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New Gains By Panzers In Tunisia

Renewed Drive by Rommel Thwarts U.S. Attack, Plunges 18 Miles

ALLIED HQ, North Africa, Feb. 17 (AP)—Rommel's veteran Panzers smashed their way to the outskirts of Sbeitla and advanced towards Feriana today in a renewal of his all-out offensive against the American forces in southern Tunisia.

The American counterattack which on Monday pushed Rommel's armor back six miles, faded yesterday under heavy losses of men and armored vehicles. The combined forces of the German 21st and 10th Panzer Divisions, using a number of huge Mark VI tanks, as well as old salvaged tanks from Libya, punched through the American lines nearly 18 miles.

With the American tenure of Sbeitla extremely uncertain, Rommel in three days had moved the front 35 miles west of the Faid Pass.

Withdrawal 'No Surprise'

One HQ source summed up the new situation on the Tunisia front with the remark, "Rommel's got himself a tremendous amount of elbow room and that may be all that he wanted. The Americans are using U.S. medium tanks in their defensive action."

"Even experienced troops can be overrun by a sudden heavy tank attack, and it is not surprising that the Americans had to withdraw because they held a long line with only light tanks."

Rommel's gains were won even while a rumor circulated behind the Allied lines in Tunisia that he was ill and had returned to Germany. Sources at Allied Force Headquarters were sceptical of this report, considering that it may be an Axis "plant."

Americans Cut Off

A number of American contingents were cut off and isolated by the Germans in the area round Sidi Bou Zid and no reports had been received of them, but strong hopes were expressed that they would be able to rejoin the main American force whose casualties were heavy.

The latest German advance has seriously jeopardized the British positions about 15 miles north of the Faid Pass on the ridge of hills on the east side of the Ousseltia Valley, where their flank is now exposed.

A high officer at Allied headquarters said the Eighth Army was progressing at such a rate from the Tunisian border that it should soon bring heavy pressure to bear on Rommel and begin to restore this situation. The new Allied line might possibly run along the hills west of Kasserine and Feriana.

Dive-bombing Slackens

German dive-bombing slackened off yesterday, but American planes continued in close support of their troops in the battle. Boston bombers, Spitfires and Airacobras were reported to be destroying trucks, heavy guns, command cars and one machine-gun post.

One German truck, two command trucks and a machine-gun were put out of action near Sidi Bou Zid by an American fighter formation.

Bostons scored direct hits on six heavy guns in the same area, and another bomber formation struck at German traffic northwest of Gafsa on the road to Feriana. Although ten enemy planes were sighted during the day by American aircraft, not one came close enough for combat.

One American plane was missing from all operations. RAF Bisleigh bombers attacked transport near Kairouan, straddling the road junction with bombs at the moment when a convoy was passing and landing another stick of bombs by the side of a second column of vehicles.

Washington Undismayed By Reverses in Tunisia

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17 (AP)—The reverses suffered by the American forces in central Tunisia produced little dismay and no surprise in military quarters in Washington.

The reaction generally appeared to be that while the repulse was unfortunate, it had been visualized for some time as a likely possibility and would merely delay the outcome of the Tunisian campaign.

There were indications in reports received in Washington that the German attack did not presage a major drive toward Algeria, but was intended to gain elbow room for the German forces in Tunisia.

Day-Night Raids Stretch Nazi Defense

ETO Air Chief Urges Round-the-clock Offensive

The accumulating effect of daylight precision bombing by American planes and night-time saturation blows by RAF is stretching German fighter plane and anti-aircraft defenses to the limit, "and they are already . . . badly overworked."

Thus Maj. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, Commanding General of the Eighth Air Force, yesterday described the results of the "round-the-clock" bombing pattern which built up to a crescendo within the last 72 hours in shattering raids by day and night on German submarine bases in Europe.

Backed by photographic evidence of the ruin blasted across Nazi sub bases and plants from Copenhagen to the Bay of Biscay, Gen. Eaker declared for the present USAAF-RAF pattern of raids in a statement which marked six months of American heavy bombing in the theater.

Four-to-One Fighting

Gen. Eaker's statement also revealed for the first time that American bombers are shooting down more than four Nazi fighters for every B24 or B17 lost.

The statement followed heavy air blows against the enemy by British and American planes, climaxed by the daylight American attack Tuesday on St. Nazaire and a RAF raid Tuesday night on already battered Lorient.

Evidence that the day-and-night raids are having an important effect on the Allied war against the U-boats was seen in the terrific opposition put up over St. Nazaire Tuesday by the Luftwaffe, which claimed six U.S. bombers.

Returning U.S. airmen told of savage air battles with groups of as many as 75 Nazi fighters, who followed the bombers half-way back across the Channel.

Such fighter strength, said Gen. Eaker, without referring specifically to any single mission, is forcing the enemy "to maintain a large force of day fighters which otherwise would be free to operate on the Russian front, on the African front or elsewhere against the Allied forces."

Nazi Defenses Extended

"In short," he continued, "the present scheme—bombing around the clock—keeps the enemy's fighter and anti-aircraft defenses extended to the limit, and they are already stretched thin indeed and badly overworked."

Further substantiation of Gen. Eaker's declaration that the day-and-night raids were helping to cut down the Nazis' air power elsewhere was seen in the reports of crews flying from one U.S. Liberator station who said that enemy pilots at St. Nazaire were clever veterans, rather than the green novices which have been encountered in recent daylight raids.

There was no report yet available on (Continued on page 4)

House Military Group Would Defer Fathers

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17 (AP)—In a race to forestall the War Manpower Commission's move to induct most of the nation's young fathers into the armed services this year, the Military Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives will seek final action today on a bill to give fathers priority in deferment.

The chairman predicted the committee would approve the bill quickly, and said he would press for prompt consideration by the House.

Four Distinguished Flying Crosses, 209 Air Medals and 31 Oak Leaf Clusters have been awarded to combat crews of the Eighth Air Force, it was announced yesterday.

It was the largest number of U.S. decorations ever announced at one time in this theater.

Three of the DFCs were won by men of one Liberator crew who survived attacks by wave after wave of enemy fighters over Europe to bring their battered B24 back to England.

When an enemy cannon shell struck 1st Lt. Howard N. Young, of Berkeley, Cal., at the controls of his Liberator, his right arm was almost severed, and Co-Pilot 2nd Lt. Cleveland D. Hickman, of Albany, Cal., was wounded seriously. Others of the crew were hit by the same fire.

In spite of his injuries, according to the citation accompanying Lt. Young's DFC, he remained at his post and kept the ship in formation until the bombing run was completed.

After the bombing run, with the plane almost unmanageable, Lt. Hickman and the Bombardier, 2nd Lt. Anthony C. Yenelavage, of Kingston, Pa., took over.



Associated Press Photo

Three hundred forty thousand pounds of high explosives, dropped in precision daylight bombing by Eighth Air Force planes, send smoke and flames up from the U-boat pens at St. Nazaire during the January raid—the sort of attack advocated yesterday by Maj. Gen. Ira C. Eaker, U.S. Air Force chief in the ETO.

Fort Fights Goering Squadron; One Lib Crew Gets Five Nazis

By Andrew A. Rooney
Stars and Stripes Staff Writer

Five of the toughest Nazi fighters yet encountered shot down by the crew of one Liberator.

Three more, from Goering's prize squadron, blasted out of the sky by "Little Audrey," a Flying Fortress which came through it all with 50 to 60 holes in her streamlined body.

Overjoyed buddies welcoming home a crew that had been erroneously reported as missing.

These were the stories that came out of the homecoming of Eighth Air Force bombers that returned to their bases in Britain today after dropping hundreds of tons of explosives on St. Nazaire, one of the biggest Nazi U-boat bases, in a daylight attack. For the Liberators it was their second raid in 19 hours, following Monday's visit to Dunkirk.

Good-naturedly ribbing the Forts, the navigator of "Miss Dianne," a Liberator piloted by Capt. Clyde Price, of San Antonio, challenged the B17s to match their record of five enemy planes shot down.

The navigator, 2nd Lt. J. A. Augenstein, of Pittsburgh, also recounted the engagements:

How They Did It

"As we were flying in the tail-end formations, the Germans would attack Fortresses flying ahead and below us from the front, circle around, and then come at us from behind."

"The first plane we got," Lt. Augenstein continued, "was blasted from 200 yards away, exploded and went all to pieces in the air. The second stalled when it was hit, plummeted straight into the clouds below, leaving a trail of smoke behind."

Sgt. Balton L. Snell, of Marked Tree, Ark., top-turret gunner, and Sgt. J. C. Wyer, waist gunner from Clarksburg, W. Va., each got two of "Miss Dianne's" victims. Sgt. Lewis J. Fleshman, of Virginia, the tail gunner, got the fifth. Fleshman's bullseye was scored on a plane that made the fatal mistake of exposing a vulnerable underside as it turned.

The rest of Capt. Price's crew were 2nd Lt. Robert E. Forrest, of Columbus, Ohio, co-pilot; 2nd Lt. M. P. Gross, of Denver, Colo., bombardier; Sgts. Kenneth Laughton, of Pine Grove, Cal., radio operator; Kenneth Erhard, Clearfield, Pa., waist gunner, and Earl W. Holton, Mulliken, Mich., rear-hatch gunner.

Crew members in "Little Audrey" (Continued on page 4)

Planes Worth \$5,500,000 Built Each Day in America

LOS ANGELES, Feb. 17 (AP)—The aircraft war production council reported today that its eight member companies were now delivering \$5,500,000 worth of planes daily.

The council's statement said that during the first 13 months of war, deliveries by the companies increased 240 per cent in weight and 147 per cent in cash volume, but the man-hours worked had increased only 99 per cent.

The president of the council, Robert Gross, commented: "Those weight increases, which are the most realistic index to production accomplishments, tell the story of emphasis on heavy bombers and greater armament."

Reds Plunge Forward on Whole Front

Twin Columns Advancing From Kursk, Kharkov; Taganrog Is Next

Two strong arms of the Red Army moved westward from the recaptured cities of Kharkov and Kursk yesterday, never slackening the tempo of their terrific assaults on the Wehrmacht, the cream of which was routed in the capture of Kharkov Tuesday.

All along the front, from Finland to the Caucasus, the Russians were maintaining their strong pressure.

In the Donbas, south of Kharkov, three Red columns were clearing the thickly populated industrial area which was to have been the bastion of the German defense in the south of Russia.

Three-Pronged Attack

Those columns were advancing in three directions. Most dangerous to the Germans was a thrust down from the north, across the east-to-west railways which the Nazis need for their retreat, toward the lower Dnieper River.

A second column was advancing from a point north of Rostov, recaptured last week. A third edged westward along the Sea of Azov and was last reported to be only 15 miles from Taganrog, next major base expected to fall to the Reds.

A German defense line extends northward from Taganrog, and in December, 1941, it stopped Marshal Timoshenko after he had swept through Rostov. This time, however, it already has been outflanked.

Southern Front Collapsed

With the capture of Kharkov, the entire German southern front collapsed, Moscow radio claimed yesterday. "A coherent German defense system no longer exists," the radio told German listeners in their own language.

"The whole German defense system is crumbling. In Kharkov, one of the main centers of the entire German defense system has been eradicated. The most important stronghold between the northern and southern fronts is now lost to Hitler."

German radio admitted the withdrawal of its forces from Kharkov, but said they had left the city a sea of flames, with all military targets and installations blown up.

The Russians announced they had captured a German order instructing the Kharkov garrison to defend the city at any cost.

Surprise Blow at Kharkov

Kharkov was taken by an unexpected attack from the north, while the enemy expected the main blow to come from the east, according to the Red Star version of the battle.

Red Star said three deep rings of fortified lines were cracked by the Red Army before the city fell. It was outflanked from the northwest, then smashed into by an abrupt maneuver of troops.

The Germans, expecting the Russians' supreme effort to come from the east, rushed numerous tanks and storm troopers there. The sweeping army that reached around the city from the northwest, however, caught the Nazis completely by surprise.

As Moskalenko turned southeast he (Continued on page 4)

New U.S. Plane Threat to Subs

BURBANK, Cal., Feb. 17 (AP)—A new land-based sea raider plane of great striking power, designed particularly to break up submarine wolf packs, is in production at a west coast factory.

Known as the PVI, it is a twin-engined warplane being built for the Navy.

"This plane has been under military concealment for months," said Courtland Gross, president of the Vega Corporation. "It has been seen in action on many fronts, however. Many of its features are still cloaked in war secrecy. We hope that it will be America's number one answer to the submarine problem."

The plane has an extremely long range and considerable radio equipment, and carries a crew of four. It has a wing span of 65 feet 6 inches.

Chicago Citizens to Pay For New U.S.S. Chicago

CHICAGO, Feb. 17 (AP)—A Chicago savings organization has launched a campaign to sell \$40,000,000 worth of war bonds in 40 days to build a new heavy cruiser to replace the U.S.S. Chicago, sunk in the recent battle in the Solomons.