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French, Americans Inch Ahead; British Held on Central Front

By EDWARD SCHRIFTGIESSER

The Axis forces in Tunisia, fighting desperately from their strong mountain fortifications, have stalled off for a little longer the day of their defeat.

In the north and south they have grudgingly given a little ground, but no strategic positions, to the attacking French and American troops. On the central sector, east of Medjez el Bab, the Germans have not only prevented the British 1st Army from breaking through to the open plain, but have even forced Gen. Anderson's men to fall back from the summit of a hill they had captured.

The British reversal at Djebel Bou Aoukas was a matter of only a few hundred yards, and its main significance was as a sign of the determination with which the Germans are defending this area. The 1st Army had gained the top of the hill after violent fighting and held it grimly against an immediate Axis counterattack. The Germans then brought up 30 tanks to support their infantry and were able to force the British back down the slope—to their original positions, the Berlin radio said.

Fighting Is Savage

The German propagandists immediately went on the air with claims to have destroyed almost completely a British tank division, but British advices gave no foundation to such pretensions. The Allied communique, in fact, told of the capture of Sidi Ahmed, 10 miles northeast of Medjez el Bab, a secondary enemy positions. Savage fighting continues.

The desperate resistance which the Germans were putting up here had its counterpart in the northern sector where the U. S. Second Army Corps is driving toward Mateur. There was a strong Axis counterattack in a region identified only as Hill 609, some seven miles southeast of Sidi Nsir, which the Americans have already passed. This did not prevent one U. S. unit from advancing seven miles east of Sidi Nsir and placing the big cross-road center of Mateur under fire of their long range artillery. Earlier yesterday it was reported they had taken Djebel Meftah.

American attacks on the Bald Hills, 10 miles north Sidi Nsir, and in the direction of Garaet Achkel, the salt lake west of Bizerte, ran into very determined German opposition, and made only slight gains.

Nearer the Mediterranean coast, however, the French took another height, Djebel el Sema, and inflicted severe losses on the enemy.

Central Front

No Man's Land

Advices from the southern front were few. The Germans still held Pont du Fahs, but the Algiers radio called it a No Man's Land which may fall to the French at any hour. Yesterday's French conquests included two hills south of the town, Djebels Krimir and Dehlalfa, for a net gain of about four miles. This was in the salient some nine miles northwest of Djebibina.

The French here have made contact with the left flank of the British 8th Army, and in combination the two appear to be attempting a flanking movement around Zaghouan Mountain below Pont du Fahs. The Axis is fighting back bitterly, however, and probably will not be dislodged from its fastnesses for some days.

German counterattacks in this area have slowed, but not altogether stopped, the Allied advance. The question now is whether the enemy has strength to keep up its attacks long enough for them to be really effective; unless most correspondents on the scene are mistaken. he hasn't.

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