

second Brigade Group of 78 Division was in floating reserve. The whole operation was under command of Major-General Ryder, United States 34 Infantry Division.

Although nominal opposition was offered in some quarters the landing was on the whole unopposed, and by 1600 hours envoys were received to discuss terms: after that time only sporadic fighting continued. On 9th November Algiers harbour was opened and the unloading of ships began.

Once this landing had been completed under American auspices, the rôle allotted to First Army was to establish a base at Algiers and to occupy Eastern Algeria and Tunisia as speedily as possible.

So, on 9th November, I left Gibraltar by air, landed at Maison Blanche airfield with a very small skeleton staff and took over command, immediately directing Major-General Eveleigh (Commander British 78 Division) to carry out the prearranged plan for the capture of Bougie port and Djidjelli airfield with 36 Infantry Brigade Group, assisted by naval forces under command of Captain N. V. Dickinson, D.S.C., R.N.

And, on the final cessation of French opposition on 10th November, it became possible to redistribute the forces available for the advance east. Orders were therefore given for all troops of 78 Division and the two Commandos to revert to command of 78 Division, while all other British troops were placed temporarily under command of 34 United States Division, which was charged with the security of the port of Algiers and the vital airfields at Maison Blanche and Blida.

If I was to forestall the Axis in Tunis and Bizerta, speed was quite vital.

Previous to leaving the United Kingdom I had prepared three alternative plans to meet the case of:—

- (a) French resistance on a considerable scale.
- (b) Short-lived resistance followed by non-co-operation or at least a period of confusion, or
- (c) Active collaboration.

The same governing principles held good in each case—namely, seizure of coastal airfields and immediate installation of fighters, as a preliminary to the successive capture of the ports of Bougie, Philippeville, Bone and La Calle; together with the most rapid advance of my land forces by motor transport, landing craft and troop-carrying aircraft.

I must state here that when in the planning stage it was decided that no assault landing should be made East of Algiers, then, in my opinion, my chance disappeared of reaching Tunis before the Germans, unless the French put up a stout resistance to Axis entry into Tunisia.* In actual fact, the French resisted

us in Algiers (feeble though their resistance was, yet its consequent repercussions caused delay and doubt) and did not resist the Axis in Tunisia. The first German landings at El Aouana airport on 9th November were not opposed.

36 Brigade landed unopposed at Bougie on 11th November and took over the port. The battalion destined to seize the airfield at Djidjelli and stock it with petrol was, however, unable to land by sea owing to the swell and went on by road from Bougie, not reaching Djidjelli until 13th November. This delay unfortunately prevented our fighters operating from the airfield and, as a result, the enemy bombers sank several ships in Bougie harbour before air cover could be provided. Losses in personnel were not high but in equipment were considerable, and the infantry were, for some time to come, operating only with what they could carry and in the clothes they wore when they left their ships.

The distances covered and the feats achieved by the brigades of 78 Division (in particular 36 Brigade) operating with a very reduced scale of first and second line transport, and with no third line, were one of the features of the early stages of the campaign. Similarly, owing to convoy limitations, aggravated by losses at sea, it was not possible to provide adequate transport for port clearance and other line of communication duties. This had serious repercussion on maintenance; ships could not be cleared, congestion occurred on the quays, and depots could not be kept filled to meet demands. Furthermore, an immensely long line of communication was created by the rapid advance eastwards, with very meagre railway resources that could not be properly co-ordinated or developed owing to limitations of staff. All these factors contributed to a situation that gave rise to great anxiety for some time.

The campaign can henceforth be divided into three main phases:—

- (a) A race for Tunis and Bizerta, undertaken by a small force on assault or light scales and consequently much understrength in men and equipment.

We just failed to win this race, after some bitter fighting in bad weather which gave us our first experience of Tunisian mud. This phase ended soon after Christmas, 1942.

- (b) The period 28th December, 1942, to 27th March, 1943, during which both sides were building up their forces and attempting to hold on to or seize ground important for the future, while we also struggled incessantly to improve our immensely long communications. We were mainly on the defensive, suffered from an acute shortage of infantry, and were often very hard pressed in the mountainous country. I was forced to use the infantry battalions of 6 Armoured Division on ordinary infantry tasks of holding a sector of the front, away from the armoured brigade; and this misuse of the armoured divisional infantry continued up to the end of February, 1943. It is some consolation to know that the Germans had to do exactly the same with the infantry of 10 Panzer Division. Our greatest asset was our preponderance in artillery, and the front seemed at times largely held by artillery fire alone. The term "front" is deceptive. We

* General Anderson refers, in this passage, to plans which were discussed, but eventually abandoned, for landings at Bone and Philippeville in addition to that at Algiers. The principal arguments against landing so far to the eastwards were based upon—

- (a) The need to concentrate the relatively small forces which could be landed; and
- (b) The danger of venturing without air cover into ports which the German bombers could reach. The reality of the bombing danger was proved by the shipping losses incurred at Bougie. Further to the east still heavier losses might have been expected, with proportionately serious results.