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'Devil's Choices' For Tunisia Foe

By THE GENERAL

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The chase is over in Tunisia. Breathing hard, Rommel's Afrika Korps has succeeded in outstripping its pursuers and taken refuge behind the fortress heights that guard the Tunis-Bizerte pocket. Pounding on the gates are the Eighth Army of Gen. Bernard L. Montgomery, which nipped at Rommel's heels for almost 2000 miles across the north strip of Africa; Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's American and French army which fought its way eastward through some of the most difficult fighting terrain in the world to make contact with Montgomery; and Gen. K. A. N. Anderson's British First Army, which has been closing in by inches on the Bizerte-Tunis stronghold and which has also effected a military juncture with Montgomery.

And now it is siege. British and American planes will visit hourly death and destruction on the compressed area into which the Axis forces have retreated, British and American heavy guns will lob high explosives into every nook and cranny of the outer defenses which bastion the irregular crescent which is the Axis' last stand on the African Continent.

What will Rommel and his companion commander Gen. Jurgen von Arnim do?

They have three devil's choices:

¶ They can all stay and fight to the last man.

¶ They can evacuate the valuable persons of Rommel and von Arnim and such specialists as tank officers, signal corps men, pilots and engineers, and leave the rest to be either killed or captured.

¶ They can try wholesale evacuation as the British did at Dunkirk.

It is a virtual certainty they won't do the first, that is, re-enact Sevastopol's siege and battle until the last gun is silenced and the last man is dead or in the hands of the enemy. The second alternative is most likely. Rommel, his brother generals and selected experts could be got out of the trap by plane under cover of darkness or transported to Sicily or Sardinia by fast boat at night.

'Devil's Choices'

Evacuation Chances

It is still possible, but in the opinion of this department not likely, that the Nazis and Italians will attempt to evacuate all their troops.

When the British succored their trapped troops from the beaches at Dunkirk they were separated by only 50 to 65 miles of water from the safety of Dover's cliffs. British yachtsmen, fishermen, naval crews—with everything bigger than a row boat that would float—were pressed into service to make the rescue.

It isn't like that on the Sicilian narrows. In the first place the distance from Bizerte and Tunis to Marsala in Sicily or Cagliari in Sardinia, logical spots to which the evacuation would be aimed, is about 150 miles. To Palermo on the northwest coast of Sicily is considerably further. Secondly, there is no possibility of the Italians or Nazis digging up any such fleet as the British used at Dunkirk. They would have to depend on some fishing craft, a few transports, a very few of the fast supply boats which have been ferrying war materials to Tunisia and the 60 Italian destroyers that are believed available.

Tremendous Carnage

If the Italians will unfreeze their powerful naval units, which have been riding at anchor in Taranto and Bari with only occasional gopher-like darts to sea, ever since the war began, and both Germans and Italians muster every single plane they can lay their hands on for aerial cover, they might succeed in saving a great many of the troops now penned in North Tunisia. But the price in warships and planes might not be considered worth the effort. Under any circumstances of evacuation the carnage would be tremendous.

Any evacuation attempt will undoubtedly be made with as much cover of darkness as possible, but there isn't a chance to do it all at night. Ten-knot transport vessels would be under fire for many hours both coming to Africa and returning to Sicily or Sardinia. Even destroyers with 30 knots under their belt would be targets during long periods of the voyage.

At the first sign of a concentration of troop transports or a mass move of the battle fleet of the Italian Navy every available plane in the American and Royal Forces will swarm aloft, bellies heavy with HE Bombs. Heavy units of the British Mediterranean fleet are abroad in the waters adjacent to the Tunisian shore line. Their commander would like nothing better than a pitched engagement with the hitherto reluctant

'Devil's Choices'

Italians.

Time is still an important factor. Hitler wants more time to bar the gates of Europe and it's probable that many thousands of his soldiers will fight to the last gasp in Tunisia to give it to him. He claims that every day the African Axis armies hold is worth a week in Europe.



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