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THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION
AT EL GUETTAR, 20-30 MARCH 1943
TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN

Type of operation described: INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE ATTACK
DEFENSE AND COUNTERATTACK

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THE OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION

AT EL GUETTAR, 20-30 MARCH 1943

TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN

ORIENTATION

INTRODUCTION

The real significance of America's entry in World War II came on 14 August 1942⁽³⁾ with the announcement that General Dwight D. Eisenhower had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Forces. With this appointment, General Eisenhower received a directive from the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff which stated that combined military operations would be directed against Africa as early as practicable. The only United States Combat Division in the European Theater of Operations in August 1942⁽²⁾ was the First Infantry Division. (1)

Major assaults were planned in Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers. The adopted plan called for a Western Task Force to sail direct from the United States and capture Casablanca. The Center Task Force, also entirely American, was to sail from the United Kingdom and capture Oran. The Eastern Task Force, American and British, was to sail from the United Kingdom and capture Algiers. The Center Task Force, in conjunction with the Western Task Force, was to take its initial objective and then assist in establishing and maintaining communication between Casablanca and Oran and build up an American army and an air striking force ready to repel any German attack. (2) (See Map A)

On 8 November 1942, the Allies landed successfully in North Africa as planned. The Center Task Force, composed of the First Armored Division, First Infantry Division and the First Ranger Battalion landed at Arzeu, Les Andalouses and Oran. (3)

(1) A-1, p. 1
(2) A-2, p. 7
(3) A-2, p. 10-11

The Allied plan was to rush all available forces to seize the strategic key to the Mediterranean - Tunisia. This plan was a squeeze play to be executed by the forces which had landed in North Africa pushing toward Bizerte and Tunis, while Montgomery's Eighth Army (British) pushed Rommel and his Afrika Korps (German) toward Northern Tunisia. (4)

Hardly had the First Infantry Division regrouped and reorganized after the French surrendered at Oran when the Third Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment was flown east to Youk les Bains. The 5th Field Artillery Battalion was ordered to Tunisia and joined the British V Corps. In late November, the 18th Infantry Regimental Combat Team joined the British V Corps. In January 1943 while the fighting was becoming stabilized in Northern Tunisia, the rest of the 26th Infantry Regiment and the 33rd Field Artillery Battalion joined the II Corps in Southern Tunisia to reinforce the French and secure the southern flank of the Allies in the Tunisian hills. The remainder of the First Division was ordered into General Reserve by Allied Force Headquarters on 18 January 1943 and established its Command Post and concentrated in the Guelma Area, 60 miles east of Constantine on about 24 January 1943. (5) (See Map B)

During January 1943 the Allied situation was critical due to many factors. They did not have sufficient forces to assume the offensive and were slowed down by torrential rains which turned the country into a sea of mud. Also, long water routes, poor roads, railroads and communication facilities gave the enemy a decided advantage. His lines of communication were short, only the Sicilian Channel separated him from his supplies and mainland. (6)

He was able to strike with great force at any place and time against the Allied Forces. The Allies were attempting to cover a two hundred mile front from Sedjenane in the North to Gafsa in the South with three British

(4) A-1, p. 55
(5) A-1, p. 58-59
(6) A-3, p. 2-3

Divisions, one American Division and three French Divisions, the latter being poorly equipped and lacking in personnel. (7) (See Map B)

In the South the Eighth Army (British) occupied Tripoli on 23 January 1943 but its line of communication had reached its limit and the drive was halted at the Mareth Line. The Port of Tripoli had to be opened before another drive could be launched. (8)

On 30 January 1943, the Germans made a main attack on the French Troops holding Faid Pass. Supported by 60 tanks, the Axis Force captured the town of Faid and made further penetrations to the South and West. This was stopped by attacks of American armor (First Armored Division) but the lost ground could not be retaken. (9) (See Map B)

During the first two weeks in February 1943, an extensive regrouping of Allied Forces was effected. The First Armored Division was in the Sbeitla area where it was attacked by the Twenty First Panzer Division (German). The attack was directed at Kasserine Pass. The Tenth Panzer Division (German) attacked from Maknassy in the South toward the same objective. This attack developed with fury and the Fifteenth Panzer Division (German) and the One Hundred and Thirty First Centauro Division (Italian) were also engaged. At this time the American Forces manning the Gafsa Garrison were withdrawn to Feriana. On 20 February the Allies were thrown back toward Tibessa. The forward progress of the Axis attack was halted in this vicinity after the concentration of more First Division units. On 23 February 1943 the enemy withdrew through the pass and by 26 February 1943 had reached the general line, Hadjeb el Aïoum - Sidi Bou Zid - Gafsa, where they remained. (10) (See Map B)

To go back for a moment, the reorganization of the Allied Command took place on 19 February 1943 with General Eisenhower being appointed Commander-in-Chief of Allied Forces in North Africa. (11)

(7) A-3, p. 2

(10) A-2, p. 28-32

(8) A-3, p. 2

(11) A-2, p. 33

(9) A-2, p. 26-27

By the time the Germans withdrew from Kasserine Pass, the First Division had organized its sector on Djebel Chambi and had taken command of all forces in the area. (12) (See Map B)

On 27 February 1943, the Ninth Division relieved the First Division and on 28 February the Division Command Post was opened at Bou Kadra. Here all the elements of the First Division were assembled, rested and filled with replacements preparatory to further operations. (13)

At the same time that the First Division was relieved, it was apparent to the Germans that many Allied troops had been withdrawn from the British V Corps sector to support the defense of Kasserine earlier in the month. With this knowledge, he attacked that sector in the Medjezel-Bab area. This attack gained six or seven miles for the enemy but this ground was retaken by British counter-attacks. (14) (See Map B)

"Estimated enemy forces in Tunisia 19 March 1943 were 220,000 men, 350 German tanks, 90 Italian tanks, 750 field and medium guns and 900 anti-tank guns." (15)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

General George S. Patton assumed command of II Corps early in March 1943. At that time II Corps consisted of the following units: 1st, 9th, and 34th Infantry Divisions; the 1st Armored Division; and the 1st Ranger Battalion. In other words, II Corps was strictly an American unit. This Corps operated under the control of the 18th Army Group which was commanded by Field Marshal Alexander (British). At last, the II Corps which had long been an orphan of the British First Army, was now a real command. Also, for the first time since the landings at Oran in November 1942, the First Division was together as a fighting team. (16)

The First Division was located in the forests around Morsott and Bou Chebka for a rest period which lasted ten days. Here the GI's rested,

(12) A-1, p. 63

(13) A-4

(14) A-3, p. 6

(15) A-3, p. 8

(16) A-1, p. 92

cleaned equipment, received new equipment, and for the first time in four months had one meal of fresh beef. (17) (See Map B)

Now the Americans had regrouped and reorganized. It was time to go on the offensive. On 16 March 1943, the First Division was given the mission of capturing and defending Gafsa and securing bases in that vicinity for the 8th British Army which was approaching Rommel, dug in along the old French Mareth Line. (18)

If the mission of capturing Gafsa could be accomplished, and the move could be continued toward Gabes, it would serve one of two purposes. It would mean a joining of American and British forces or it would cut the enemy forces in two. This was known as "Operation Wop". Gafsa was a French garrison town and lay some fifty miles south of Bou Chebka on the northern edge of the great Sahara Desert. Earlier in the year it had been occupied by units of the 26th Infantry but was given up without a fight when the II Corps line was attacked and pierced at Faid Pass. This garrison was now operated by Italians and was the only thing which stood in the way of juncture between the Americans and the British Eighth Army. (19) (See Map B)

The 34th Division was on the right and the 9th Division (minus) was on the left. Proper plans and preparations were made and the night of 16-17 March saw the First Division moved by trucks over roads previously de-mined by the 1st Engineers to their forward attack positions which they occupied by 0600 on the 17th March. After this night motor move of about 45 miles, the Division was prepared to assault at 0800 with complete artillery support but it was necessary to delay until 1000 hours to effect complete coordination with an air attack which had been ordered to precede the infantry assault. (20)

After the air strike, supported by artillery, the Division moved in

(17) A-1, p. 92

(18) A-1, p. 92

(19) A-1, p. 64

(20) A-4

on Gafsa only to find that the operation was a dry run. The Italians, finding the high ground on both sides of the town occupied, withdrew.

THE DIVISION SITUATION

Immediately after entering Gafsa, while most of the Division was engaged in mopping up the town, elements of the 1st Ranger Battalion and the 1st Reconnaissance Troop pushed on toward El Guettar and maintained contact with Italian mechanized units near the oasis. The town of Gafsa, situated as it was, with the mountains on the east and west, was highly unsuited for defense of any kind. With this in mind, the Division was moved eastward toward El Guettar. (21)

On 20 March 1943 at 1630 hours, the Division received a Warning Order to make the necessary plans, including the areas for the placements of artillery, for an attack along the Gafsa-Gabes Road to take the commanding high ground, east of El Guettar, about 18 miles southeast of Gafsa. Orders were received for this operation at 1800, 20 March 1943 and a fragmentary order was then issued to the unit commanders who had been assembled. (22) (See Map C)

The plan of attack called for the 18th Infantry to attack south of the highway east of El Guettar, the 26th Infantry north of the highway and the 16th Infantry initially in Division Reserve in the vicinity of Gafsa. The 1st Ranger Battalion, supported by the Division Artillery and the heavy weapons company of the 1st Engineers was to make a preliminary night march of ten miles over rugged mountainous terrain, the Djebel Orbata, which was a ridge overlooking and dominating the oasis of El Guettar. This attack was to take place at 0400 hours, 21 March 1943. The 1st Ranger Battalion was to occupy a covering position to protect the advance of the other elements of the Division through the valley below. At 0550, Combat Team 18 was in position ready to attack with the 26th Infantry behind them. (23) (See Map C)

(21) A-1, p. 65

(22) A-4

(23) A-4

NARRATION

INDIVIDUAL MISSIONS OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE 1st DIVISION

The 1st Ranger Battalion was to occupy the Italian position located on the precipitous cliffs of Djebel Orbata, (890), thereby dominating the approaches to the great oasis below. (See Map C)

The 26th Infantry was to capture and occupy the knife-edged feature, Djebel Ank, (621), and in so doing, the road fork east of El Guettar would be secured. The 26th Infantry was then to continue east along an unimproved road called Gumtree Road toward the village of Bou Hamran. (24) (See Map C)

The 18th Infantry was to follow the southern fork, the Gabes Road, and capture and defend the two commanding features of Djebel Berda, (772), and Djebel Moheltat, (482). (See Map C)

The 16th Infantry was to remain in Division reserve in the vicinity of Gafsa and complete the mopping up of that garrison. (25) (See Map C)

THE ATTACK ON EL GUETTAR, 21 MARCH 1943

The 1st Ranger Battalion made its night march as scheduled and attacked the Italian position in the funnel in the mountains north of the fork in the El Guettar Road at 0400 hours, 21 March 1943. By 1400 hours the position was occupied and the Italians had either withdrawn or been captured. (26)

By mid-morning, the 26th Infantry had pushed past the fork in the El Guettar Road and had occupied the position at Djebel Ank. This successful operation, in conjunction with the operation of the 1st Ranger Battalion to the north, secured the road fork. (See Map C)

The 18th Infantry then followed the southern fork, the Gabes Highway, sending the 2nd and 3rd Battalions west of the highway toward Djebel Moheltat and the 1st Battalion south towards the commanding feature of

(24) A-1, p. 67

(25) A-5, p. 67

(26) A-5, p. 33

Djebel Berda. (27) (See Map C)

The 1st Battalion of the 26th Infantry was on its objective at 1316 hours; the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 18th Infantry were at Oued El Ked-dab, in the foothills of Djebel Moheltat, the capture of which was the continuing mission of the Combat Team. (28) (See Map C)

The attack was progressing as planned but, as a precautionary measure, the 3rd Battalion of the 16th Infantry was moved from Gafsa to a switch position east of the road junction, reporting to the Commanding Officer of Combat Team 18. The 2nd Battalion of the 16th Infantry was also moved to the vicinity of El Guettar by motor. Here this battalion was hidden in the walls and gardens of the oasis and awaited orders which would send them straight down the Gafsa-Gabes Highway. These orders were to be issued immediately upon the securing of the line Djebel Moheltat-Djebel Kreroua by the 18th Infantry. The 1st Battalion, 16th Infantry, with the 7th Field Artillery Battalion remained in Gafsa where a forward landing strip was in the process of construction. (29) (See Map D)

Up until this time, fighting had been limited to sharp, brief actions with the Italians. During this part of the attack, the Luftwaffe incessantly bombed and strafed the advancing infantry and attacked the First Division Artillery savagely. At 1650, the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry was attacked by 15 tanks from the vicinity of Djebel Moheltat but this was not followed through and the tanks withdrew to the east. (30)

ACTIONS ON 22 MARCH 1943

The 26th Infantry continued its attack towards Bou Hamran and elements of the 3rd Battalion arrived in the outskirts late in the day.

Combat Team 18 attacked at 1300 hours in the direction of Djebel Berda, and were able to occupy positions and dig in. (31) (See Map D)

(27) A-1, p. 67

(30) A-4; A-1, p. 67

(28) A-4

(31) A-4

(29) A-4; A-1, p. 67-68

ACTIONS ON 23 MARCH 1943

Combat Team 26 continued its attack toward Bou Hamran at 0245 hours. At 0430 the 2nd Battalion of the 18th Infantry, which had been on ^{the} left of 3rd Battalion up to this point, joined the 1st Battalion on Djebel Berda and executed a coordinated attack which secured commanding positions on this hill. The 3rd Battalion was in position north of the Gabes Road, (482). (32) (See Map D)

While this was taking place, the 1st Engineer Battalion laid a minefield between hill 336 and the wadi south of the Gabes Road. The 3rd Battalion of the 16th Infantry was moved astride the El Guettar-Gabes Road four miles south of El Guettar, dug in behind the minefield laid by the engineers. (33) (See Map D)

At 0510, the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion reported an attack by 10 tanks and 2 companies of infantry from its positions on the high ground east of 336, where they had been placed to protect the artillery. (34)

When daylight came, at approximately 0600, the faint rumbling noise which had long been audible in the valley beyond the 18th Infantry positions came to life and the German 10th Panzer Division (heroes of the Sedan Breakthrough) could be seen slowly approaching from the ^{east} west. This Panzer Division was in an armored square with infantry following closely behind the tanks. Behind all of this were half-tracks loaded with infantrymen. When the tanks approached a position on the road between the positions of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 18th Infantry, they broke into a formation of three columns. The north column moved towards the northwest, the central column remained astride the Gafsa-Gabes Road and the south column broke to the south. There were more than thirty tanks in this column and undoubtedly was the main effort. It can readily be seen that, were this attack successful, all units of the 18th Infantry

(32) A-4; A-6, p. 12

(33) A-1, p. 67

(34) A-4; A-1, p. 68

would be cut off from the remainder of the Division. (35) (See Map D)

At 0600, while all of the above was unfolding, the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry was attacked and its positions over-run by tanks. The 16th Infantry was ordered to move its anti-tank company forward and to move the remainder of the regiment by infiltration. At 0635, all units of Division Artillery were notified that there were some thirty tanks plus infantry northeast of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, and to get all possible artillery fire on them at once. The 5th and 32nd Field Artillery Battalions put out so much fire that it was dangerous to fire their guns. The attack continued and finally the artillery had to spike six guns of each Battalion and seek cover. The artillery that was further to the rear, 7th Field Artillery Battalion, kept firing until the attack was halted. (36)

The 16th Infantry, 3rd Battalion, was digging deeper in their switch position, from where they could see the artillerymen defending their guns with rifles and hand grenades. Along the main highway, the German main tank attack group appeared in position to rush the pass between Hill 336 and the wadi to the left of the road. At this time, the few remaining half-tracks from the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion came back through the covering minefield. This battalion had accounted for at least 10 Mark III and IV tanks and some enemy personnel. (37) (See Map D)

By 0800 elements of the 1st Battalion of the 7th Panzer Regiment (50 tanks), the 1st Battalion of the 69th Panzer Grenadiers, the 2nd Battalion of the 86th Panzer Grenadiers and a Battalion of the 90th Artillery Regiment had been committed, along with the 10th Panzer Division. (38)

The 16th Infantry switch position was shelled by artillery fire while the German infantry crawled to get within assaulting position. Meanwhile

(35) A-7, p. 19

(37) A-1, p. 68

(36) A-4; A-7, p. 21

(38) A-1, p. 69

all remaining 155's of the 5th Field Artillery Battalion were placed on line with the 3rd Battalion, 16th Infantry and kept throwing round after round into the advancing German ranks. The 2nd Battalion of the 16th Infantry detrucked at the fork of the Guntree-Gafsa Road under fire and went into position on both sides of the 3rd Battalion. By mid-morning, the enemy attack stalled and the tanks started to withdraw. At this time, reserves from II Corps started to arrive, these included the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion of full-tracked 3-inch guns and the 17th Field Artillery which was to reinforce the 5th and 32nd Field Artillery Battalions which had been hit so hard. (39) (See Map D)

The 1st Ranger Battalion was put into position to the right of the 1st Battalion, 18th Infantry, and at 0907 reported tanks on both sides of the Gafsa-Gabes Road, seven and a half miles east of El Guettar and shelling the Division positions. At 1047, three of the enemy tanks were knocked out by the Division Artillery and the remainder withdrew. (40) (See Map D)

At 1055, the 18th Infantry reported a threat of a counter-attack in front of the 3rd Battalion and that they were still out of communication with the remainder of the regiment, and short of ammunition. Also, they reported that enemy tanks were between the 5th and 32nd Field Artillery Battalions but that artillery fire was being brought down on them. The enemy tanks started to withdraw and one company of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion and Company "C" of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion were committed to pursue the tanks to the northeast. Our losses in this pursuit were four tank destroyers and one 37 MM gun. (41)

After this action, there was little activity for the remainder of the morning. In the early afternoon, "E" Company of the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, made a limited counter-attack to the south from Hill 483, elimi-

(39) A-1, p. 69

(40) A-4

(41) A-4

nating some of the German patrols searching the northern flank of Hill 336. The former positions of the 32nd Field Artillery were retaken before the enemy was able to destroy the equipment which had been left there and contact was made with the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry, in the vicinity of Hill 482. The German tanks which had attempted to outflank the switch position from the south were bogged down in the mud of Chott El Guettar, (Salt Lake). (42) (See Map D)

At 1325, the 1st Ranger Battalion Observation Post reported that enemy tanks were eleven miles east of El Guettar and withdrawing further to the east. At 1518, the Division was informed through a radio intercept that the 10th Panzer Division would again attack at 1600 hours with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 86th Panzer Grenadiers, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 7th Regiment and the 2nd and 4th Battalions of the 90th Artillery Regiment. At this time, the 16th Infantry was ordered to turn over the defense of Gafsa to the 39th Infantry, 3rd Battalion, and to move the remainder of the 16th to the vicinity of El Guettar. (43) (See Map D)

At 1610, the 5th Field Artillery Battalion, reporting on the morning action, reported six guns out of action but casualties slight. The guns which were over-run were being pulled out. All of the guns of "B" and "C" Companies of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion and seven guns of the 899th Tank Destroyer Battalion were lost, but thirty and possibly forty enemy tanks had been knocked out. (44)

At 1645, the enemy delivered an air strike on the Division position and at 1655 it was reported that the enemy attack had jumped off and was progressing up the valley. Sections of the 3rd Battalion, 18th Infantry positions were again over-run but the battalion line held fast. The Germans attacked in waves with armored half-tracks preceding the infantry. All anti-tank weapons were fired effectively at the half-tracks and the

(42) A-4; A-1, p. 69

(43) A-4

(44) A-4

Division Artillery fired an anti-tank mission at 1714, seven and a half miles east of El Guettar. At 1830, Company "A" of the 1st Engineers was committed as infantry. The anti-tank mission fired by the artillery had been devastating and had crucified the enemy. At 1945, all enemy tanks which had survived the terrific fire laid down by artillery and infantry were moving to the rear. At this point, the 1st Ranger Battalion was moved to protect the left flank of the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry which had been practically surrounded. The 3rd Battalion, 18th Infantry, and the Ranger Battalion succeeded in holding off the tanks while the 1st Battalion of the 18th crucified them. This ended the action for the day.

(45)

24 MARCH 1943

When morning came, it was found that the enemy had withdrawn through the pass north of Djebel El Kreroua. (46) (See Map D)

The 2nd Battalion of the 16th Infantry relieved the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 18th Infantry, still on Djebel Berda were attacked by the 10th Motorcycle Battalion which had been the German reserve, and fell back slowly on the heights of Berda. At this point, the 16th Infantry was given a sector north of the Gabes Road. (47)

25 MARCH 1943

On this day the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 18th Infantry were withdrawn on Corps order and with the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry which had been relieved on the 24th, regrouped at El Guettar. While this action was taking place, the 26th Infantry had been brought south from its positions at Bou Hamran and had attacked the northern rim of Djebel Moheltat, and from Hill 536 were beginning a battle through the treacherous hills toward Hill 482 which was the Key to the entire battlefield. (48)

(See Map D)

(45) A-4

(46) A-8, p. 24

(47) A-8, p. 24; A-1, p. 70

(48) A-1, p. 70

THE FINAL DAYS IN THE BATTLE OF EL GUETTAR

The 1st Battalion of the 16th Infantry was moved by motor from Gafsa and detrucked at the road junction of Gumtree-Gabes Road, Moving from there by foot, they went into positions on both sides of the 3rd Battalion, 16th Infantry. On 27 March, an all out attack started which carried through the pass north of Djebel Kreroua. (49) (See Map D)

From this point, the battle went into a gruelling contest in which the terrain was a greater foe than the enemy. The II Corps committed the 39th Infantry and the 47th Infantry Regiments and a great deal of artillery of the 9th Division into the battle to retake Djebel Berda. A tank force of the First Armored Division, commanded by Colonel Chauncey Benson, and the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Armored Infantry, were committed. At this point, the Germans became defensive experts and by means of the 21st Panzer Division defending minefields and an anti-tank screen of 88's the Benson Force was bottled up in the valley. (50)

The zone now under 1st Division responsibility was the rugged hills north of the Gabes Road. The 16th Infantry with the 26th Infantry attacked the horseshoe shaped Djebel Moheltat on the 28th of March and were hurled back. On the 29th of March, the 26th Infantry was successful in advancing within assaulting distance of Hill 482, and on the 30th took the position. All this time, the 16th Infantry was advancing hill by hill with great difficulty. The 18th Infantry having had a short rest was assigned the mission of advancing along Gumtree Road and on the 27th of March they had taken Djebel Hamadi (567) and moved south to cover the flank of the 26th Infantry. During this operation, they attacked Hill 574. (51) (See Map D)

Resistance was always stubborn and the terrain was difficult but all of a sudden, there was no resistance at all. Finally, word was received that Montgomery had battered through the Mareth Line and the Battle for El Guettar had come to an abrupt close. (52)

(49) A-1, p. 70
(50) A-1, p. 70

(51) A-1, p. 70-71
(52) A-1, p. 70

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The attack in the first phase of the El Guettar battle was well planned by Division and a well executed maneuver by the Combat Teams, in spite of the fact that the Combat Team Commanders did not receive the Order until late in the day, making a thorough reconnaissance during daylight impossible. This is a "must" before any attack and reconnaissance should start immediately upon the occupation of a new position.

Night shuttling movements of troops are very effective and help to keep the morale of the men high and undoubtedly conserve energy which is needed for the following attack.

Artillery fire should be adjusted during daylight but it is possible to adjust it at night if the moonlight is sufficient to allow key terrain features to be distinguished. However, trained observers must be used. This is one reason why the initial attack by the Division was successful.

Contact with the enemy was maintained after the fall of Gafsa. This made it possible for the roads between there and a point near El Guettar to be demined and worked so that a move by motor to a forward position could be made.

Well placed artillery and tank destroyer fire on the morning of 23 March prevented the 3rd Battalion of the 18th Infantry Regiment from being completely surrounded and forced the enemy to withdraw. This fire also forced the enemy to channelize itself into a minefield where the tanks were bogged down and destroyed by infantry weapons protecting the minefields.

The American soldier had his first real battle with a determined enemy at El Guettar. The basic fundamental of fire power and maneuver was thrown aside at first but once it was realized that a frontal at-

tack against a well dug in foe is disastrous, the basic principle was used with continued success.

Commanders were lax in maintaining contact with the enemy after an objective had been reached. This resulted in the Americans having too many unknown quantities to overcome, that is, lack of enemy information.

The attack of the 10th Panzer Division was a perfectly planned armored attack and did penetrate the American lines. In spite of the front being over-run by tanks, the infantry, being well dug in, was able to hold and drive off the enemy.

The artillery and air power available to many units was limited. Had there been sufficient for all units to fire all that was called for, together with proper air support, the attack of the 10th Panzer Division would have been stopped before it was started, due to the fact that the good observation afforded the observers would have enabled them to bring the fire directly on the approaching tanks, forcing them to disperse.

When boundary lines are placed between units during an attack, they should be flexible enough to allow one unit to assist another by fire. This was brought out by the fact that the 1st Battalion of the 18th Infantry sat and watched the attack on the 3rd Battalion but was unable to render any assistance. This could have been disastrous.

Units of the Division were successful in capturing numerous key terrain features which is the basic principle of any military operation. Some of these features were voluntarily given up even though numerous lives and much equipment had been lost in gaining them. This was a great mistake because, if they were worth taking in the first place, they were worth holding for future operations to come in the same area. This was proven by the fact that the 18th Infantry withdrew from Djebel

Berda, a feature which was later assigned to the 9th Division as their objective. Had this unit moved in and attacked through the 18th Infantry lines, the operation would undoubtedly, have been successful and would have saved time, lives, and equipment. This was not done and the casualties of the 9th Division (less one Combat Team) were: WIA-872, KIA-120, MIA-316, injured 186, exhausted 207 and disease 111, which makes a total of 1812 casualties. Of these, 425 were returned to duty, leaving 1387 lost. (53)

The 1st Division losses in material to the German 10th Panzer Division were:

21 Tank Destroyers of which 8 were repaired
8 $\frac{1}{2}$ ton Trucks
4 Half-tracks
1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ton Truck
12 105 MM Howitzers
12 155 MM Howitzers, 6 of which were recovered (54)

LESSONS

- ✓ 1. Never give up key terrain when it is to be used for future operations.
2. Night operations are successful if the attacking force can knife through the flanks of the enemy and attack from the rear.
- ✓ 3. Continuous reconnaissance is essential to the success of any operation.
- ✓ 4. The proper laying of minefields and well placed artillery fire will channelize a strong force of attacking armor into position where it can be destroyed without the use of friendly armor.
- ✓ 5. Fragmentary Orders must be issued to allow Commanders the maximum time to prepare for movement and make necessary reconnaissance.
- ✓ 6. After reaching an objective, the maintainance of contact with the withdrawing enemy is a necessity.

(53) A-9, p. 9

(54) A-10, p. 782; A-3, p. 29

7. Artillery fire can be adjusted at night.

8. A defensive position must be organized in depth including infantry, artillery and anti-tank weapons.

9. Move troops by motor whenever possible.

10. Boundary lines established by a higher headquarters must be flexible in order to allow one subordinate unit to aid another, provided that it will not materially alter the over-all plan of attack.