Also by Henri Michel

THE SHADOW WAR

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THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Lampson, proved absolutely reliable, even though his old opponent Ahmed Maher did not conceal his hostility towards the occupier. In order to ensure law and order, the British took the precaution of disarming the Egyptian troops. Nahas Pasha placed the emphasis on defending democracy, expelled dubious elements from his ministry and even dissociated himself from the secretary general of the Wafd. British law and order reigned in Egypt.

Churchill, however, had to face criticism in the House of Commons. He launched a dramatic and passionate appeal which recalled the worst moments of the summer of 1940: 'Every man in uniform must fight as if Kent or Sussex was going to be invaded. Egypt must be held at all costs.' He dismissed Auchinleck, who was the scapegoat for the defeats and especially for the loss of Tobruk, whereas the general had warned London in January 1942 that no stronghold could be held beyond the Egyptian frontier.

However, the inexorable law of desert warfare this time played in favour of the British and saved them. At the gates of Alexandria, while his opponents were in complete confusion, Rommel now had only twenty-six tanks with which to deal the final blow, and these were short of petrol; his soldiers were exhausted; his supply lines, which were too far extended, were being bombed by the RAF. Sick at heart, he was forced to halt. It would perhaps have been wiser to retreat again in order to put 250 miles of desert between the *Afrika Korps* and the British Army, which was taking on a new lease of life and increasing in strength as it reached Egyptian soil. But this was not Rommel's temperament, nor was it Hitler's orders.

Since the fighting in the USSR had made it necessary to recall the four German squadrons from Sicily, Malta had begun to breathe again; from August 1942 onwards she suffered fewer and fewer attacks and in November none at all. The number of bombers and torpedo aircraft based there could be considerably increased. Once again the Italian convoys found themselves exposed to alarming attacks: from August 1942 to January 1943 fifty-three ships were sunk; in October losses reached 44 per cent and in December 52 per cent. Rommel was suffering from the fact that the fronts were mutually dependent and from the difficulties facing the Wehrmacht in the USSR. Would he be able to resist the new attack which the British were preparing?

IV THE PAUSE AT EL ALAMEIN. THE BRITISH PREPARATIONS

The *Afrika Korps* had come within forty miles of Alexandria. On August 31 its leader said to his troops: 'In three days we shall be at Alexandria.'

In actual fact the battle just lasted into September and the soldiers dubbed it the 'six day race'. It was the British superiority in the air combined with the *Afrika Korps'* lack of petrol which clinched the matter. The British aircraft made 18,000 sorties and dropped 930 tons of bombs on their opponents, who were concentrated in an area of less than sixty miles. Rommel had asked for at least 10,000 tons of petrol; he was promised 6,000 and received 600.

The only result of the German attacks was to make a small gap in the enemy lines which was gradually closed up again. Rommel did not like failure and for eighteen months he had spared no effort nor his health. He went back to Germany to rest. The first round of the battle had ended in a draw.

When he returned on October 24, he found a very different state of affairs. Churchill had completely recast the British command; in Cairo Alexander had replaced Auchinleck as Commander-in-Chief; Montgomery had been put in command of the Eighth Army. This son of a Tasmanian clergyman was a strange mixture of mysticism, austerity and careful determination; he had absolute self-confidence; in his mobile command post he kept a portrait of Rommel so that he could stare at it intensely in order to divine his opponent's intentions at his leisure. He demanded a great deal of himself and of his troops; he thought that they should lead a strict life and that comfort made them soft. No one was given home leave, only leave to go to Cairo. Some campaign veterans thus found themselves away from home for five years. Surprisingly, Montgomery enjoyed great popularity among his soldiers, who nicknamed him 'Monty'.

Despite his eccentricities, 'Monty' was a cautious and extremely careful leader. He had realised that the ups and downs which the Eighth Army had been experiencing since 1940 with their succession of victories and defeats, were demoralising the men. His intention was to muster enough resources to advance without afterwards being forced to retreat. He cancelled the orders involving further withdrawal, sacked some of his officers, supervised training and, in a way which was unprecedented in the British Army and seemed impossible in view of the independent traditions of each of the services, combined the Army and Air Force in a joint general staff. He formed an armoured force similar to the *Afrika Korps*. And he waited until a continuous stream of reinforcements had arrived in Egypt and given him ample and lasting superiority in men and equipment. Churchill, always impetuous, was irritated by this slowness and urged Montgomery to hurry. But the latter, although still unknown, was daring enough, according to his biographer Alan Moorehead,[1] simply to reply to the all-powerful Prime Minister: 'If the attack begins in September it will

1. *Montgomery*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1965.

fail; if we wait until October, I can guarantee a great victory and the destruction of Rommel's army; am I still to attack in September?' And Winston, who liked men of character, approved the plan which Monty submitted to him.

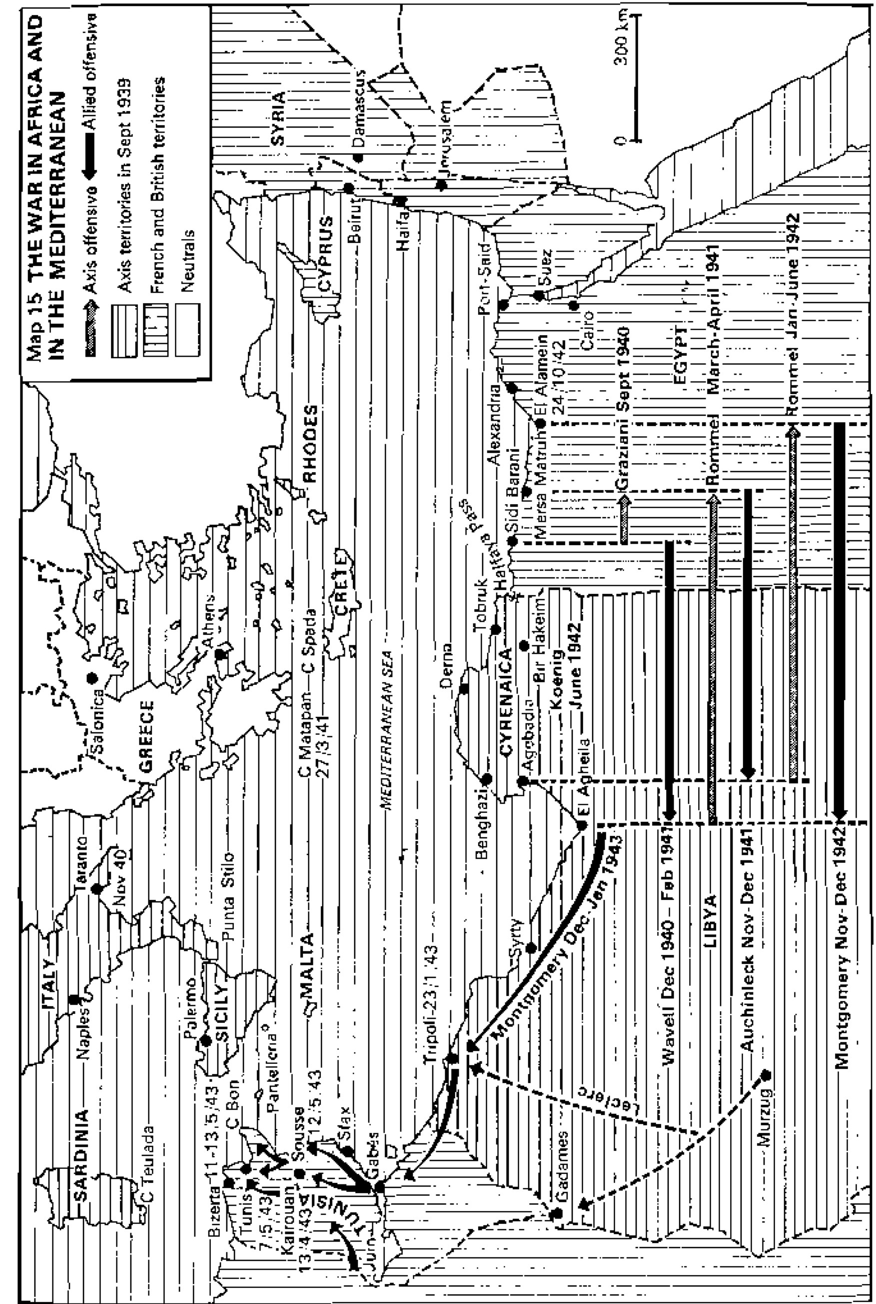
The Nile delta was a far livelier jumping-off point for an army than the Cyrenaican desert. Montgomery received a further supply of American Sherman tanks and he soon had twice as many tanks as Rommel. He gained the mastery he needed in the air. Fresh troops, notably New Zealanders, put new life into his infantry. He united his various different units into a homogeneous force. At last, by the night of October 23–24, he considered that he was ready and he launched his offensive.

V THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

Montgomery's preparations had not gone unnoticed by the German-Italian command. They had wondered whether, after the fruitless attack of August 31, it would not be better to fall back to the west in order to reduce its line of communications and increase that of its opponents. Rommel had had several discussions with Kesselring about this. They concluded that the positions which they had reached, stretching from the sea to the Qattara depression, an area of many hundreds if not thousands of square miles which were completely impassable, were good and must be held. Kesselring had no difficulty in convincing Mussolini, who was obsessed with the long-delayed leap to victory in Egypt. Rommel, for his part, saw Hitler and he seems not to have suggested a withdrawal which he knew the Führer opposed on principle.

The lie of the land did not leave much chance for the opponents to show great imagination in their renewed attack; with one flank backing on to the sea and the other bordering on the desert, their only possibilities were a frontal attack on the flank or an encircling movement from inland, or to carry out both operations simultaneously or in succession. The tanks were hampered in their movements by dust and gravel, low-lying marshes, sandstorms and surfaces of jagged rock. The desert air was healthy but the ubiquitous mosquito carried nasty diseases. Over the vast, monotonous expanses where there were no landmarks, it was all too easy to lose one's way and lack of water soon became a matter of grave concern.

Montgomery was not much of an innovator; he preferred to act with extreme caution. Instead of trying to destroy the enemy tanks all at once, as Rommel did, he proceeded by nibbling operations and by frequently switching his line of attack, in one of those decisive breakthrough battles which Churchill compared to a naval battle but which was even more like an air battle; thus one by one the bases essential for the enemy tank operations



were destroyed; the tanks were then forced to fall back in order to escape destruction themselves. This was what Monty meant by his phrase: 'I'll make Rommel dance to my tune.'

Rommel had protected his defence lines by laying hundreds of thousands of mines. On the evening of October 24, one British armoured division had succeeded in breaking through but another had scarcely made any advance; the situation was not very satisfactory. During the night of October 24–25, Montgomery and his lieutenants had a council of war and decided to carry out their plan at all costs. But at the same time, in order to be ready for any eventuality, Monty positioned troops in reserve. 'A leader who can act like this,' he wrote with a self-satisfaction which he took no trouble to disguise, 'is on the point of victory.' On the morning of October 25 the 10th Armoured Division also succeeded in crossing the minefields.

When Rommel made a hasty return from Germany, the situation had taken a disturbing turn; his deputy, General Stumme, had been killed. Fighting continued on his positions for a few days longer and then the 'desert fox' had to make himself scarce. He signalled the OKW on the night of November 2–3. They waited until Hitler was awake to tell him the bad news. The Führer's violent anger surprised no one. How had they dared to disobey him, he exclaimed, when the previous day he had ordered Rommel to 'conquer or die'? However, Rommel's aide-de-camp arrived at the OKW to justify his leader's decision: one had to accept the inevitable. Despite his preoccupation with the situation in Stalingrad and although disturbing concentrations of ships had been reported at Gibraltar, Hitler decided to reinforce the African Army with men, tanks and aircraft, apparently without any concern about the delays they would encounter on their way. In actual fact it proved possible to send only a few thousand men.

After 'de-mining Rommel's garden', Montgomery took great care not to launch into a wild race to cover the greatest possible distance in the shortest possible time. He had fully realised that in desert warfare supplies must follow on so as to avoid Pyrrhic victories. After each advance, he did not extend his lines, however great the temptation or however favourable the opportunity. He waited for the enemy counter-attack in positions which he himself had chosen; he boldly set up stocks of equipment and food supplies as near as possible to the front; he formed a 'forward supply group', with the task of equipping harbours and bases as he advanced.

Hitler's orders forbade Rommel to disengage in order to have room to regroup; he was to fight every inch of the way, which was exactly what Montgomery was wanting. But he could not find any line to establish a foothold. Petrol was arriving in ever-diminishing quantities. He clashed with the Italian command which, under pressure from the Duce, did not

wish to be pushed so unceremoniously out of Cyrenaica and intended offering resistance at Sollum, then at Mersa el-Brega, short of the Great Syrtis, and finally at Bouerat outside Tripoli. However, these intentions were cancelled and contradicted by the Italian units which, after fighting bravely at El Alamein, became demoralised in retreat and broke up. And how was it possible to hold on firmly to a specific point with defeated troops who were not receiving any replacements either of equipment or ammunition?

Despite his steady succession of victories Montgomery was not free of anxiety; he could solve his supply problem only by capturing harbours which were in good condition. In January 1943 he wrote that if he did not reach Tripoli within ten days he would have to halt or even withdraw. But he arrived there before the fateful date and by a symbolic chance was joined there by the small Free French unit, ragged and wretchedly armed, which Leclerc had brought victoriously across the Sahara from Lake Chad. Nothing could now stop the Eighth Army. The conquest of Cyrenaica was followed by that of Tripolitania. Both Churchill and Montgomery noted it in their memoirs; 'Before El Alamein,' wrote one of them, 'we never had a victory; after El Alamein we never had a defeat'; which the other echoed when he wrote: 'For seventeen months we did not have one single failure.' The British victory in Africa was a replica of the American success at Midway; it was not due to a lucky chance, to a temporarily favourable combination of circumstances or to the genius of a military leader but to the superiority which the Allies had gained in armaments, manpower and organisation. And so the Mareth line, the gateway to Tunisia, had now been reached and other Allied troops, Americans this time, had come from the other side of the Atlantic to join hands with the Eighth Army.

VI OPERATION 'TORCH': THE ALLIED DECISION

In April 1942, the British and Americans had agreed on Operation 'Bolero', by which a powerful American force would be assembled in Britain, capable, at the earliest possible moment, of launching the full-scale attack across the Channel for which Stalin was continuing to clamour. If it were further delayed, there was a risk that either the Russians would be defeated or they would cut their losses with the Germans in order to put an end to the fighting in the east. A limited operation ('Sledgehammer') had been contemplated for the summer of 1942 but calculations had shown that a landing would not really be possible before the spring of 1943 at the earliest (Operation 'Round-up').

However, Churchill had mapped out another plan which he had christened 'Gymnast'. Why not strike while the iron was hot and take advantage of the flourishing state of the North African front in order to gain victory by a landing in French territory? Churchill had a bee in his bonnet about bringing the French colonies back into the war; he saw all sorts of advantages in it: it would ensure the protection of Gibraltar, regain control of the Mediterranean, economise on shipping by avoiding detours round the Cape and very quickly bring down Italy, the weakest opponent.

The Americans, however, and Marshall particularly, were of a very different opinion. With their industrial power and their inexperience in military matters, they saw an offensive as an immense rationalised operation which would bring enormous amounts of equipment together at the right place and at the right time, thanks to meticulous planning and an exact timetable against which the Germans would have no adequate reply. The British, who were more empirical and wanted to husband their strength, were amused by this youthful impetuosity; for them the landing could only be the last and crucial blow against an enemy already worn down by a series of previous attacks.

It quickly became apparent that it was impossible to attempt to do anything across the Channel during the summer of 1942, because of the earlier delay in assembling men and equipment in Britain. The plan was to have a million men ready to embark in 2,200 special landing craft in the autumn of 1942; in fact, there were only 250,000 men and 400 craft. This was the result of the support given to MacArthur in the Pacific and Alexander in Egypt. Plans had to be revised.

Seizing his chance, Churchill, whose besetting sin was stubbornness, brought up 'Gymnast' again and since Marshall was still reluctant, he appealed to Roosevelt. On July 30, after several weeks of discussion, Roosevelt resigned himself to following his ally, on condition that the plan for a landing in Europe in the spring of 1943 was not abandoned.

Churchill, however, knew that his most authoritative military leaders were of the opinion that a landing in French North Africa in 1942 would make another landing in Europe in 1943 impossible. His silence on this point, as d'Hoop writes,[1] leads one to assume 'both an inveterate optimism and blatant dishonesty'. The experimental Dieppe raid on August 19, 1942 seemed to prove that he was right. Carried out with 6,000 men and one tank regiment, it needed 237 ships and landing craft and although a good deal was learnt from it, it ended in failure after revealing the full complexity of large-scale amphibious operations. Nevertheless, some Americans, in particular Admiral King, did not draw the same conclu-

1. 'Les Problèmes Stratégiques de la Grande Bretagne, juin '41–juillet' 42', *Revue d'histoire de la deuxième guerre mondiale*, July 1965.

sions from it as the British Premier: since it was impossible to attack in Europe, they said, they might just as well reinforce MacArthur in the Pacific, and since King was in charge of the allocation of ships, it needed all Roosevelt's authority to prevent Operation 'Torch' – the code name given to the landing in North Africa – from being deprived of essential shipping from the outset.

The fact nevertheless remained that 'Torch' was a makeshift operation, for which time was even more short because the date was fixed for the autumn, in order to prevent the Wehrmacht from taking advantage of the semi-truce in winter in the USSR by reorganising its troops in the west. Both the diplomatic and the military preparations – and the two were linked – would be bound to suffer from this.

Indeed the first problem which the preparations for 'Torch' had to solve was what kind of welcome the Allies would receive from the French troops and authorities; they were known to be loyal to Vichy – this they had proved at Mers el-Kebir, at Dakar, in the Middle East and in Madagascar – and very much against the British and the Free French. In order not to jeopardise the chances of coming to an agreement, it was therefore decided that it would be strictly an American operation, at least outwardly; it would be under an American general and, failing Marshall, whom Churchill suggested but whom Roosevelt wanted to keep by him, the choice fell on Eisenhower. It was also decided that General de Gaulle and Free France and even more the internal French Resistance should be kept out of the way and in ignorance – a decision which was all the more agreeable to Roosevelt because he denied that Free France had any right to represent France and because the American authorities had been greatly annoyed by the incidents of St-Pierre and Miquelon, which had been 'freed' by Admiral Muselier against the United States' wishes, and of New Caledonia, when the French commissioner Thierry d'Argenlieu had briefly taken to the jungle on the arrival of the Americans. Cordell Hull referred to them as the 'so-called Free French'.

But how were they to approach the Vichy troops in such a way as to neutralise them without at the same time divulging the secret of the expedition? The American diplomats made some discreet inquiries as to how they stood, with Murphy, the Consul-General at Algiers, playing the chief role. It seemed impossible to approach Pétain directly and dangerous to bring Admiral Darlan into it – even though he was Commander-in-Chief of the Vichy troops and even though he had made a few timid advances to the Americans after being removed from power in favour of Laval in April 1942; but he was the man of the 'Paris protocol' who supported French collaboration with the Axis. And the French Navy's hostility to the British was common knowledge. General Weygand continued to enjoy great prestige in French North Africa but he no longer

had any official post and he declined the surreptitious advances which were made to him – he was above all else, he said, a disciplined soldier.

The Americans' choice therefore fell upon General Giraud, a man with a firmly established reputation in Africa as a good fighter, who had made a glorious escape from the fortress of Koenigstein and who had dared to stand up to Otto Abetz, the Reich's ambassador, when he came to ask him on behalf of the Führer to go back to his German prison, since otherwise he would make the French prisoners of war pay for it. The American diplomat Murphy had several conversations with Giraud, which ended in a vague agreement whose ambiguity was going to give rise to serious misunderstandings and tiresome confusion. The Americans recognised Giraud as the leader of the French Resistance; between de Gaulle the outcast and Pétain the untouchable they were, in fact, backing a 'third man'. They were relying on him to rally the French North African troops to the Allied cause and to avoid any bloodshed between the French and themselves. But whether he was intoxicated with his popularity or whether he had been deceived, General Giraud had completely different ideas; he thought that he was going to be put in charge of all the Allied troops in North Africa; he advocated a landing on the French Mediterranean coast, and no one told him bluntly that it was impossible; he set up a complete semi-clandestine network in the Armistice Army which he intended sending into the occupied zone. Sure that the Americans would support him, he had nothing but contempt for the French underground Resistance and he evaded the approaches which they made to him. To him, General de Gaulle was merely a brigadier-general, whose respect for discipline and rank required him to submit to his command. Some of Giraud's remarks give the impression that he saw himself as the head of the whole European Resistance movement. In fact, having been away from France for nearly two years, General Giraud had not gauged the development of French public opinion; he disapproved of collaboration for patriotic reasons; but he did approve of the National Revolution, for he had said so and put it in writing; he had complete and utter respect for Pétain.

VII THE PREPARATIONS IN NORTH AFRICA

Every step was taken to keep Giraud's arrival in Algiers till the last moment, so that it would cause the psychological shock that was hoped for; a British-controlled network in France, 'Alliance', was given the task of transporting him on a British submarine. In North Africa itself, the field had been prepared both by the Americans and by the General's emissaries; American consuls, who were sometimes nothing more than

disguised special service agents, had established themselves in the big cities after an agreement with General Weygand at the time of his proconsulate in Africa and had for some months been enlarging the number of necessary contacts. The Office of Strategic Services itself had set up a powerful branch in Tangier and established contacts with the intelligence and counter-espionage services of the Armistice Army which had rallied to Giraud. So a whole conspiracy could be set afoot in Algeria and Morocco.

The American consuls had found that on the whole the people of North Africa – officials, French settlers and natives – were loyal to the Vichy government. Free France had succeeded in recruiting only a small number of supporters in an offshoot of the metropolitan Resistance movement 'Combat', consisting primarily of academics. As for the army, its patriotism was as certain as its hostility to General de Gaulle; but since it was imbued with the official neutralism of the Vichy government, summed up in General Weygand's formula of 'fighting anyone who threatened the rights of France', there was no doubt that it would regard the Allied landing troops as aggressors and would open fire on them, unless their leaders gave them other orders in due course.

This barrel of gunpowder had therefore to be defused. The plot centred on a 'Group of Five', people of importance in favour of General Giraud, consisting of General Mast, the industrialist Lemaigre-Dubreuil, a leader of the Youth Work Camps, Van Hecke, an extreme right-wing journalist, Rigault, the officer Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie (two of whose brothers were on the side of General de Gaulle but who was himself a royalist), and the diplomat Tarbé de Saint-Hardouin. 'The Five' recruited accomplices in most of the services and in the large towns of North Africa. A double plot was hatched; in Algiers a putsch would neutralise those Vichy leaders who were assumed to be hostile, so that the American landing could be safely carried out; at Rabat, General Béthouart – the only leader who had achieved a French victory in 1940 at Narvik – would prevent any opposition from the Resident General Noguès, the GOC unless the latter were warned at the very last minute and joined the conspirators. In the meantime General Giraud would arrive in Algiers, take over command of the troops and the trick would have worked.

General Eisenhower sent his deputy, General Clark, by submarine to make contact with the Group of Five in the region of Cherchell in Algeria. The Five submitted to him their plan, which he approved, and presented him with a whole list of suggestions and *desiderata* which he did not exclude. They asked him for the arms they needed for the success of their attempt and they insisted on the landings taking place in the whole of North Africa, including Tunisia. Clark listened carefully and showed himself to be understanding but took good care not to give his companions

the slightest inkling of the Americans' real plans, for fear of letting the cat out of the bag. The conspirators were to be forced to act alone, and virtually in the dark. From this point onwards a difference of views was apparent but no one thought it wise to emphasise it in case this made it worse: the resisters were acting from a specifically French point of view and with political aims which the Americans refused to go into or to understand; for them the only thing which mattered was the success of the military operation.

Indeed, the Allies had had some difficulty in deciding on a final plan. The British proposed simultaneous landings in Casablanca, Oran, Algiers and Bône; Admiral Cunningham, who was anxious to put an end to his trouble in the Mediterranean, wanted them to go as far as Bizerta, thus cutting off Rommel's rear, and the Axis would find it impossible to establish itself in Tunisia. The Americans, however, were more pessimistic; they were responsible for the operation and they knew that their resources were limited. They did not feel completely reassured about the behaviour of the French troops and they were afraid that they might continue offering strong resistance; finally, they were worried by Franco's attitude and by the possibility of a German reaction in the direction of Gibraltar. It was therefore important not to make the lines of the expedition too long.

In the end, the plan was not fully decided on until September 20. Three landing areas were fixed on, Casablanca, Oran and Algiers. The force operating in the west would be purely American; the one in the centre, against Oran, would be made up of American troops, convoyed by the Royal Navy and supported by an Anglo-American air force; the one in the east, against Algiers, would consist of troops from both countries, protected by the Royal Navy and supported by the RAF. They would all be under an American commander. There would be no landing east of Algiers until there was absolute certainty of success in the capital; only then would they advance towards eastern Algeria and if possible to Tunisia.

This was a wise but at the same time a complicated scheme; putting it into practice proved difficult. It required a great deal of time and it was precisely time that was lacking: there were only ninety days instead of the 360 which were deemed necessary. If one adds to this the fact that half the American troops had to be provided by the contingents which had arrived in Britain and that almost the whole of the available supply of troops had to be used, any large-scale operation across the Channel in 1943 became impossible.

Besides, the lack of experience of those carrying it out, especially of the Americans, gave rise to numerous problems. They have been carefully listed by Morison: some of the landing craft did not receive their engines until the day before they were due to sail; the crews had been recruited in a hurry and were bad at handling their craft; the aircraft-carriers which were to escort them came almost straight from the shipyards; the troops had not been trained to transfer at sea from the troop-ships to the landing craft which had been provided to land them; the co-ordination of Army and Navy was far from perfect; on September 9 Admiral Hewitt still did not know what naval forces he would have at his disposal, and so on. In short the chances were that this experimental interallied amphibious operation would not be a brilliant one.

VIII THE LANDING

The American convoys had to cover 3,000 miles; those which had come from Britain had the task of shipping men and provisions to Gibraltar – they had been taken there by 340 troop-ships in the course of the previous weeks. Miracle number one: neither the Axis powers nor the Vichy authorities detected these gigantic armadas until later: at the time, everyone thought that there was going to be an operation in the area of Dakar or Malta.

The OKW's log-book mentions that on November 4, even though the Germans knew that forces were being concentrated at Gibraltar, they were not yet worried by it. On November 6 the convoys were sighted at sea; Mussolini and Kesselring then expressed the opinion that they were heading for North Africa; but those in charge of German naval operations thought that the landings which could now be expected would probably take place in Tripoli, perhaps in Sicily and Sardinia and, as the last hypothesis, in French North Africa. Besides, what could be done? Commitments on the eastern front were so heavy that all of the Wehrmacht's forces were needed and a rapid survey made it plain that it was impossible to send air forces to the Mediterranean. They therefore had to resign themselves to strictly defensive measures – to putting into practice the 'Attila plan' for invading the unoccupied French zone, while in contradiction of this the shock units, notably the 6th Panzer Division, were transferred from France to Russia. Besides, an operation on French territory did not seem such an alarming possibility; with their ears still ringing with Laval's and Darlan's suggestions of collaboration, the Germans considered – as General Jodl said to Hitler on November 7 – that an Allied landing on French territory 'would finally drive France into Germany's arms'.

The landing troops' opponents, real or feared, were therefore taken utterly by surprise. The first fortunate result of this was the complete success of the Algiers putsch. On the night of November 7–8 a few hundred young men, virtually unarmed, mostly Jews who had been joined by a small handful of Arabs, took over the city without bloodshed. Most of the

officials were captured in their homes, notably General Juin, who commanded the troops, and Admiral Darlan, who had chosen an inopportune moment to come to Algiers to the bedside of his son who was suffering from poliomyelitis. The city's defences were thus disorganised and the Americans took advantage of this to land without difficulty. But they did so later than planned and at points known only to themselves. This removed any possibility of co-ordination with those who had carried out the putsch; at daybreak, the VIPS were freed and fighting broke out. As a last straw, General Giraud was not there; he was in Gibraltar arguing with General Eisenhower, for he had been greatly disappointed to learn that he was not the interallied Commander-in-Chief; a radio broadcast of a communiqué supposedly issued by him was inadequate compensation for his absence.

At the other end of the operation in Casablanca, the putsch, after a good start, had taken a bad turn. General Béthouart had used rebel troops to cut off the Residence; but General Noguès, who had been held prisoner for a short while, had succeeded in giving his orders through an uncut telephone link and loyal troops had come to free him. It was now General Béthouart's turn to be arrested and threatened with court martial. There, too, it had not been possible to prevent fighting and the French naval forces, under Admiral Michelier, were by no means negligible. Finally, at Oran a British attempt to force the harbour had failed and there was fighting there, too.

All the precautions which had been taken to avoid a Franco-Allied clash had therefore failed; the Americans' prime concern was to put an end to it as quickly as possible; but being unable to dictate their terms or to rely on General Giraud to make sure that they were accepted, they found themselves obliged to enter into discussions with the Vichy authorities, whom in any case they had nothing against, and they were forced to realise that Admiral Darlan alone, as Commander-in-Chief, had the power to call a cease-fire. So it was with him that an armistice was signed in Algiers at 6.45 p.m. on November 8.

But the fighting was continuing at Casablanca, where General Noguès, furious at his humiliating mishap, was even less disposed to put a stop to it because Marshal Pétain had appointed him commander of the troops, after disowning Admiral Darlan; the struggle was to continue until November 11, causing 2,000 casualties among the French, who lost all their fleet, among them the battleship *Jean-Bart*. The Americans' clumsiness had prevented them from achieving a rapid victory; their aircraft-carriers were so lacking in training that one of them lost twenty-one of its thirty-one planes, all as a result of accidents, except for one which was shot down; this same lack of experience cost them 150 landing craft out of the 347 intended to land on the Fedhala beach; the land fighting at Mehedia

lasted longer and caused greater bloodshed because General Truscott, who had little knowledge of the capabilities of naval gunnery, failed to ask for its initial support.

When the cease-fire came, the landing had, however, been everywhere successful, although at a higher cost than had been anticipated. But politically the situation had taken a completely unexpected turn. When General Giraud arrived in Algiers, the dice were already cast and the other French military leaders refused to recognise his authority; they even severely criticised his behaviour. General Giraud accepted this state of affairs with equanimity; he was not interested in politics; he would be satisfied if the French Empire came back into the war and he was given command of an army. Admiral Darlan, on the other hand, the man of the 'Paris protocol' of May 1941, had made a spectacular comeback.

The fact was that he had succeeded in receiving Marshal Pétain's blessing, thanks to the French Admiralty's having kept a direct line with Vichy, thus allowing a certain amount of communication by telegram. One of these messages mentioned a 'secret agreement' of the Marshal's; the Admiral took advantage of it to explain away his sudden change as being authorised by the Head of State. He was not a rebel since Pétain approved of him and he claimed that he was only acting in accordance with the latter's secret intentions, which he was not in a position to divulge.

The exact meaning of this telegram has been hotly disputed; the Marshal's apologists have made great use of it in their campaign to rehabilitate him; they even draw attention to a task which Pétain was supposed to have given Darlan on August 4, 1940, which was obviously without any bearing on the totally unexpected situation of November 1942 and to which Admiral Darlan himself had never referred. General Schmitt and Dhers, by tracing the sequence of events very closely, have shown that this telegram was sent after they had taken place; not only did it arrive after Admiral Darlan had put an end to the fighting on his own initiative without being ordered to do so by Vichy, but it also referred to a previous phase, when the Admiral had informed Vichy of his intention of resisting the landing troops by force of arms. The 'secret agreement' thus concerned Darlan's original desire to fight and not his sudden swing over to the Allies; moreover, the Marshal's real thoughts had been expressed when he subsequently publicly disowned and formally condemned the Admiral.

This debate is important only from the strictly French viewpoint of the death-sentence passed on Marshal Pétain by the High Court of Justice in 1945 and the atmosphere of discord and passionate feeling which it continued to arouse in France. The important thing for the course of events is that Admiral Darlan, with the Marshal's consent, either real, assumed or invented, had reaffirmed his personal authority, forced an end to the fight-

ing and retained power, which was reinforced by a *de facto* recognition of the Americans. The result was utter chaos.

One thing that does seem to be true is that the American landing put the Vichy government in a very difficult situation – even if some of its members and probably Marshal Pétain himself were delighted, in their heart of hearts. It gave no promise of a liberation of France in the near future and it exposed her to stern German reprisals. By losing control over the colonies, the Vichy government lost one of its chief assets and almost one of its *raisons d'être*; it looked as though it might deal the death-blow to the policy of collaboration advocated by Laval. Darlan's sudden swing could only confirm Hitler in his fundamental distrust of the French and his hostility towards them. What disasters might now be in store for France? The Marshal's policy, 'the gift of his person', had been dictated by the desire to reduce the misfortunes of the French and the firm belief that he was the only one who could do it. This was why he had refused to leave France in June 1940; this was why he refused again in November 1942, despite the urgings of some of those close to him, among them Admiral Auphan, and at the risk of upsetting a good many of his followers. His extreme caution, combined with the circumstances, prevented him from speaking his mind. It was therefore probable that the Marshal confined himself to accepting the *fait accompli* by letting Admiral Darlan follow a course, which he was in any case no longer in any position to prevent, and by remaining in France himself to save what he could from any possible disaster.

A 'secret agreement' with Admiral Darlan's sudden volte-face would have had some real meaning only if it had been accompanied by concrete measures which, it is true, would have had to be kept secret by reason of the circumstances. But no such measures were taken, either in Tunisia or in Toulon. The consequences of this were going to be very tiresome and even disastrous; yet it was not time which was lacking.

Indeed, no German reaction to the landing had been organised until November 10; it took the form on the one hand of the invasion of the southern zone by German and Italian troops and on the other hand the setting-up of a solid 'bridgehead' in Tunisia. There could be no serious objections to the first operation but the second was very risky and as the OKW had pointed out, it demanded a 'close and friendly' liaison with the French military authorities. This liaison worked perfectly, and no 'secret disagreement' occurred to disrupt it; furthermore, Vichy sent out a special envoy, Admiral Platon, the Colonial Minister, to negotiate it. In the face of this mutual determination, the Algiers discussions and the uncertainties arising from them reduced the French forces in Tunisia to inactivity, including those of their leaders who were sympathetic to the British and Americans.

So German transport aircraft were able to land on Tunis airfield without a single shot being fired against them; 'defence against anyone' did not operate against them at all. The French troops withdrew to the mountains west of Tunisia, as if their job had been to oppose a possible Anglo-American advance. Without meeting any opposition, the Germans were able quite happily to reinforce their advance-guard units by air and sea, to the point of despatching three German and two Italian divisions to Tunisia. They extended the perimeter of the occupied territories in the north by seizing Bizerta without firing a shot and capturing Admiral Derrien's small flotilla there; in the south they went to the aid of the *Afrika Korps*, which would thus be certain of being able to retreat westwards. It was not until November 19 that the French commander in Tunisia, General Barré, rejected the German ultimatum – in the meantime instructions to this effect had been received from Algiers, eleven days after the 'secret agreement' between Marshal Pétain and Admiral Darlan.

IX RESULTS OF OPERATION 'TORCH'

The Allied landing in North Africa therefore ended in semi-victory. It had clearly lacked boldness and breadth of conception but this was not realised until General Franco's complete inactivity had been confirmed. Above all, the American armies had shown how badly prepared they were for the enormous tasks awaiting them; all in all, Operation 'Torch', which had been restricted both in its area and in its risks, had been a good preparation for the crucial offensive across the Channel and the difficulty in carrying it out left one to suppose that a similar offensive in 1943 would very probably end in costly failure. It could therefore be argued that it was not just a huge waste of time, indeed quite the reverse.

In North Africa, on the other hand, the failure of the 'Giraud scheme' was creating a somewhat confused political situation. The recognition of Admiral Darlan, even though presented by President Roosevelt as a 'temporary expedient', nevertheless came as a shock to Allied public opinion, both American and British, and even more so to the French. It seemed that some kind of prize was being offered to the men who had upheld the policy of collaboration at the expense of volunteers – such as General de Gaulle – who had never given up fighting with the Allies even in their worst hours. In Africa, the Vichy government did not change its supporters or its laws – some of them inspired by Hitler, such as the abolition of the Crémieux Decree which had granted Algerian Jews French nationality. General de Gaulle made violent protest in London and the whole French underground Resistance followed suit; any contact with Darlan seemed to them dishonourable. Besides, did not Darlan dis-

own those responsible for the Algiers conspiracy and anyone involved in it for disobedience to him, by demoting them from their posts and even imprisoning them? The ease with which the Admiral had obtained the support of West Africa and as a result the reinvolvement of the whole of French Africa in the war were small compensation for the troubled political situation which had been created and in which General Eisenhower struggled on as best he could but without always quite understanding the ins and outs of it all.

In France herself, the chief victim of the operation was the Vichy régime. A visit by Laval to Hitler's headquarters was unable to prevent the invasion of the southern zone, against which Marshal Pétain made a formal protest which had no practical effect. The plan drawn up by General Giraud was not carried out and the Vichy authorities ordered the Armistice Army not to resist the invader. Only General Delattre de Tassigny, in Montpellier, tried to take to the maquis, but scarcely anyone followed him and he was disowned by the government and imprisoned. The occupation of the southern zone was shared between the Germans and the Italians, with the Rhône as a boundary. All the cities were occupied without any difficulty. The Armistice Army which had at first been withdrawn to its barracks, was disarmed and then dissolved, except for one division which, together with the Navy, was given the task of defending the fortified port of Toulon, coming under the orders of the German formation called the 'Felber Group'.

The German authorities purported to regard the southern zone as still free; they did not set up any new districts within the zone of the kind which existed in the north. This was pure fiction; the semi-independence which the armistice had given the Vichy government was well and truly over. Robbed of its colonies, its army and its home territory and forced to break off diplomatic relations with the United States, Marshal Pétain's government could no longer even pretend to have a policy of its own, for it no longer had the means. This was the end of the experiment which began with the Rethondes armistice of a French government theoretically retaining a little independence and hoping to set the country on its feet again thanks to military neutrality offset by political and economic collaboration with the conqueror, and to the plan of reform called the National Revolution. There were only two possible cards left for the French to play: either full collaboration or Resistance. Most of the officers of the Armistice Army opted for the second; they did not, however, join the existing Gaullist Resistance movements; they tried via Spain to join the ranks of the new French army being formed in North Africa; those who stayed on in France made up the Army Resistance Organisation (ORA) which also wanted to depend only on this regular African army.

What would the Toulon fleet do? Admiral Darlan's invitation to come

and join him in Algeria met with a resounding and vigorous refusal from its commander, Admiral de Laborde. Between their direct leader and Marshal Pétain, the sailors chose to obey the head of state. But there was the risk that they would allow themselves to be wholly or partly tempted by the call to arms. From November 16, Hitler decided, as a precaution, to neutralise the fleet and if possible to take control of it. The strictest secrecy was observed in order to prevent the Vichy government and even the Italians from learning about it. To reduce the risk, the French troops were withdrawn from Toulon, which the German shock units were stealthily approaching to the apparent unconcern of the French Admiralty. After all, Hitler had promised not to try to seize any ships.

At dawn on November 26, 1942, the German attack was launched. The French sailors were caught completely off their guard – Admiral Marquis, the port-admiral, was captured in bed. Since no sailing orders had been given, very few of the ships' commanders decided to make their escape, although it was not fuel that was lacking but only the orders or the will to do so. Only five submarines escaped, one of which was scuttled when it got out to sea while another went on to be impounded in Spain.

The other ships conscientiously obeyed the orders to scuttle which Darlan himself had issued a long time before. Thus four battleships, two of which had survived Mers el-Kebir, 7 cruisers, 17 torpedo-boat destroyers, 1 aircraft-transport ship, 6 sloops and 16 submarines were deliberately sunk – a total of 220,000 tons. In addition the Kriegsmarine took over in the Mediterranean ports 159 merchant ships amounting to 650,000 tons.

All that remained of the French fleet which had emerged unbeaten and intact from the fighting of 1939–40 had thus gone to the bottom without any benefit to France at all. It is true that Admiral de Laborde considered that honour had been saved. He had no difficulty in proving that Hitler had broken his word; why had he not given more thought to earlier cases when the Führer had similarly broken his word? This gentlemanly language had an anachronistic ring when referring to the men, the aims and the methods of Nazi Germany.

CHAPTER I

The End of the War in Africa

BOTH because of their own lack of daring and because of their reduced strength, for which they blamed Operation 'Torch',[1] the Allies did not manage to seize the whole of French North Africa at once, and this enabled the Germans to send an expeditionary force first by air lift and then by sea and succeed in establishing themselves in Tunisia and joining hands with the *Afrika Korps*. Far from being brought to an end by the two brilliant operations of El Alamein and the American landing, the war in Africa was thus going to be continued at the point of intersection of these two great successes, by a difficult and costly campaign in Tunisia. Then again, Eisenhower's acceptance of Admiral Darlan, with Roosevelt's approval, was going to disturb the French and cause further dissension amongst them at the very moment when everyone capable of fighting was siding with the Allies, thus wiping out the memory of the Rethondes armistice. The shortlived reign of Admiral Darlan and then General Giraud's government, both supported by the Americans, were characterised by a very sharp opposition between the Algiers authorities and General de Gaulle in London; but the latter was relying on the underground Resistance. In the absence of any real reconciliation between the hostile elements of the French forces, it was going to take months of bitter discussion to bring them together in a French government under General de Gaulle in Algiers. At least this strife did not prevent a French army from being reborn and fitted out with modern equipment by the Americans. But it had lent fuel to a vigorous upsurge of local national feeling strong enough to undermine the French Empire, which up to now, despite the setbacks suffered by the mother country, had remained quiescent.

I FRENCH 'INDECISION' IN TUNISIA

The best that one can say is that the behaviour of the French troops in Tunisia was ambiguous. They were probably motivated by contradictory

1. See p. 387.

feelings; on the one hand, the spirit of revenge against Germany certainly still lingered on; but on the other hand, they were steeped in the Vichy mystique, according to which France no longer had any allies, since the British in particular were suspected of wanting to seize her colonies. This mystique was expressed by the slogan 'France and France alone' and in North Africa by Weygand's orders to 'defend the Empire against all comers'. In Tunisia it was obviously the Germans who were the aggressors; but they were only replying to other aggressors in the rest of French North Africa, the British and Americans. An admiral is said to have asked out loud the question in everyone's mind: 'Who's the enemy?' Since the leaders had not been given any information or instructions, they decided to wait and see; they took no action against the Germans until the situation in Algiers had been cleared up and until they had received unequivocal orders to do so. Time was thus lost that would never be recovered and the Germans took the fullest possible advantage of this.

General Barré, the commander of the armed forces, took great care not to collaborate with the Germans as he was ordered to do by Admiral Darlan on the morning of November 9 and also by the civil authorities under the Resident General, Admiral Esteva, and yet again by the commander of the Bizerta base, Admiral Derrien – seven destroyers and nine submarines were captured undamaged by the Germans. But he took no action against them. He had withdrawn from Tunis without fighting, so that German paratroopers and later the transport aircraft were able to land on El Aouina airfield without a shot being fired against them. Barré had taken his troops up into the mountains which dominated the Medjerda in the west in order, he wrote, to 'hold the road for the Americans'; but none of the enemy forces was in a position to seize this road, which did not need holding and this operation had not in any way been prearranged with the Americans. In other words, it could just as well have been directed against them to block their approach to Tunis, according to how the situation developed in Algiers.

General Barré also wrote that he had 'left' his rearguard in Tunis under Colonel Le Couteulx de Caumont with the task of 'waiting until the night of November 13–14 for reinforcements which it was hoped would come from the west'. But what forces were left in Tunis? What were they supposed to do? In any case, what action were these units capable of now that they had been left behind by their main forces? And why not leave all the units in Tunis? With orders to fire on 'all comers'?

It is true that General Barré referred to 'a plan which had been in existence for several months', according to which Tunis had been considered indefensible. The question was: against whom? Against a powerful Allied landing force supported by a strong fleet, certainly; but not against a few German paratroopers who could be picked off in mid-air.

To justify the Vichy troops' withdrawal, General Koeltz, who knew all about these events because he had played an important part in them, painted a telling picture of the troops' weakness and shortages; they had no anti-tank sections, no AA guns and no heavy batteries; there were not enough European officers and NCOs to lead the native troops; for want of petrol, engines were running on alcohol; there were no spare parts or even tyres. But the entire African Army was in the same parlous state; this had not prevented it from fighting against the British and Americans in Algiers, Oran and Casablanca; but it had stopped it from resisting the Germans, who were much less strong, in Tunis and Bizerta.

Moreover, another contradiction now emerges. Vichy propaganda had always presented the armistice as the only solution enabling France in June 1940 to keep an army which would one day be able to resume the fight against the Germans. On the other hand, General Weygand had managed to get round the clauses of this armistice and he was rightly given the credit for keeping more troops and weapons in Africa than he had a right to. What was the point if, when the time came, these troops were unable to defend a position as important as Tunis on their own and if they could not resume the fight against the Germans – the very fight for which the Vichy leaders had had the foresight to keep and train them – unless the Allies immediately flew to their aid those same Allies whom they had fought in Algiers, Oran and Casablanca, with the unfortunate result of hindering and delaying the advance eastward which they were supposed to be so eagerly awaiting?

For their part, General Anderson's British troops, which had been given the task of forestalling the Germans in northern Tunisia, had not advanced very quickly; although Bougie had been captured on November 11, the Djidjelli airfield was not taken until the 13th; owing to lack of air cover at Bougie many Allied boats were sunk by Axis aircraft; the lines of communication were very long, the terrain was mountainous and roads were few and narrow. No co-ordination with the French had been possible: General Giraud had not wanted to place his troops under British command. If, then, the British had advanced very quickly, as General Barré wished, in what circumstances and with what instructions would Franco-British liaison have been established with a view to their later mutual co-operation for the recapture of Tunis? No one knows.

General Anderson noted that the French mayors and leading French officials made no secret of their hostility to the Allies; the Arabs were indifferent; the French population was sympathetic but passive. Once Bône had been captured on November 12, both by sea and by paratroopers, on the 13th Anderson was joined by reinforcements from Algiers, but his whole command never amounted to more than one brigade. He occupied

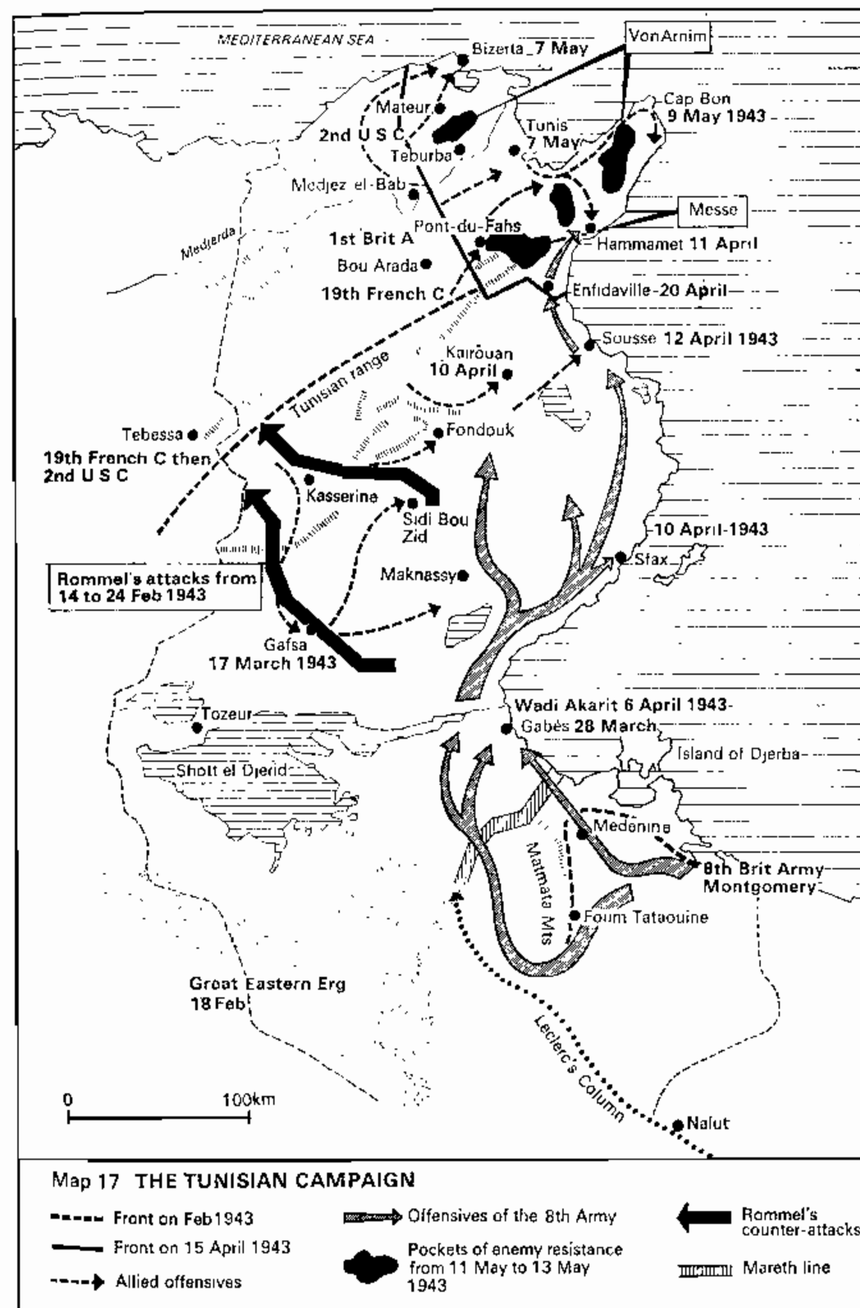
Tabarka but on November 18 he had to face an enemy attack at the Djebel Abiod. Till then General Barré's 12,000 men do not seem to have given him the slightest assistance; it was not until November 19 that Barré rejected the German ultimatum. At that time there were still very few German troops; 1,000 men in Tunis, according to Anderson, and 4,000 in Bizerta; but they were near to their airfields, which the French had abandoned without a fight, and this gave them air superiority. At the end of November, Anderson was relieved to see French officers whom he considered to be sympathetic to the Axis leave General Barré's staff; he noticed that the older French officers were either hesitant or hostile, while the younger ones were keener and more sympathetic to the Allies. By this time it was too late; at the end of November, British dilatoriness and French 'indecision' had enabled the Italian and German troops to occupy the whole of Tunisia and join hands with the *Afrika Korps*; a hard campaign was going to be needed to make up for the great opportunity which they had lost, even though the German operation had been carried out with meagre resources and for a limited objective – the evacuation via Tunisia of the forces which were retreating from Tripolitania.

II THE TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN

On December 1 and 2, General Anderson was at last in a position to attack in the direction of Tunis; he was repulsed. The Germans, under von Arnim, even counter-attacked, but their forces were inadequate and they were checked. Another Allied offensive was planned for December 22 and 23; torrential rains made it impossible; the roads were impassable. General Eisenhower finally cancelled it on December 24, and it was replaced by an operation in the south in the direction of Sfax, where the roads were wider. The Allies had lost the first round.

However, the French had formed a line in the centre of Tunisia. Starting from Tebessa, under the command of the GOC General Juin they had occupied the passes in the mountain ridges which run across Tunisia, in order to seize the outlets on to the Kairouan plain. As a result of this operation they might be able to cut off the German forces in Tunisia from those of the *Afrika Korps*.

In the course of January, in order to check this danger, General von Arnim launched his tanks against the French positions; for a month the French withstood the attack virtually on their own and with inadequate resources; they had heavy casualties – 5,000 men – but they lost only the eastern ridge. General Giraud then agreed to incorporate the French troops into the Allied defences – which he had to do in order to receive a



Map 17 THE TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN

plentiful supply of modern equipment. The British fought in the north of Tunisia, the French in the centre – under General Koeltz – and the Americans in the south.

Fearing an American attack on his right flank, while Montgomery's Eighth Army launched a frontal attack on the Mareth line to which he had withdrawn, Rommel persuaded von Arnim in February to forestall them by attacking first and the latter inflicted a serious defeat on them. General Anderson had to withdraw both the French and the Americans westwards to Kasserine. But von Arnim did not press home his advantage; he even withdrew one of his divisions from the front. Rommel disagreed with him and had himself made commander of all the Axis troops. In February he took up the offensive in the direction of Kasserine and broke through the American front. The blow was so serious that Anderson contemplated a general retreat; he now had only one brigade left that was in a fit state to oppose the Germans.

But Rommel's intention was merely to clear a wide enough space for the withdrawal of the *Afrika Korps* troops and to protect their right flank when they retreated northwards. He did not renew his attack; in March the situation seemed to him to be deadlocked and he left Africa. Montgomery then took over the initiative in the direction of Gabès. He had envisaged a wide encirclement from the west but he had to fight two eighteen-day battles in order to open up a route. He managed to do so with the help of the French corps, which recaptured the eastern ridge in the direction of Kairouan.

The two Italian-German armies in Tunisia were now formed into one, under von Arnim; on paper they numbered 250,000 but there were only 90,000 combat troops and they were hemmed in at the bridgehead in Tunis, with their backs to the sea. General Alexander, who had been in command of all the Allied forces since 14 February, gave Anderson, who was in the best position, the task of mopping it up. The first attack on April 22 made little headway. A second on May 6 was more successful; the French, for their part, had seized the Fahs bridge and had then edged their way eastwards to cut off all possible retreat routes for the Axis troops.

On May 7, the British entered Tunis and the Americans Bizerta. On May 9 General von Vaerst laid down his arms to the Americans at Cape Bon; on May 13 the *Afrika Korps* and General Messe's Italian troops surrendered to the British and French. In all, the Allies took 250,000 prisoners.

The war was over in Africa and the Axis had lost; the Mediterranean once again became a British sea; Italy was open to Allied attack, with the whole length of her mainland exposed to bombers and the islands and southern Italy to landing fleets.

III DARLAN'S REIGN

The scuttling of the Toulon fleet and the Tunisian defeats had been very damaging to Admiral Darlan's prestige and authority; it was a heavy blow. Yet he continued to wield complete power, civil and military, on behalf of Marshal Pétain, who was committed to stay in France by his promise not to leave the French and was said in Algiers to be in a situation where it was impossible for him to express his thoughts publicly. The Admiral claimed that he had been authorised to interpret them and was doing so faithfully. Although he had been disowned by Pétain and deprived of all his titles, while his photograph was disappearing from the many places in the Southern Zone where it had been displayed beside the Marshal's, the Admiral had received the allegiance of all the men in charge in North Africa – except for those in Tunisia. Governor-General Boisson had placed French West Africa under his authority; the only territories over which he had no hold – among those answerable to the Vichy government – were Indochina and the French West Indies, which were governed, however, by two admirals who owed their posts to him, Decoux and Robert. Admiral Godfroy, who was in command of Force X in Alexandria, was still hesitating about whether to join him.

Admiral Darlan had kept on all the Vichy officials, even those most heavily compromised by their collaboration. On the other hand, he had put the Algiers Gaullists in prison and banned their newspaper *Combat*; he had dismissed the ringleaders who, on behalf of Giraud, had organised the putsch of November 8, and some remained under threat of prosecution; but others had apparently joined him and he had given them important posts – for example Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie was put in charge of the police.

The Admiral governed with a council of colonial governors – the 'Imperial Council'. Although disowned by his peers, General Giraud's prestige and the American support earned him command of the armed forces, a post which fulfilled his every wish and to which he intended to confine himself. Relations between the French administration and the Allied forces were governed by an agreement which the Admiral had made with General Clark, Eisenhower's deputy, an agreement which was much more favourable to the Americans, especially as far as the rate of the dollar was concerned, than those which had previously been negotiated by Lemaigre-Dubreuil on behalf of General Giraud.

The American consul Murphy maintained his support for Darlan, who was being violently attacked by Free France, the underground Resistance and the American press, and whom President Roosevelt had half-disowned by treating him as a 'temporary expedient'. On December 23,

1942, the Admiral was assassinated by a young Gaullist, Bonnier de La Chapelle, perhaps influenced by the chief of police himself, after a chaplain had given him absolution. A wind of panic immediately swept over Algiers; Murphy and Giraud thought that they were threatened; Bonnier de La Chapelle was immediately brought before a council of war, deserted by his protectors and executed.

There was so much upset in men's minds that the Count of Paris thought that his hour had come; he had been bitterly disappointed in Vichy, where he had hoped for a moment that Marshal Pétain would become a French General Monk; he had supporters in Algiers, even in Darlan's government, and an actual conspiracy had been hatched on his behalf; in the first stage he was to be declared 'lieutenant of the realm'; his supporters and the Count himself considered that this was the only solution capable of uniting the warring factions which were splitting the French among themselves. But although General Giraud, whom the members of the 'Imperial Council' had quickly and unanimously named as Darlan's successor, showed himself very well disposed towards the Count of Paris, he held out no hope. Not that he was a convinced republican or a determined opponent of monarchy; these constitutional problems were of little importance to Giraud; but it was his firm belief that while the war lasted, they must not risk dividing the French even more by political reforms and decisions which would commit them for the future and which they would regard as having been forced on them.

IV GENERAL GIRAUD'S GOVERNMENT

Thus for six months the colonies which had re-entered the struggle were to be governed by a man with the strange title of 'Civil and Military Commander', who had accepted this responsibility only out of a sense of duty and who regretted that he was now unable to confine his activity to fighting, which in his opinion was the only thing he was qualified to do. General Giraud was a very fine man and a brave fighter and he had a great reputation in French North Africa – the Arabs used to say that he had 'baraka'. But he had no experience of government and he quickly showed that he was unable to cope with political and social problems. Refusing even to examine them, he declared that he was pursuing 'only one aim: victory', but he could not prevent these problems from arising.

In actual fact, the General's origins and upbringing tended to make him a great admirer of the National Revolution – he had said so to Marshal Pétain both verbally and in writing. He therefore preserved its legislation in Africa; the Crémieux decree was not restored, neither were republican laws and institutions; on the other hand, he retained the censorship, the corporate organisation of the economy, the ban on freemasonry and political parties and the Vichy organisations of the Legion of Ex-Servicemen, with its 'police force' (SOL). Giraud had freed the men whom Vichy had imprisoned for opposition to the régime; but on the other hand all the officials appointed by this same régime remained in office. In doing this, Giraud indubitably had the backing of the African Army and administration and in France of the officers and NCOs of the dissolved Armistice Army. But he clashed violently with General de Gaulle and Free France, which was supported by the underground Resistance. It is true that on the other hand he enjoyed the almost unconditional support of the Americans.

Indeed, President Roosevelt had a genuine dislike for General de Gaulle at whom he was always poking fun and making nasty digs, as well as telling racy stories about him which were untrue. He found the General's policy and behaviour 'intolerable'; he considered that he was afflicted with a 'Messiah complex'. As far as his exasperation allowed him to express political views, Roosevelt refused, as long as the war lasted, to identify France with any committee; from now on he would not discuss or even negotiate with anyone but local authorities. Giraud was in power in North Africa: he came to an agreement with him. In Equatorial Africa it was de Gaulle: he granted him lend-lease aid. This principle led him to the conclusion that all power in North Africa, both civil and military, should be in the hands of the Allied Commander-in-Chief; if a French Committee was set up it would be by agreement between himself and Churchill, without taking French opinion into account or even asking for it; at the Liberation, France would be under Allied occupation and military government for at least six months. In the meantime Roosevelt strangely dissociated de Gaulle not only from the French Resistance but also from Free France – and he suggested appointing him 'Governor of Madagascar'.

Churchill was too conscious of his debt to Roosevelt and his dependence on him to cross him and he made no secret to General de Gaulle that 'between the President of the United States and him he picked the big man'. But he did not make the same blatant mistakes as his partner about the situation in France and the attitude of the French; he knew that de Gaulle was 'the symbol of the Resistance'; although he said that he found him 'impossible' and even that he was 'disgusted' by him, he continued to support him and delayed dismissing him until later.

Each being backed by a 'Big Power', Giraud and de Gaulle had put up a show of being reconciled at Anfa and had established mutual liaison bodies. But their relationship remained touchy and tense. De Gaulle criticised Giraud for giving in to the Americans and for the fact that the aftermath of Vichy lived on in Algiers; above all, he ridiculed Giraud's indifference to political problems; 'is there a single country,' he said, 'which can make war without pursuing political ends?'