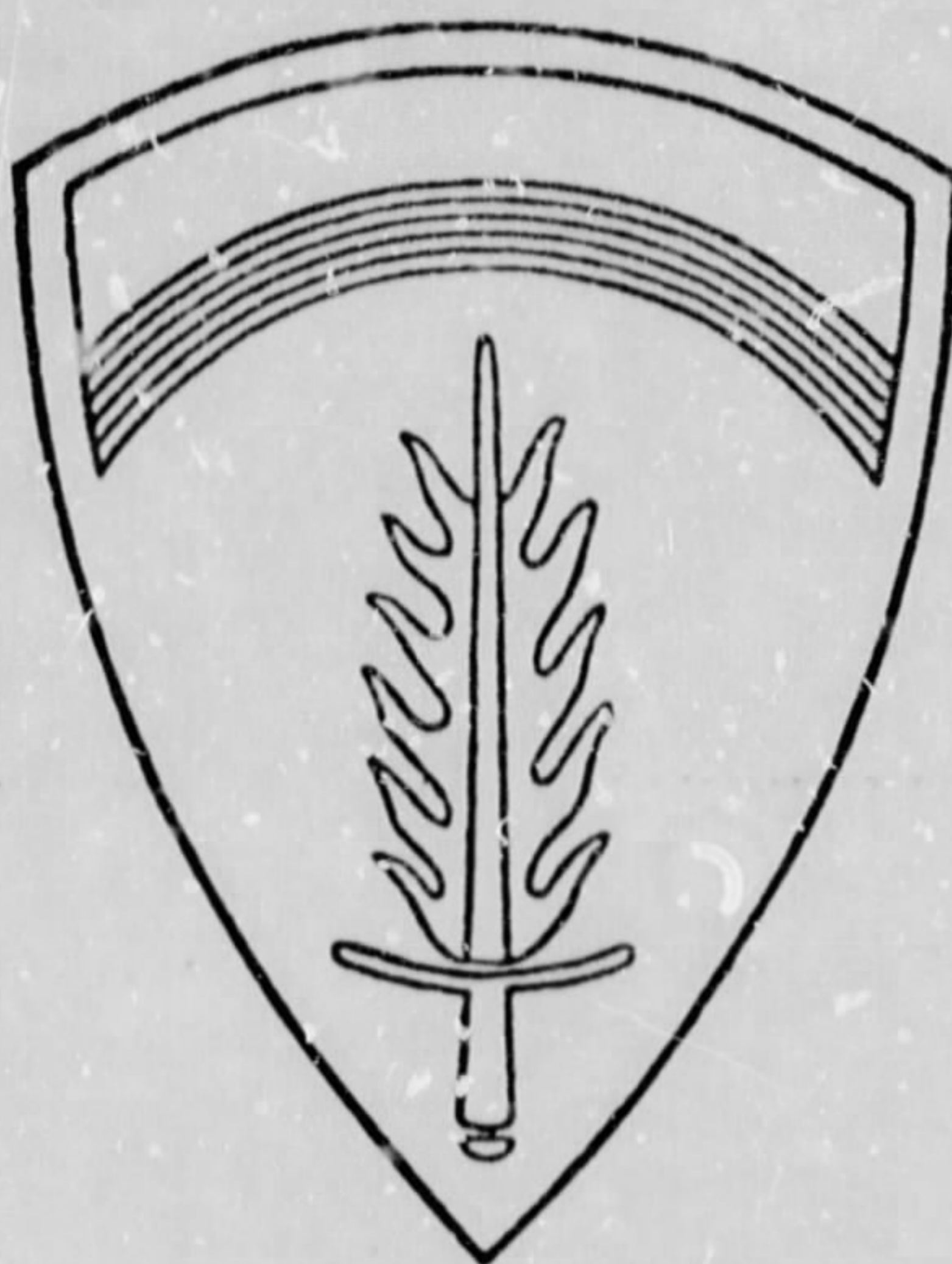


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RAILROAD, SEA AND AIR TRANSPORT SITUATION

FOR SUPPLY OF AFRICA THROUGH ITALY

(JAN - MAY 1943)

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RAILROAD, SEA AND AIR TRANSPORT SITUATION FOR
SUPPLY OF AFRICA THROUGH ITALY
(January - May 1943)

by

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Historical Division
HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE..

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Generalmajor

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Supply of Africa through Italy, January - May
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Railroad, sea, and air transport situation for supply of Africa
through Italy, January - May 1943.

A. Railroad situation Italy

Detailed documentation see report of Gen. Maj. Karl Theodor K o e r n e r.

Effects upon supply transports.

Daily movement from the Reich up to the Rome area 48 trains, including all transports of coal, foodstuffs and civilian trains.

Daily movement from Rome to Naples 24 trains.

Daily movement from Naples up to Reggio area 12 trains.

Railroad ferries Reggio-Messina 400 cars daily.

Of these approximately 25% were made available by the Italian Government for German Wehrmacht transports. Even when they were urgently needed, additional trains were released only unwillingly by the Italian transportation chief for use of the German authorities, thereby depriving the Italians.

Up to the end of May 1943 this transportation performance could be kept up because no large-scale enemy bombing attacks were made on the important rail junctions in northern Italy. Only in the south-Italian area delays in the movement of transports were brought about by aerial attacks on Naples, causing bottlenecks in the railroad stations north thereof.

In order to relieve the bottlenecks in the central-Italian railroad stations, special Kommandos were organized by the German, which were authorized by order of the Italian transportation chief to start particularly important supply trains on their way to the south. In the course of performing these duties it was learned that the Italians did not dispose of any separate communication net for railroad purposes exclusively. Therefore

OB Sued had to assign radio posts and communication airplanes to these Kommandos.

Railroad situation in Tunis.

The railroad net in the bridgehead Tunis consisted of two lines, one was leading westward from Tunis via Bizerta, and had standard gauge. The second was leading southward from Tunis, via Sfax, Sousse to Gabes, and had narrow gauge. There was a sufficient amount of rolling stock, but locomotives were lacking. It was impossible to bring in additional locomotives over the supply routes because of difficulties in loading and unloading operations. Furthermore there was an acute shortage of coal. Efforts were made to fire the locomotives with residues of olive oil presses, and also to bring in coal over the supply routes. Operations in a coal mine on the Bone peninsula were taken up again with the help of German mine inspectors and miners.

Despite considerable enemy interference by bombing and low flying aerial attacks it was possible to maintain railroad service up to the end of April.

B. Sea transport situation.

a. Shipping space.

At the beginning of January 1943 the following shipping space was available for shipments to Africa:

1. on German and Italian merchantmen 150,000 metric tons
2. under the Laval-agreement shipping space available in ports of southern France approximately 450,000 met. tons
of which suitable for supply of Africa 100,000 met.tons.

Because of frequent attacks on South-Italian ports the capacity of Italian shipyards to do repair work was greatly decreased so that the average shipping space actually available for the supply of Africa amounted only to a

total of 30-50 000 metric tons. Moreover the number of escort vessels ready and placed at our disposal for duty was reduced.

Losses of large ships through enemy action of all kinds increased so much during the spring of 1943 that, as an average, each ship could be used for supply service to Africa only once; thereafter loss of the ship would have to be anticipated.

Shipping space on small vessels was available as follows:

Naval tank landing craft (MFP) of 80 met.tons each	45 = 3 600 met.tons
Siebelfaehren (SF) of 40 met.tons each	45 = 1 800 met.tons
War transports (K.T.) of 600 met. tons each	3 = 1 800 met.tons

Losses of small vessels were not very heavy so that OB Sued submitted the following request to OKW in the middle of January 1943:

Total monthly requirements of the supply services for the

German units in Africa	<u>150 000 met.tons.</u>
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of which can be handled by air transport

(see section C)	18 000 met tons
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leaving supply goods to be moved by sea

transports in the amount of	132 000 met.tons.
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Owing to the fact that due to losses there would be no more large ships to count upon during the following months, the entire African traffic would have to be handled by small vessels. Small vessels can make at least 5 trips a month to Africa, and can, therefore, be scheduled accordingly. Consequently the number of small vessels required to be constantly available was as follows:

10 K.T. of 600 met. tons each	= 6 000 met. tons.
200 MFP of 80 met. tons each	= 16 000 met. tons
200 SF of 40 met. tons each	= 8 000 met. tons
Total	<u>30 000 met. tons.</u>

This request arrived at the OKW at the end of January 1943. During a personal report by OB Sued in the Fuehrerhauptquartier in the middle of February 1942 (sic) Feldmarschall Kesselring once more emphasized the urgency of this request. At the beginning of March the OKW made available a quota of 45,000 metric tons of steel per month for the construction of small vessels.

It had to be realized that despite all possible speed, it would take considerable time before the construction program would get under way. Therefore several alternate proposals were submitted during January:

1. The German command submitted a request to the Italians to employ 300-500 Italian sail boats with auxiliary motors (Motorsegler) in the African traffic. This could not be done because the owners of these motorized sailboats refused to make them available for supply service duty to Africa, and the Italian Admiralty was unable to enforce its view.
2. At the present moment the main difficulty consisted in the allotment of the necessary quantities of steel; therefore the representative of the Reichskommissar for ocean shipping in Rome suggested the construction of motorized sailing vessels of 300 metric tons each. The lumber required for this construction program could be delivered from Slovakia, already out to measure. The construction of these sailing vessels was to be handled by the local shipyards in the ports of northeastern Italy. The lumber was delivered and at the beginning of April 50% of the total lumber requirements were stored ready for use in northern Italy. The project failed because no motors could be allotted.

3. It was planned to transfer motorized sailing vessels, equipped with new motors, from the Greek area to Italy. To a certain extent it was possible to obtain Deutz-motors for this purpose, and to install them into 200 metric ton sailboats. A German sailor was appointed as commander, and the sailboats were started on their trip to Italy with Greek crews. The Italian port authorities raised considerable objections against the Greek crews, so that finally the Greek crews refused to sail on. Furthermore, difficulties arose in the procurement of motors. Subsequently 5 motorized sailing vessels were assigned to duty along the Italian eastern shore.
4. Army engineer personnel had made an attempt to construct concrete boats in a shipyard in the Piraeus. In this case too the Representative of the Reichskommissar for ocean shipping was to make available concrete boats, but the execution of the plan failed because of the lack of motors.

When during the course of February none of these plans could be carried out, OB Sued submitted the request to OKW to send 300 motorized river vessels from France and Germany to Italy, and to use these in the African and coastal traffic. This plan was approved, and preparations were immediately made for the transfer of the vessels on the canal network existing in France and Germany to Marseilles.

A number of these boats were stationed on the rivers in northern France which do not connect with the canal network in southern France. Therefore preparations were made for the transportation of these boats over land. The German Air Force made "Kuhlemeyer" available (road rollers),

furthermore it was necessary to straighten road curves in villages in order to make the movement of these boats on "Kuhlemeyer" possible.

Despite several instances of interference by Partisans these emergency measures were carried to a good end. During March the first motorized boats arrived in Marseilles, were reinforced for ocean traffic there, and arrived in Genova at the beginning of April. They were used to move stocks of supplies for 3 months to Sardinia and Corsica, as had been ordered in April.

Furthermore, these ships were used in the supply of Sicily - Africa had been lost in the meantime - and of the southern tip of Italy.

b. Shipping space (sic)

As has been shown above, there was only a limited amount of shipping space available for the movement of supplies to Africa. Furthermore the Italian Navy could make available only a few boats, poorly equipped for submarine defense, for escorting purposes. Because of these two reasons OB Sued was forced to handle the supply of Africa, despite all difficulties, from the Sicilian ports Messina, Palermo, Trapani, Marsala, and from the ports Reggio and Naples in southern Italy. These ports were suited for large-scale loading operations, and - up into the month of April - they could be repaired quickly after aerial attacks.

Available for unloading operations in Africa were:

The ports Bizerta and Tunis for large vessels;

Along the eastern coast the ports Sfax and Sousse for small vessels.

However considerable delays occurred in the unloading operations in these ports because of the gradually increasing air attacks. In both of the large ports the crane installations had been destroyed by air attacks.

Replacements were brought in from Marseilles and Toulon, and later on from the ports in northern Germany. Unfortunately the first 7 crane installations from Marseilles were lost on the sea during their transfer to Naples.

Since air attacks on our known unloading ports increased and thereby all loading operations were greatly impeded, OT was given the mission to explore small ports and landing places along the open coast, in Africa, Sicily and on the southwestern coast of Italy, and to prepare them for use by small boats. During April this mission was extended to the eastern coasts of Sardinia and Corsica and the central portion of the western coast of Italy. Here too considerable difficulties developed because of the delaying tactics of the Italians. Only a small portion of the requested constructions could be completed before the close of the African campaign.

C. Air Transport situation.

At the beginning of January 1945 the following air transport units were at the disposal of OB Sued:

1 Me 323-group of 28 airplanes, of which, on an average 15 airplanes were able to go on duty,

9 Ju 52-groups, of which ready to go on duty 200 airplanes.

Daily employment of these units once, of the transport wing stationed in Sicily twice. On an average 600 metric tons were transported to Africa daily by air. The main jump-off ports were located in the Naples area.

It was possible to complete the supply flights only by changing the schedules and under heavy fighter escort. Up to the beginning of May the casualties did not surpass a bearable limit. Only at the beginning of May

the losses increased; particularly severe was the loss of 14 Me 323 on one single day.

In conclusion it may be stated that moving the entire supply via Sicily and from there by boats or airplanes to Africa was a request impossible to fulfill. Only 100-120 cars with German supply goods were moved by the ferry, that is to say 1500-1800 metric tons. Since all of the fighter units and a great part of the combat units were supplied from bases in Sicily, only a small portion of the cars was left for the supply of Africa.

Because of this reason, and despite all considerations to the contrary, the large boats and the greater part of the air transport units had to be started out of the Naples area.

Due to the self-sacrificing efforts of the crews, both of the Navy and of the Air Forces, it was possible to move, despite all difficulties, 40-50% of the required supply during the months of January to March, and only about 20-30% during April to Africa.

signature: Seibt.

Translated:
3 Dec. 1947: M.B.