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Office of the Division Commander

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28 March, 1943.

REPORT: Report of visit to Tunisian Front.

To: Commanding General, Second Armored Division
by: *Col. Hq. AGF 3 PARA DG*
on: 13 JAN 1943

1. Report is hereby submitted of my visit to the Tunisian front, made pursuant to instructions contained in letter Headquarters I Armored Corps, dated 5 March, 1943.

2. The original plan for my visit to the front contemplated that I visit the entire front, including the sector of the Second Army Corps, the French sector, and the sector of the British First Army. However, upon arrival at the Command Post of the Second Army Corps, at my request, and due to the fact that my interest was primarily in that of the operation of armored troops in battle, it was arranged for me to spend my entire time with the First Armored Division. Also at my request, I was placed on a semi-duty status with the First Armored Division, and as a result of this status was able to visit all elements of this Division and to obtain what I consider to be valuable information, both by observation and by conversation with personnel who have considerable experience in fighting armored equipment.

3. The following comments are submitted, based upon my three week visit at the front:

a. RECONNAISSANCE.

(1) Reconnaissance elements, once having established contact with the enemy, should never permit this contact to be lost. In the attack which started on March 20 the reconnaissance agencies were constantly losing contact with the retreating Italians. This placed the division commander in a position of not knowing exactly where the enemy would make a stand, or where the next resistance would be encountered. Fortunately, the Italian enemy in this particular operation, at least initially, showed very little desire to make a stand, and while I was accompanying the infantry of one of the Combat Commands during this attack, I constantly noted evidence of hasty withdrawal.

(2) Reconnaissance elements must not be brought into bivouac at night, but must remain in contact with the enemy and have its listening posts on duty at all times when visual contact is impracticable.

(3) Reconnaissance elements must make provision for the proper equipping of a point vehicle to locate and remove mines. For this purpose it is recommended that engineer troops always accompany reconnaissance details.

b. MINES.

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(1) The use of mines on the front is so prevalent as to warrant the subject being given exceptionally serious consideration. During my visit in Tunisia, I observed the action of two types of enemy mines; namely, the Teller mine, and the Italian mine (name unknown). On one occasion a half-track lead vehicle of a reconnaissance detachment was blown up by two Teller mines planted together. The vehicle will require major replacements before it could again be operated, and at least one man was very seriously injured. The effect of the Italian mine was considerably less severe. One Muntam that I observed, with an officer and driver as occupants, struck an Italian mine and was badly wrecked, but the officer suffered only very slight injury, and the driver slightly greater injury, but not serious.

(2) The method of neutralizing mines was made a subject of considerable discussion by me with representatives of the British Army and French officers I encountered, and as a result of these conversations and considerable study on my part, it appears that the following methods are most effective in removing the hazard of mines in battle areas:

(a) The scorpion has been used with much success by the British Eighth Army, and consists of fastening several (four, I believe) heavy chains to a revolving drum which is attached to the front of a vehicle. As the vehicle advances, the drum revolves and the chains flay the ground, and in this manner explode the mines.

(b) The attachment of engineers to the leading elements of all commands for the purpose of either removing or destroying mines.

(c) The use of bangalore torpedos, to be pushed ahead of a vehicle into a mine field for the purpose of detonating the mines in the field.

(d) The use of the "carrot" appears to be improvised in the First Armored Division, and was described to me, but I never saw it in operation. The principle seems to be sound, and I believe should be given some study. The principle as I understand it is briefly as follows: A yoke is erected to extend in front of the tank and is fastened between the tracks. It is also attached by a cable or chain to the turret from the front of the yoke, a Teller mine is attached and can be placed in position over a mine field by rotating the turret. When placed in proper position, the attached Teller mine is detonated from the inside of the tank, and this in turn explodes mines in the field. The principle appears to be similar to that used in connection with the bangalore torpedo.

(e) The use of sand bags on all vehicles, to protect the personnel by taking up the shock of the explosion of the mine, has been found to be very effective.

c. ANTI-TANK GUNS.

(1) It is believed desirable for some anti-tank guns to be self-propelled, while others should be towed. The towed guns, with their low silhouette, are most effective in combatting tanks when placed in a locality that requires the enemy tanks to come within ranges under 1000 yards to engage them. At these shorter ranges the advantage of the anti-tank gun over the tank is obvious.

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(2) It is believed that the towed anti-tank gun alone should be used for any type of static defense, while the self-propelled gun should be held as a mobile reserve.

(3) The infantry must always receive the protection of the anti-tank guns emplaced to protect their flanks.

(4) Anti-tank guns must not be used as "tank chasers", but must be so emplaced that they will force the enemy tanks to come under their fire. Anti-tank guns that were utilized to chase tanks suffered heavy casualties.

d. ARTILLERY.

(1) The First Armored Division has on several occasions had opportunity to mass the fire of more than one battalion of field artillery. The opinion as to effectiveness of a concentration of artillery fire against tanks is open to considerable discussion and various definite opinions. For example, one combat command commander informed me that a column of about fourteen German tanks advanced against him in the battle at Sidi bou Zid, and was met by the concentration placed on the column, and the only effect was that the column changed direction and attacked the elements of the First Armored Division in flank. None of the tanks were hit.

In discussing this subject with Lt. Col. Brook, Field Artillery, General Alexander's representative at the Headquarters of the First Armored Division, and who until recently was on the Staff of General Montgomery, I was informed that artillery must be trained and prepared to fire by direct laying, and to be used as anti-tank guns. This in addition, of course, to being able to place concentration. It has often been found necessary for artillery to fire by direct laying for their own protection, as on numerous occasions artillery batteries have found themselves threatened, sometimes overrun, by enemy tank attacks.

The opinion expressed by competent artillerymen at the front, both foreign and American, is that artillery must be able to shoot itself into position for immediate action, and to survey itself into position for future action.

In my observation of the operation of artillery in battle I found a tendency to exist for artillery battalions to be much too far back, and for artillery observers to be too far in rear from the units for which they are observing. In the attack on a hill mass East of Maknassy on March 24, I personally called the attention of artillery observers to various targets that appeared, and found in at least one case that the artillery observer did not know the location of the infantry his battery was observing for. During this same action I was present with the infantry advanced elements, who were being held by enemy fire and subjected to mortar fire delivered by the enemy and by considerable machine gun fire, none of which were being promptly taken under fire by friendly artillery.

During this action, several times high-burst artillery fire was delivered by our own artillery over our own infantry.

When enemy tanks appeared in this action, I was very pleased to note that a forward observer, even though located too far to the rear, did very promptly bring artillery fire to bear on these tanks.

During the action against the objective set for March 24, I asked an artillery battalion commander what the target for his battalion was, and was very much surprised to learn that his battalion was in reserve. I was surprised because I had always been led to believe that during an attack no artillery would be kept in reserve.

When the foregoing matters were mentioned to the division commander, he promptly issued orders to correct them, or stated that he had already noticed it and corrective measures had already been taken.

(2) Direct fire of 105 howitzer has been employed against enemy tanks. When a hit is obtained, the enemy tank is quite thoroughly demolished. I did not observe this procedure and obtained this information from the division artillery officer of the First Armored Division. The M1-A1-M67 shell is often used by the armored artillery, and is very well liked by artillery personnel. It is used entirely against materiel, never against personnel. The supply of this type of ammunition at the front is adequate.

(3) The M7 howitzer appears to be generally preferred by artillerymen at the front. They consider the added armor protection and added carrying capacity for ammunition to be highly desirable.

(4) The FM radio has not been operating as efficiently as desired. This may be due to atmospheric or terrain conditions, or some defect in the radio itself.

e. TANKS.

(1) When enemy anti-tanks are supported by infantry, as is usually the case, it is considered desirable for the attack to proceed by bounds; namely, infantry-tanks, infantry-tanks. It is highly desirable that infantry and artillery precede the tanks in order to silence anti-tank guns before our tanks come within effective range of the anti-tank weapons.

All commanders should attempt to force the enemy to attack our base of fire, which will usually consist of tanks in hull-down position and anti-tank weapons.

(2) The principle of advancing by fire and movement is very sound. By that I mean that the tanks must provide their own fire and their own movement. Before I went on this visit there was considerable discussion in this Division as to the desirability of considering that the artillery provided the fire while the tanks provided the movement. Both from conversations with officers and men who have had considerable experience in tank fighting, and from my own observation in battle, I am convinced that no tank should move unless another tank is covering his advance.

On March 24 I witnessed the operation of German tanks, and particularly three Mark 4 tanks, that appeared over the top of a hill, one at a time, and moved down the hill toward our line, at all times keeping at least one tank in an "over-matching" position.

(3) It has repeatedly been found that the Germans will attack with tanks at night. In at least one case I was informed of a limited German tank attack being launched at about midnight on a dark, moonless night.

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(4) The Germans usually start their tank attack unbuttoned, and will not button-up until they are compelled to do so. Apparently they recognize the reduced efficiency in operating a buttoned-up tank, and it is desirable to bring machine gun fire against German tanks promptly when they appear, in order to force them to button-up, and then take them under fire by heavier weapons.

British officers have stated that the British never button-up completely, but always have the vehicle commander exposed in the turret for the purpose of directing the tank.

(5) Regardless of the presence of the gyro-stabilizer on our tanks, it is considered desirable that all fire from tanks should be delivered from a stationary vehicle. The Germans never fire from a moving vehicle.

(6) When moving to engage in a tank attack, drivers should shift into the lower gear so as to make shifting after the movement has started unnecessary. Stopping to shift gears, or stalling the tank as a result of shifting gears, has resulted in quite a number of our tanks being hit.

(7) In a withdrawal, tanks should not be faced to the rear with their gun pointed toward the enemy. Even though this may facilitate a rapid getaway, it deprives the vehicle of its full armor protection, and in one case that I am familiar with, resulted in the driver and assistant driver being pinned in a burning tank because the turret was facing to the rear.

(8) Tanks should wait until enemy tanks come close to their position before opening fire. Pursuit of enemy tanks should be made only after careful reconnaissance, in order to avoid being "sucked in" to a trap of anti-tank weapons that are often towed behind German tanks.

(9) We have been previously cautioned against permitting tanks to advance too rapidly, and to make certain that before advancing from one locality to another the ground should be carefully looked over to make certain that no anti-tank guns are concealed. However, when this has been ascertained, the tank should move very rapidly to the next position from which to make new observations.

(10) German tanks utilize their machine gun for determining ranges, and it has been found that our tank personnel, who feel very confident when they hear light calibered machine gun playing against their tank, were suddenly brought under fire by a heavier weapon at effective ranges, determined by the use of the machine gun. Experienced tank crews have told me that now the sound of machine guns against their tank is an accepted signal for a rapid movement to a new locality.

(11) Our tank crews are also very quick, as a result of their experience, to recognize bracketing fire of artillery, and on March 24 I observed a tank crew rapidly moving away from a place that it had been occupying when it had received one over and one short from enemy artillery.

(12) In firing from a tank all shooting should be low, in order to cause ricochet that will explode up and into a tank.

(13) Practically all of our tanks that are hit are thoroughly destroyed by burning. This is a matter which should receive very serious consideration, as it has been noted that German tanks that have been hit do not burn, and are apparently very easily and promptly recovered.

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(14) The capabilities of the light tank should not be discounted, as I feel there are and will be many opportunities for the employment of this vehicle. On the objective east of Makassy, I observed several of our light tanks that were accompanying an armored infantry detachment actually on a ridge that would have been a serious obstacle for medium tanks. The light tank also is an excellent reconnaissance vehicle, and could very easily form a nucleus of a fast moving encircling or maneuvering force.

(15) Tanks should never be moved in column, but should move off the road and adopt a "V" or wedge shaped formation. It has often been found that units as small as a battalion do not need to go into assembly areas before moving to an attack, but can attack directly from column.

(16) A serious defect seems to have developed in the M4 tank due to refinement made for convenience of personnel. It appears that the armor in the vicinity of the traversing mechanism has been thinned for the purpose of preventing the knuckles of the operator from being skinned or barked when using the hand traversing mechanism. As a result of this refinement, it has been found that the bulk of penetrations in our M4 tanks occur in the area where the turret joins the hull. In the First Armored Division they are attempting to correct this situation by salvaging sufficient armor from tanks that have been destroyed in order to place a protecting screen of armor around this vulnerable area.

(17) The marksmanship of American tank crews is generally considered to be far superior to that of German tank crews.

f. INFANTRY.

(1) The infantry must be prepared to push out rapidly in front of tanks for the purpose of locating and neutralizing enemy anti-tank.

(2) In placing infantry in position, it is highly desirable that they be placed on terrain that may be considered tank-proof. For example, rocky ledges, ravines, stream crossings, or similar terrain features.

(3) The round fox-hole, rather than the rectangular one, is generally preferred by infantry units.

(4) I strongly recommend that infantry be trained in riding onto a battle position on tanks, thereby permitting themselves to reach the objective much more rapidly than is the case if they were following the tanks.

(5) In the use of slit trenches, infantry must be made to realize that the slit trench is merely a means to an end, and not the end itself. I regret very much to have noticed on several occasions some infantry personnel in their slit trenches apparently feeling that they were accomplishing their mission by preventing themselves from being hit, and forgetting their primary objective of closing with the enemy.

(6) Considerable emphasis has recently been placed upon placing infantry on tops of hills in order to protect the advance of tanks through a valley or corridor. In this connection, such use of terrain should be carefully considered, as it cannot be reasonably expected that infantry will climb to the tops of huge mountains at night and fight effectively all the following day. It is believed that the same purpose

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would be accomplished if the infantry only occupied sufficient height to permit them to observe and fire into the corridor, rather than the extreme tops of the hill, which in many cases presents to them a vast amount of dead space over which they can neither see nor shoot.

(7) No fixed rule can be given as to whether infantry shall precede the tanks, or whether tanks shall precede the infantry. If the enemy is on a defensive position and has had an opportunity to emplace his anti-tank guns and organize the defense, it appears obvious that infantry should precede tanks. If the situation is obscure, and the enemy capabilities unknown, the infantry should be with the tanks, prepared to pass through them and advance rapidly to clear out the area in front of the tanks.

g. ENGINEERS.

(1) My observation of the work of engineers has indicated that their primary missions in this theater are the neutralization of mine fields, repair and maintenance of roads, and the operation of water distributing points.

(2) The neutralization of mines, I believe, should be given the most careful and complete study, as the mere presence of these obstacles will delay the accomplishment of a mission for a very long period. I observed a tank attack delayed for about six hours while mines were being removed. How much longer it was delayed, I do not know, as I was required to leave the area after that length of time in order to comply with other instructions.

(3) A larger proportion of mine detectors should be made available to all units.

(4) Engineers must be made available at all critical road areas to assist troops in passing through those areas. The heavy traffic on roads in front line areas causes those roads to deteriorate very rapidly and constant maintenance is required. For example, the road from Maknassy to Feriana is about 100 miles in length, about 50 miles of which is paved. The best time that I have ever made over this road was between 4½ and 5 hours, due to the bad stretch of 50 miles between Maknassy and Gafsa.

(5) The bulk of the engineer work on roads into the forward area should, in my opinion, be performed by Corps engineers.

(6) It should be habitual for engineers to be attached to // all reconnaissance agencies. //

h. SUPPLY.

(1) It has been reported that supply agencies have a tendency to be too conservative as to estimating their capabilities. For example, the supply setup is now supplying twice as many troops in the Tunisian theater as their estimate indicated they would be able to supply. //

(2) The supply of the divisions is made only through the // Corps, and the Army is not a part of the supply picture. //

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(3) The First Armored Division carries with it seven days Class One supplies, 350 miles of gasoline and oil, and three units of fire of all classes.

(4) In the past, various classes of supplies were dumped in division areas, but it was found divisions were abandoning it when moving either forward or backward, and this practice is being discontinued.

(5) The divisions send their vehicles back to the Corps distributing point in order to obtain their supplies.

(6) All issues are made at night, without lights.

(7) Supply is considered generally satisfactory and adequate.

(8) It has been found to be desirable to have gasoline trucks interspersed throughout columns of combat vehicles in order to permit refueling without prolonging the period of waiting for gasoline vehicles to come from the trains or from the rear of the column.

(9) The movement of supplies and other vehicular convoys in the forward areas was observed generally to violate the accepted principle of security. Both British and American convoys, on too numerous occasions, were observed moving at reduced distances, and often halted bumper to bumper.

(10) Although ammunition supply is normally considered adequate, on a number of occasions artillery ammunition replacement becomes a serious problem, especially when batteries are required to fire excessive amounts. For example, in the Sidi bou Zid battle one battalion of the 91st Field Artillery fired 2,970 rounds in one day, and on March 23 I was informed by a battery commander that his battery had fired 2,000 rounds on that day.

On March 24 I questioned a battalion commander of a tank battalion as to whether he was ready to resist a German counter-attack if it should be launched, and he informed me that he was ready, except that he had no 75 ammunition. I was very relieved to note that an adequate supply of 75mm ammunition was delivered to him on the battlefield.

(11) In the First Armored Division it was found that 278 trucks will carry a refill for one unit of fire for the entire division, including its anti-aircraft battalion.

(12) The supply of water is handled in a normal manner by having organizational vehicles carry their water cans, to proceed on schedule to the water distributing point to have them filled.

1. MEDICAL SERVICE.

(1) The operation of the medical service that I observed appeared to be adequate and satisfactory. All medical installations were clearly marked, and as far as I could determine not bothered by enemy aircraft.

(2) I observed numerous litter bearers on several battlefields rendering first aid in some cases and carrying wounded to the rear in other cases.

(3) Evacuation from the battlefield appears to be efficiently performed, except in the case of men injured in tanks, as in practically all cases of our tanks being hit the tank burns, and evacuation is impossible.

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1. AIR AND ANTI-AIR.

(1) There has been nothing that I heard or observed during my visit to the front that has caused me to change my opinion that supporting air units should be under the direct control of the armored division commander. The practice of calling for air through to Corps commander seriously delays the arrival of such air support, and in many cases may prove detrimental to the accomplishment of the ground mission.

(2) Tank commanders have informed me that on numerous occasions they observed large groups of German tanks, but by the time their request for bombardment aviation was processed through Division Headquarters and Corps Headquarters the target had disappeared.

(3) Training must emphasize that when enemy aircraft appears the column must not be halted or dispersed in order to permit the men to leave their vehicles and take cover. When a column is attacked directly, it is reasonable to permit personnel traveling in thin-skinned vehicles to disperse for cover, providing the anti-aircraft gunner remains to man his gun. I observed on numerous occasions columns halted, men dispersed, and 50 caliber guns unmanned, when Stukas were passing overhead, and in some cases not paying any attention to the column.

(4) Men should be trained to watch enemy aircraft and observe the direction of fall of bombs. It is comparatively simple to determine whether they are going to alight in the vicinity of the watcher, and if they are not going to do so, it obviously serves no purpose, other than to delay progress, to take cognizance of them.

(5) At night, when any enemy bombers appear over a C.P. or other installation, anti-aircraft gunners should be cautioned not to fire unless it appears that their installation is about to be attacked. On the night of March 23, while in the C. P. of the First Armored Division, enemy bombers appeared overhead and dropped several flares. Due to the excellent concealment of the C. P., I believe that its location would not have been determined had not several gunners opened fire on the airplanes with anti-aircraft guns. It was only a few moments after the anti-aircraft weapons opened fire that the airplanes again circled and dropped their bombs.

2. COMMAND.

(1) The First Armored Division operates with its division divided into four combat commands. This causes the combat command to consist of, in general, one battalion of tanks, one battalion of artillery, one battalion of infantry, and service supporting troops. I do not consider that this is a sound method of operation, and feel that this permits the small combat command to be attacked by superior forces and the division defeated in detail. I believe that the generally accepted method of operation, in the nearly equal sized combat commands, with perhaps a small reserve under division control, is sound.

(2) For the purpose of training, I believe it is desirable for the composition of combat commands to be fixed, but in combat the combat command commander and his staff should be prepared to assume, on very short notice, the command of any grouping of elements of the division.