German-Italian Panzer Army evacuated Derna on November 18, and was withdrawing toward Bengasi. Supply by sea was prevented from Malta by British air and naval combat forces. Supply by air also turned out to be impossible. The situation in the air left only the airfields of Gran Sirte and those near Tripoli approachable. The distance from the southern-most German air bases in Italy and Sicily was so great that the transport planes which wished to return had to carry a double load of fuel and could deliver only about 50 liters. Also combat planes that were loaded with fuel canisters



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and turned over fuel from their tanks, could not come near the 200 cbm., the least daily amount demanded by Rommel. On top of it came the fuel requirements for the flying units. Feldmarschall Rommel stressed to the Armed Forces High Command and OB Süd over the radio-telephone the necessity of capitulation

## 2. Vain Attempt of Supply by Blockade Runners

In a secret meeting of the Comando Supremo it was decided to load two fast boats with fuel and ammunition, commanding one to Tunis, the other to Augusta, Sicily. But a secret order that was to be opened only at sea directed the captain to go to Tripoli and outlined the exact course to be followed. It was set in such a way that the change in course took place only after dark, one vessel passing Malta on the west, the other on the east, bringing them half-way between Malta and Tripoli at daybreak. At that point the German flying units operating from Libya were to give them cover.

During the night German reconnaissance planes equipped with airborne search radar (A.S.V.)\* established that two war vessels had left Malta and were following the exact two courses. One vessel was set afire, the other was recalled by the Italian admiralty.

## 3. No Possibility of Supply by the Italian Navy

The few Italian supply U-boats, two of which had during several crossings taken fuel in considerable amount to Tobruk, were not free for employment; The High Command of the Italian Armed Forces refused, in spite

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\*) Translator's note: Naval intelligence suggests this translation for the German which reads "Schiffssuchgeraet." They explain that A.S.V. is standard electronic abbreviation, standing for "aircraft to surface vessel detector radar."



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of Mussolini's promise, to load a cruiser with fuel that could have made the run to Tripoli in one night; thus the German-Italian Panzer Army appeared to have been lost.

4. Attempt of OB Süd to carry Supply via Tunis

At the end of November 1943 [sic] OB Süd made the almost hopeless decision to supply the German-Italian forces northeast of Tripoli from Tunis. This happened at a time when the southern German troops were situated in the Kairouan area. This situation in the south was not quite clear. Air reconnaissance had not established in this area any enemy forces worth mentioning. It was known that there were rather strong French forces in Gabes whose position was not clear.

Since trucks were lacking, supply of the German-Italian forces could succeed only by using the Tunis - Gabes narrow-gauge railroad; however, this was no longer in operation. To this end the Tunis the Quartermaster received orders from OB Süd to load up a train in Tunis with fuel and ammunition and to dispatch it under strong guard to Gabes. Railroad repair engineers were to be sent along. The German-Italian Panzer Army received orders to scratch together the last drops of gasoline and to send several trucks to the Gabes railroad station.

XII. German Air Landing in Gabes and Supply of the German-Italian Panzer Army via Gabes

Simultaneously, orders were received that Gabes is to be captured by an air-landing operation at dawn. To this end an air force company, equipped similarly to the company which carried out the first landing in Tunis, was loaded into transport planes. Bomber units from Sicily were assigned to



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provide the cover. The operation was given a radio detachment in order to make direct contact with OB Süd via the II. Air Force Corps. This radio channel to OB Süd via II Air Force Corps was based on the range of the radio equipment that was attached.

Erroneous Failure Report

During the morning OB Süd received a report from Tunis that the planes at the time they were attempting to land were fired upon from below and that the landing had failed. The weakness of this operation lay in the fact that OB Süd did not dispose over parachute units ready for action which could beforehand take possession of the airfield and cover it. It was therefore easy for the enemy to fire upon the invading transport planes which offered a defenseless target at the time of landing. The accompanying bomber units could not guarantee full protection by bombing.

When the report was received, it attracted attention by stating that only two transport planes had returned to Tunis; this was agreed upon in case of failure. But it appeared to exclude almost the possibility that all planes were shot down from below. It also had to be assumed that in case of failure the bomber units would have made a report.

If the information meant that the landing had failed, the fate of Rommel's army would have seemed sealed. It was to be expected that after this attempt at conquering Gabes, the Americans would reinforce this base. There were not yet available sufficient German forces for occupying the place as a battle ground. The mobile fighting group which was moved up was still in progress of formation.



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Landing is Successful

Following reception of the report, OB Süd ordered air reconnaissance over Gabes. After a little while relief was felt when the message was received that German transport planes were standing on the Gabes airfield and were being guarded there. Apparently the French fired on the first transport planes, but with the appearance of German bomber units ceased firing.

Later it also turned out that because of atmospheric disturbances during the day, radio connection between Gabes and Sicily (II Air Force Corps) was not effected.

First Supply to the German-Italian Panzer Army via Gabes

The first train with fuel and ammunition arrived a few days later. Also trucks from the German-Italian Panzer Army came in. Thus the German-Italian forces were again ready for action. The personnel that accompanied the train represented a valuable reinforcement for Gabes' outlying post.

More trains with fuel and ammunition were ordered to Gabes. The Allies had missed the chance to force the German-Italian forces in Italian North Africa to capitulate without a fight by an assault against the south Tunisian coast.

Sfax - Gabes Supply Route by Sea

It was clear that railroad communication to Gabes would soon be interrupted by the Allied air force. There was also a lack of coal, so that heating had to be done with residue from olive presses. For that reason Sfax was provided with a naval command that was sent there for unloading of ships and a Sfax - Gabes coastal traffic of small vessels (Siebel ferries and sail boats) was established.



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At Sfax supply vessels docked also repeatedly; but the small artificially installed harbor basins proved quite vulnerable to air attacks, so that the vessels were very rapidly sunk. Not even the camouflaged artificial installations under which small boats were to find cover could offer protection. At long last communication by motor transport was thought of, and the bringing up of a great number of trucks was ordered. In this connection strongly occupied strong points with repair facilities were installed along the Tunis - Gabes - Tripoli highway, at a day-long travel intervals.

#### XIII. Appointment of a New Commander in Tunis

On 16 November 1942, General Nehring, General der Panzertruppe, was named Commander in Tunis and Commanding General of the XC Panzer Corps, which was in process of formation.

#### XIV. Engagements in North Tunisia

On 14 November enemy pressure on the weak German security detachments which had not advanced sufficiently westward began to be felt. These German troops then delayed the enemy's advance by blowing up railroad and highway bridges, also by laying of mines.

On 17 November the German air reconnaissance detected enemy march columns on both big highways east of Bone and near Souk-Aras in Tunisia.

German bombers and dive-bombers attacked these enemy movements in the course of the following day.

Enemy pressure increased. The enemy succeeded in pressing back the German security detachments.



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When it was attempted to push forward via Medjez el Bab [Béja?] German covering forces encountered the French Barrès Division stationed there; the latter refused to let the German troops move forward and disarmed the German patrols. When the division failed to answer an ultimatum for clearing the place for a short time for German troops it was attacked, on 21 November, by heavy bombing units from Sicily. It became obvious to the German command on the basis of the Barrès Division's attitude up to now, that it stood on the side of the Allies. Thus fighting flared up also here. German forces did not prove sufficiently strong enough to push back the French to any extent.

On 23 November strong Allied attack were repulsed near Mateur, Tebourba and Medjez el Bab with the effective cooperation of the dive-bomber units.

Serious Crisis near Tunis as a Result of Enemy Tank Assault

Nevertheless, a motorized unit succeeded during this fighting in pushing forward across the mountains, through a gap in the German obstacle line, and in advancing toward Tunis. Furthermore, this unit, composed for the greater part of light tanks, succeeded in rolling over the airfield near Djedeida (12 miles west of Tunis) and in destroying a rather large number of planes of the dive-bomber units situated there. To be sure, by air reconnaissance of this unit the enemy approach had been discovered sufficiently early and the commander had believed that the ground force units would prevent in time an advance. But the enemy tank attack from a new direction was such a surprise that the shifting of the unmotorized army forces for defense was impossible. However, a portion of the dive-bomber (Stuka) unit succeeded in taking off and in attacking some tanks with bombs. Merely light anti-aircraft guns provided security to the airfield. These were able to



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damage a few more tanks. The tank unit advanced further on the highway to Tunis. At a defile directly west of Tunis, where the highway passes through a swamp area, it encountered the 8,8cm anti-aircraft battery which was pushed in line there for the defense of the town. It opened fire; the tanks turned and disappeared west. Had the tanks succeeded in combatting or enveloping the anti-aircraft battery they would not have encountered much of a counter-attack and would have stood in the Tunis harbor. The occupation of Tunis would have come to an end then. This fighting action ended the reinforced Allied fighting operation in North Tunisia.

On 26 November the spotting of transport movements on the railroad stretch to Oran led to bomber units being employed for the destruction of railroad installations. These air attacks continued the following day.

XV. Contradictory Viewpoints of Rommel/Kesselring as to the Withdrawal of the German-Italian Panzer Army to Southern Tunisia

Recognizing the deadly danger that threatened the German-Italian Panzer Army through an advance of even weak Allied tank units or through air landing near the coast, Feldmarschall Rommel expressed the intention of withdrawing as quickly as possible to South Tunisia. The question of tempo for withdrawal of the German-Italian Panzer Army became for the following weeks the current subject of discussions between the Armed Forces High Command Commando Supremo, OB Süd and Feldmarschall Rommel.

On the one hand, it had to be assured that the advance of the British Eighth Army be delayed as long as possible. On the other, such forces were not to be laid open to annihilation by the superior British Eighth Army.



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Moreover, the army was constantly threatened by a deadly danger in case of an advance, even by weak Allied forces, in South Tunisia near the coast, as the army without supplies was dependent on current stock from South Tunisia. It is an established fact that against an enemy assault of such nature OB Süd did not dispose at the time of sufficient mobile forces in order to regain the area successfully. So it happened that of the 10th Panzer Division, from which the fighting group was mainly to be drawn, the following approximately had arrived in Tunisia on 1 December 1942:

- one Panzer battalion with 45 Panzer (unloaded in Bizerta two days before the battle near Terbourba)
- one motorized battlaion
- one motorcycle infantry battalion
- one artillery battalion
- one anti-tank company or battalion
- Division staff

Contrary to Feldmarschall Rommel's opinion, the OB Süd defended its point of view before the Comando Supremo, according to which the danger the German-Italian Panzer Army was running was to be lessened and removed by all means, and this by having Rommel's Army check the British Eighth Army as far east as possible. Only by such action could sufficient space be retained for any German operations later - if it came to an attack against the American forces from the Gafsa area, or a stroke against the British Eighth Army in Tripolitania; further, only in this way could a junction between the American and British forces be prevented. The view of OB Süd was approved by Comando Supremo. Feldmarschall Rommel who still was under direct orders of Comando Supremo at this time received orders in compliance with it.



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Rommel flew to Rastenburg, to the Fuehrer Headquarters, at this point of time, apparently to present his contrary point of view. It is said he recommended the evacuation of Africa and that he encountered refusal. The political situation did not permit the evacuation of Africa, also technical presumptions were lacking.

XVI. Supply Crisis for the Axis Begins

Allied Air Attacks on Harbors, Vessel Escorts and Airfields Begin

On 29 November a large American unit of about 40 four-engine bombers attacked first of all the harbor and airfield of Bizerta and sunk there one or several supply vessels. On 30 November followed an attack by British planes against the harbor and airfield of Tunis. There also were lost shipping and supplies.

Simultaneously, air attacks began from Malta against vessel escorts at sea; of these, night torpedo attacks proved especially effective:

Hitler Orders Countermeasures

Hitler then ordered that 100 anti-aircraft guns, to each, Bizerta and Tunis, be immediately conveyed; a measure that proved impossible of execution at the time. Further, Hitler ordered a reinforcement of the convoy guard by German planes. This mission, to be performed by the German Air Force in ever increasing measure, absorbed the Air Force to such an extent that large portions were not available for combat.

The supply crisis that was to continue throughout the time of fighting in Tunisia and influence decisively its outcome had begun.



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Measures against Allied Attacks on Airfields

The effect of the first attacks on the El Aonina and Bizerta airfields, which the German command had a long time expected, were relatively slight. The flying units had already been moved from these places to airfields constructed for emergency; only in very wet weather they returned to the large fields which were provided with runways.

A special staff, an Air Force Command Staff for special assignment, was established in Tunisia, in order to reconnoiter areas suitable for airfields and to construct them according to orders from the command. Owing to the favorable terrain no substantial difficulties were encountered.

The German command was surprised at the speedy construction of Allied airfields in the up to then unfavorable terrain of Algeria. An air photograph of the area, showing the utilization of wire netting as an overlay of the ground, disclosed the secret.

XVII. Fighting in December 1942

In November it became possible for the German and Italian forces to check the Allied advance on Tunis and Bizerta in North Tunisia. But they failed to occupy the ridge at the Algerian - Tunisian border in time and to hold it far enough to the west. At the end of fighting in November the German lines stretched along the eastern spur, so that the German fighting area did not have sufficient depth. Every breakthrough could easily mean a penetration into the coastal valley where the Allied superiority in tanks could make itself felt. The German forces attempted therefore, beginning 1 December 1942, to widen the bridgehead they had gained. The battles for the month of December and for the following month will always be remembered. In the first days of



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December (1 to 5) the important railroad and the Tebourba highway intersection point were taken after several days of fighting and a group of British-American forces were destroyed (11th Infantry Brigade). The Allies suffered great losses in men and materie, especially in tanks.

On 11 and 12 December a bridgehead south of the Medjerda sector which was defended by the Allies was stormed and its garrison annihilated; counter-attacks during the following days were repulsed.

During December we succeeded in pushing back the Allies only toward the Mateur - Medjez el Bab line. In the later part of this month there was only fluctuating fighting of small proportion on both sides.

In the southern part of Tunisia the garrisons of the stations Spusse (Sousse?), Sfax and Gabes were strengthened and the southern Tunisian front lengthened further to the south, in the manner of strong points.

The German-Italian Panzer Army stood from 26 November to 12 December, 1942, in defensive combat in the Marsa el Brega position and on 13 December, 1942, withdrew fighting south of the Gran Sirte bend to the Bouerat position; the latter was occupied on 29 December 1942.

#### Weather Grows Worse

About 10 December the rainy period began and made operations in Tunis difficult. Movements of vehicles outside the roads became almost impossible.

#### XVIII. Employment of German and Italian Air Force Units in December 1942

##### 1. German II Air Force Corps

In December these units attacked from the airfields of Sicily and



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Sardinia mainly the Allied airfields and supply harbors on the Italian African and French African coast. The goals were the harbors of Tobruk, Bengasi (beginning on 13 December), Algiers, Bougie, Philippeville and Bone. The attacks took place mostly during the night. At times, suitable weather conditions (overcast skies) were taken advantage of for daytime attacks.

Moreover, Allied vessels were attacked day and night, mostly by torpedo bomber patrols, before the Libyan and North African coast. on 18 December the Lucca airfield in Malta became the goal of nightly bomber raids, the object of which was the elimination of the British torpedo bombers.

On 30 December a German long-range unit from the airfields of southwest France attacked the Casablanca harbor. The fighting units repeatedly joined the attacks, while ground fighting was at its highest, or engaged Allied supply columns and railroad trains.

German Air Force Commander Africa and German Air Force Commander Tunis

They supported the army in conducting the fighting through attacks against artillery positions, march columns, trucks and armored units.

As substantiated by prisoners, the employment of dive-bombers during the attack on Terbourba in the beginning of January had a decisive effect on the battle.

Effect of German single-engine fighter planes and anti-aircraft artillery insufficient

The fighter units in their encounter with four-engine bombers did not have the success in shooting them down that had been expected; the cause was discovered only later (insufficient penetration force of fighter armament



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against bombers equipped with armor protection). In addition, it later was discovered that in the high-altitude of the Allied bomber units it was difficult for the fighters that had taken off to recognize in time enemy units in the air. By employing radar, the Second Air Fleet Command received therefore an escort fighter system speedily.

The protection of sea communications demanded fighter units in an ever increasing degree.

The anti-aircraft artillery also did not full power against the Allied bomber units that were flying beyond the range of the main field of fire.

#### Allied Air Force

The Allied Air Force's attack against the Axis supply harbors in Tunisia, Sicily and Central Italy became more intense. Moreover, there followed a heavy attack of four-engine bombers against the North Italian industrial area. The Allied fighter units which were employed to support the ground fighting in Tunisia were obviously badly handicapped through insufficiently completed fields and through the effect of bad weather on landing fields.

#### XIX. Development of Situation shows that Troops and Supplies cannot be moved by Large Vessels. Request for Small Vessels.

The question of transport developed more and more into the central problem of the war in Africa. From the situation in the air in the beginning of December 1942, it clearly could be seen that the problem of transport of troops and supply to Africa cannot be solved only by large vessels. This would come into full light when, after organization of its ground personnel, the entire Allied Air Force would enter the fighting. The large vessels



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were sunk partly at their loading ports already, mainly at Naples and Palermo. While crossing the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Sicilian Straits, bomber, aerial torpedo and submarine attacks caused losses. Besides, there was a constant threat of attack through light naval forces from the North African harbors and from Malta. When approaching the coast, losses were suffered by mines. The unloading of ships of more than 1,000 tons lasted in the harbors more than 24 hours, of those of 5,000 tons as long as three days, in spite of stevedores and engineers who had been moved from Hamburg and the employment of German militarily organized unloading companies. Most of the vessels turned over by the French were over 3,000 tons. During the unloading the vessels had to lie along the wharf and could be unloaded only from one side, since the Italian navy did not succeed in moving the required number of barges. Thus the vessels which were being unloaded became the easy prey of Allied air attacks and were in most cases sunk with the bulk of their load. In addition, the protection of vessels that crossed called for an exceptionally great number of air and sea cover forces. And, as the Italian shoremen worked only to a limited extent after the air attacks began, the Italians often did not have enough torpedo boats ready for escort duty, so that undesirable delays occurred in putting transports to sea.

Increased demands were made on the German Air Force for cover missions of vessel transports, lasting several days. The week following a rather great loss of ships, Hitler himself gave orders as to the quantity of escort cover to be used from the air.

Request for Small Vessels from the Armed Forces High Command (OKW)

During previous battles in Africa small vessels, such as naval tank landing crafts and Siebel ferries in traffic between Crete and the African



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coast, had proved very good. They carried only 80 to 100 tons per ship of useful load; they were difficult to attack from the air; they offered only small targets and they were equipped with four-barreled anti-aircraft guns. They often shot down the attacking planes. Owing to the slight draught of these vessels, they were secure from U-boat attacks, as the torpedoes followed usually a lower course. They could be protected from U-boats emerging to the surface and light naval forces by being accompanied by Siebel combat ferries (fitted out with 8,8cm. anti-aircraft guns). The loading and unloading could be done outside the harbors also and in two hours.

On the basis of the situation that had developed, OB Süd made the recommendation that small vessels be sent in to the greatest possible extent. The Italian Comando Supremo was approached with the same request. It was requested from the latter, furthermore, that suitable small boats with auxiliary engines be speedily made available.

XX. Disarmament of French Vichyite Fighting Forces in Tunisia

In the meantime it was established that in Southern France the French troops and fleet commanders could not keep their pledged obligations to incorporate themselves with the Axis' units in the area of general defense. A greater and greater number of high-ranking officers went over to the Allies. As thus the security of German and Italian garrisons became more and more endangered, the Armed Forces High Command ordered at the end of 1942 disarmament of the French troops in Southern France.

Meanwhile, the French had stopped fighting against the Allies in the rest of the Colonial territory and allied themselves with them. The Barrès Division from Tunisia lined up against the Axis forces.



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Armed Forces High Command Orders Disarmament

Owing to the presence of French forces in the Bizerta area, the Armed Forces High Command saw a growing danger in the French armed forces in the Bizerta area and demanded from OB Süd their disarmament. It also appeared that in view of a possible Allied landing in Bizerta the defense of this important fortress should not be left in French hands.

OB Süd Carries out the Disarmament

At first OB Süd hesitated to carry out the disarmament. But he could no longer turn a deaf ear to the expostulations of the Armed Forces High Command regarding the great danger of warfare in Africa. Orders for disarmament were issued therefore; Generalmajor Gause was commissioned to carry them out and was sent by OB Süd to Tunis and Bizerta where he was to regulate the disarmament in agreement with the commander in Tunis. To this end German units were hastily moved to Bizerta with transport planes and warships and the German garrison was reinforced by 2,000 men. OB Süd figured that the French were of equal strength. Among other things the gun crews of the batteries which were still in French hands, as well as the German crews of the three French destroyers which lay in the Bizerta harbor, were transported.

The Commanding French Admiral Dèrien [sic: Darlan?] in Bizerta was invited to a conference. There it was imparted to him that the development in the situation demanded the disarmament of the French troops, but that in all other points, such as the freedom of French soldiers if they wished to leave with their families and return to their native country, as well as an opportunity for work, was to be maintained, according to previous agreements. Only in case of destruction of weapons, guns, vessels and installations was



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there a threat of heavy punishment. To ensure compliance, German bomber units flew over the fortress. Along the side of each destroyer, German speedboats stood. The disarmament proceeded without a hitch. The number of armed Frenchmen in Bizerta was about 12,000 men. In comparison, it must be noted, that the total number of German troops in all Tunisia was at the time about 19,000.

#### Three French Destroyers Turned over to Italy

The three destroyers were given German crews. To meet Italian representations, these destroyers had to be turned over to the Italians a few days later by Hitler's orders. Thus, they were entirely unavailable for employment at sea during the fighting in Tunisia; whereas, had they been in German hands they could have played a decisive part on convoy duty and in bringing in supplies.

#### Return of the Disarmed to their Homeland

OB Süd endeavoured honorably to fulfill the promise given to the French soldiers, guaranteeing their return to their homeland if they so wished. At first the return was effected, using the empty transport planes via Italy, after Feldmarschall Kesselring by personal intervention with Mussolini had removed the difficulties which the Italian officials caused. When the danger to these transports became apparent, owing to the air situation, a request was sent to the Allies through the Foreign Office and the German Schutzmacht [neutral power handling German matters] for grant of free passage to two French vessels in the Mediterranean. In spite of continuous pressure OB Süd received no answer to this request.



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XXI. Formation of the Fifth Panzer Army

Meanwhile, in the beginning of December 1942, the decision was made to convert the German forces into an army. From the purely numerical standpoint it was not as yet necessary, though it was desirable to elevate the German Commander-in-Chief from the big number of German and Italian headquarters. Another reason was the necessity of clear understanding, as to relative command status with the independent quartermaster, the independent harbor representative in Bizerta, the independent German and Italian naval administrative centers. But it was especially desirable to create the impression in the enemy intelligence that stronger forces were already in Tunisia than was actually the case. OB Süd proposed Generaloberst Guderian as Commander-in-Chief, who has been looked upon as chief deputy for direction of mobile fighting. But Hitler rejected the proposal, as Guderian was in disfavor at the time. Instead Generaloberst von Arnim was charged with the commission; on 9 December 1942, he assumed the high command over the German and Italian fighting forces in Tunisia.

Naming of an Authorized Representative for the Commander-in-Chief

Owing to the experiences of Feldmarschall Rommel, Hitler decided to give him a second general, in the person of General Ziegler, who would share with Rommel the responsibility. General Ziegler received the title "Authorized Representative of the [Deputy] Commander-in-Chief." In the separate theater of war in Africa it became evident that the Commander-in-Chief was heavily handicapped by having only rather young subordinates and by not having a chance thus to consult a person of equal responsibility before decisions of importance. Aware of this situation, Feldmarschall Kesselring from Sicily has been visiting for several months already Feldmarschall Rommel in Africa,



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so as to give the latter the opportunity of talking over the situation, discussing decisions, listening to objections or being strengthened in his decisions. Feldmarschall Kesselring induced these frank discussions without interfering in the conduct of the African war, with the exception of that of the Air Force.

XXII. Strength of the Opposing Forces in Tunisia in Mid-December 1942

According to a foreign source "My Three Years with Eisenhower," a diary by Capt. Harry B u t c h e r, the fighting forces on both sides consisted of the following strength on December 14:

Axis Forces in Tunisia:

German troops	19,500
Italian troops	11,250
Air Force	2,500
Supply units	5,000
	<hr/>
Total:	38,500

(The strength of the German-Italian Panzer Army, according to the same source, amounted on November 11, 1942, to:

20,000 men  
28 Panzers

(Meanwhile, the number of Panzers have been augmented by supplies received via Tunis).

Allied Forces in Tunisia

British troops	20,000
American troops	11,000
French troops	30,000
	<hr/>
Total:	61,000



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(The bulk of Allied troops was still in Algiers. Data as to the strength of the British Eighth Army are lacking).

XXIII. Bringing Up of Additional German Forces

Panzer Division "Hermann Göring" is made available

In the second-half of December (about 11 December 1942) Armed Forces High Command (OKW) received the request for the next division. The Armed Forces High Command demanded at first that the entire 10th Panzer Division with all its vehicles and columns be transferred to Africa before new forces are made available. Only after OB Süd's urgent requests, on the basis that the situation in Africa and the difficulties in sea transport positively demanded that soldiers with their guns be moved across at once, were the first elements of the "Hermann Göring" Panzer Division made available. As OB Süd learned, the division was still in process of reorganization and in part not yet sufficiently trained.

Effects of the Battle of Stalingrad

The battle of Stalingrad had already claimed the available reserves of the Armed Forces High Command. This battle was to have a decisive effect on the fighting in Africa. Instead of the promised seven Panzer divisions only the 10th Panzer Division and elements of the "Hermann Göring" Panzer Division were made available; the latter without tank elements and without artillery, instead an anti-aircraft regiment.

Beside the unsolved question of sea transport, OB Süd was confronted with new difficulties of extraordinary extent. The fighting in Tunisia began with the assumption that there would be sufficient troops and security for sea transport; all this appeared now threatened. The "Hermann Göring" Jäger



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Regiment, of the "Hermann Göring" Division, was the first part to be dispatched to Italy and thence to Africa. Further elements of this division did not come; only a few so-called march battalions without heavy weapons.

XXIV. Political Effects of the First Allied Air Attacks on the Industrial Region of Upper-Italy

The first Allied air attack had an unexpected political effect on this region. Soon after the attack, an Italian liaison officer, exhibiting extreme alarm, came to the Chief of OB Süd General Staff. He related that his Commander-in-Chief is firmly convinced that, owing to the effect of such air attacks on the people of the North Italian industrial region, Italy will be forced to withdraw from the war unless she is provided with the most effective defensive measures. There is no time to lose. Italy has no adequate means of air defense at her disposal; Germany must help. In the absence of General Feldmarschall Kesselring this conversation was transmitted through the Chief of the General Staff to Hitler's Headquarters in the field.

100 German Anti-aircraft Batteries made available

Hitler's decision came back in a few hours: 100 German anti-aircraft (Flak) batteries were to be made available and be moved out immediately to this region. The batteries arrived surprisingly fast. The German stipulated that these motorized batteries were to be mounted at the destination in order to release transportation; further, the German personnel was to be replaced in the course of time by Italians, partly or entirely. It later proved that the mounting of these guns on the spot was a great handicap; it made their employment in the defense against the Allied landing in Sicily impossible. The replacement of German personnel by Italian was also unsatisfactory and



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disadvantageous, as some of the Italians showed themselves to be of no use during Allied air attacks. Consequently, it was necessary through intricate and protracted conversations with the Armed Forces High Command to obtain German personnel to man the guns, particularly to handle the complicated range-finding instruments and to service the guns.

XXV. Growing Shipping Losses through Allied Air Force Activity

In December shipping losses increased considerably, in particular during the crossing. In addition, losses multiplied by nightly torpedo attacks from planes that came from Malta. Although the German light sea forces generally succeeded in repulsing such attacks in the English Channel, to the Italians this was impossible.

Through a German naval officer, experienced in convoy duty, it was determined that this was due to the wrong handling of Italian torpedo boats. As soon as a vessel was laterally illuminated by a plane using parachute flares, the accompanying torpedo boat had to move on the other side (of the boat) at a 1,000 meter distance, where the torpedo plane flying at its lowest elevation had to aim and drop its torpedo. It was not difficult then for the torpedo boat by heavy fire and its searchlights to prevent the plane from aiming the release of its bombs. Their concern over losing their torpedo boats prevented the Italians from employing such tactics. Besides, the crews were not trained for night firing and their weapons did not have the proper devices (luminous sights, etc.) for night firing.

For practical purposes the base for supplying Africa was now moved to the harbor of Naples. At the same time, Palermo was made use of only to a limited extent. By using Naples the time of crossing by water to Tunis was



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first and foremost tripped, allowing the Allies more time for every sort of attack against these ships. Escort vessels, already insufficient in number for convoy duty, were in demand to an ever increasing degree.

XXVI. Demand on Italy for Supply via Sicily in order to Shorten Sea Line of Communication

In Sicily the Palermor harbor could be used for large vessels, Trapani for smaller ones; Marsala and a number of other harbors along the western coast could also be made usable for small vessels by constructing simple docks. But the attempt of OB Süd to induce the Italians to move the bulk of supplies via Sicily was fruitless. The Italians based their refusal on the fact that the railroad service between Naples and Reggio was inadequate, as was that of the railroads on Sicily; in addition, they cited the bottleneck of the railroad ferries across the Messina Straits.

These means of traffic were fully utilized for bringing in supplies to Sicily, amounting to about 50,000 tons of grain and about 30,000 tons of coal per month. Also the proposal of OB Süd to supply Sicily with boats via Messina and Augusta, as well as via Reggio, and to employ motor columns that had been intended for Africa which OB Süd placed at the disposal, from Messina to the west coast, brought no change in the Italians' attitude.

Further reasons for shipping losses were the mines in the Tunisian harbors that have not been sufficiently cleared, as well as the circumstances that only a part of the escort vessels that were to protect the convoys were equipped with U-boat detection instruments.



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XXVII. Conference on Supply to Africa in Hitler's Headquarters in the Field

About 20 December, the question of supply to Africa became the subject of conferences between Germany and Italy in Hitler's Headquarters, near Rastenburg.

During a night session all reasons for failure of supply to Africa, set forth in the above paragraph, were discussed. On the German side the following were present: Feldmarschall Keitel, Generaloberst Jodl, and, as representative of OB Süd, the Chief of OB Süd's General Staff; on the Italian side: Marschall Cavallero and representatives of the Italian Navy.

On the following day a conference on the results took place at Hitler's in which also the Foreign Minister Count Ciano took part. The Italians agreed to move supplies via Sicily as far as possible and to speedily convert the three destroyers taken over in Bizerta into supply vessels. To this end the torpedo tubes were to be taken out and space made for cargo.

Both promises did not materialize. The question of building small vessels, especially military transports, was assigned to the Italians on German instructions, because the working capacity of the dockyards was not fully utilized.

XXVIII. Situation at Turn of Year 1942/1943

At the end of the year the Tunisian bridgehead was organized and fortified. Our own troops stood in the following general line: Mateut [sic, Mateur?] - Medjez el Bab (exclusive) - Pont du Fahs - Djebina - Dj. Bou Daboussa (partly occupied) - Pichon (exclusive). In the northern sector stood the Broich Group (eastward and southeast of Goubellat - northeast of Bou Arada



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- the narrow strip between the lakes northwest of Pont du Fahs), adjoining the 10th Panzer Division to the south; farther south, at Djebel Chirid, the Italian "Superga" Division was in line and in contact with the Italian "Imperiali" Division.

Farther south the localities of Sfax and Gabes were occupied to secure Rommel's supply communications, while security detachments were pushed out to the western passes of the mountains.

There was organized a weak, mobile reserve group. On the other hand, the Germans failed to push their lines of security far enough to the west.

The fact that the first commander neglected to throw immediately all forces to the Tunisian - Algerian border influenced the later conduct of fighting most detrimentally. It can be assumed that properly handled, the entire Tunisia highland could have been taken possession of and areas, especially useful for defense could have been made available.

The German - Italian Panzer Army had occupied the Buerat position.

After the first objective was settled - that of constructing a line of security - all means were used to organize a rather strong attack group, in order to pass over as soon as possible to the offensive. For it was clear that Tunisia could not be held long, because of the limited depth of the combat zone between the coast and the mountains. The Allies had neglected, in spite of every opportunity, to advance toward the coast into south Tunisia and thereby cut off the German - Italian Panzer Army.



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The nervous tension of the German High Command in the Mediterranean during the last two months has been beyond human endurance, owing to the constant small and large crisis in Africa, the sinking of many supply ships, the difficulties with the Italians and every kind of friction.

(signed) Paul DEICHMANN

Translated by O. Fuhrman



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1. The General z.b.V. shared full responsibility with the Chief of the General Staff, the latter issuing the fundamental orders. Since the position of General z.b.V. was created only in the course of command, the supply units seen on the sketch remained first of all at their original command posts; thus, they were doubly subordinate. The orders of the Chief of the General Staff passed through the General z.b.V. to the headquarters attached to the OB Süd.

(signed) DEICHMANN



ORGANIZATION OF STAFF OB SÜD  
as to Command and Supply

