Subject	:	Fifth Pz Army (March 43 - 12 May 43) (Tunisia)
Title	:	Kaempfe der 5. Panzerarmee in Tunesien
Author	:	Gen Pz Gustav von VAERST
Sheets	:	14, + 2 sketches
Analysis	:	Author discusses the composition and strength of Fifth Pz Army at the beginning of March 1943, evaluates the terrain, and gives an estimate of the Fifth Pz Army situation at this time. He then proceeds to give a condensed, narrative account of Army operations. In general, the account seems very good.
Circumstances	:	The report was prepared at PWE 8, Garmisch, Germany, under the supervision of 7734 EUCOM Historical Detachment. The author had available no important documents and he is not known to have been aided by other prisoners.
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OPERATIONS OF THE 5th PANZER ARMY IN TUNISIA

Written by : Gustav v. Vaerst Gen.d.Pz.Tr.

Sources: Memory, without documents worth noting.

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Operations of the 5.Panzerarmee in Tunisia

from beginning of March 1943 to the surrender

Map 1:500 000

I. General Military Situation

The Heeresgruppe Afrika was formed on 5 March 1943 out of the 5.Pz.Armee in the west and the 1.Pz.Armee in the south of Tunisia.

The bulk of the forces of the 1.Pz.Armee stood in the Mareth position. Opposite it was the 8th British Army.

The boundary between the two armies was approximately at Gafsa.

Situation of the 5. Pz.Armee: see sketch No. 1.

II. The mission of the Heeresgruppe was to hold Tunisia. Accordingly the mission of the 5.Pz.Armee was to protect Tunisia to the west.

III. Composition and strength of the 5.Pz.Armee at the beginning of March

Manteuffel's Division: originally formed in Tunisia from various units; incomplete; combat value, 2/5 that of a motorized inf.div.

334.Inf.Div.: complete Inf.Div. (partly motorized). The 3.Inf. Regt. a mountain regiment.

Division Hermann Göring: not all flown across from Europe; combat value, 2/3 that of an Inf.Div. (motorized) without its artillery.

Italian Korpsstab: The sector of the front just south of that of the Hermann Göring division was assigned to it.

The separate battalions (Marschbataillone) had been battalions composed of replacements that had been sent over. Because of the need of combat troops these battalions were used as such. They had first to be converted into units fit to take their place in the line. Their higher headquarters had to be organized. They handled this with the personnel composing them. Their chief weakness lay in the lack of heavy weapons and any vehicles.

10.Pz.Div.: about 60 Panzers (Panzer 3 and 4) at the disposal of the army southwest of Tunis; all other elements in line at the front.

Tiger-Panzerabteilung 501: about 20 Panzers latest type at his-

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German-Arabian Lehrabteilung: in process of organization from

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Arab volunteers; no combat value.

Air forces: a. About one Gruppe each of Jagdflieger and Stuka; also an Aufklärungsstaffel in Tunisia, which was instructed to cooperate with the Army.

b. 20. Flak Division: incomplete; used for antiaircraft defense particularly at Tunis and Bizerte, in cooperation with the army.

Ammunition and Fuel Situation: poor but no serious danger.

Ration Situation: taken care of for the next few weeks.

IV. The Terrain

West of Mateur the terrain between the coast and the Medjerda valley is hilly, with considerable variations in elevations. Isolated peaks and ridges dominate the terrain around them for 10 or more kilometers. Consequently the possession of these points is essential. The various ridges are very extensive and require large forces to defend them. The few roads are easily blocked at their winding turns in the hills but away from the hilly ground this is almost impossible, as the terrain off the roads is practicable for vehicles almost everywhere. The land is bare, only west and north of Sedjenane are there woods and almost impenetrable undergrowth. Tanks can be used in this sector but the accidents of the terrain constitute a hindrance.

The terrain most favorable for tanks lies on both sides of the Medjerda, and particularly just south of it. From Medjez-el-Bab running east toward Tunis a 10-km. wide hill changes into a wide plain. The hill is under cultivation and is free of any tank obstacles. It is commanded on the north by hills rising 400 meters above it. In the south lower hills afford a full view into this plain. Consequently the possession of the hills on the north and south is essential.

The adjacent terrain as far as Dj. Mansour is extensive hilly country, not unfavorable for tank fighting, once the low ground east of the Medjez-el-Bab---Bou Arada road is crossed to the east.

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From Dj. Mansour to north of Pichon the terrain is hilly and partly wooded. The few existing roads are insufficient to open up the

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country which is cut up by fissures, particularly in its northern portion. The hill country adjoining it to the west and east and ~~that~~ almost inaccessible makes this sector unsuited for offensive operations by either side.

The mountain rib extending from Pichon to Gafsa however is the one and the only one protecting the low steppe terrain down to the coast. The passes through this ridge are of critical importance: these are the two lying close together at Pichon and Fondouk, the one at Si bou Zid and that between Gafsa and Maknassy.

The steppe in the southern portion of Tunisia is everywhere practicable for vehicles. Near Enfidaville the hilly country begins, from which an unlimited view can be had to the south. At Enfidaville and west thereof 3 or 4 roads lead into the hill country which is practicable for tanks even off the roads. The Dj.Zaghouan towers up 1200 meters.

The plain around Tunis is fertile cultivated land with good roads, everywhere passable for tanks, even the olive plantations there.

The Tine sector near Mateur is a tank obstacle. Otherwise the country south of Mateur is cultivated and everywhere practicable. The terrain on both sides of the course of the Sedjenane is cut up by sharp ravines and is almost impassable.

The fortifications of Bizerte face seaward. Outside of a few batteries of modern type they were obsolete. On the land side of the fortifications observation posts had been constructed on the various hills and there were covered shelters.

V. Estimate of the situation by 5. Panzerarmee at the beginning of March

Arising from the basic idea that the battle in North Africa could only be fought successfully if oversea communications were protected, the hope existed that contrary to our experiences in Egypt, Lybia and Tripolitania, this condition might now be fulfilled in view of the shortness of the route by sea and the good harbors we held in Europe and Tunisia. It looked as if the protection of these ports and of the crossings by air forces of sufficient strength was al[illegible]

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The tendency at the beginning of March in Tunisia, in estimating the strength of the opposing forces, was to credit the Allies with

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possessing a slight advantage on the western front and to concede that reinforcements on any considerable scale would be received by them more rapidly than on the German side. On the south front, the approach of the 1.Pz.Armee with the stronger 8th British Army following it had resulted in materially strengthening the total Allied forces.

The British troops were regarded as worthy opponents. It was known of the British High Command that it undertook no rash ventures. As for the Americans, we knew that their organizations were at full strength and furnished with modern equipment. We also counted upon their being confident of their strength no less than upon their lack of experience. As for the French troops there existed some doubt as to the universal character of their zeal for battle and we also knew that their equipment was not modern.

The morale of the Italian troops had lowered steadily. The unsatisfactory situation of their equipment -particularly in the matter of heavy weapons- had not been corrected. They scarcely played any part in the subsequent fighting in which the 5.Pz.Armee was engaged.

The morale of the German troops was uniformly good, as was their combat value, except for the march [provisional] Bns. which were not yet welded together. The health was good, including that of the Italian troops.

The plans of the Allies were estimated as aiming at no decisive attack at the outset in the north and at the center of the west front until additional forces could be brought up, when an attack would be made in great force. For the employment of strong armored forces in such an attack the Medjerda valley was the most likely spot, with the gateway west of Pont du Fahs as next best. On the southern flank of the army it was necessary to figure on a thrust against the rear of the 1.Pz.Armee through the mountain rib which was only lightly held. The Heeresgruppe's estimate of the situation coincided with the 5.Pz.Armee's. Anticipating that next developments would place the main weight of the enemy's attack in the south of Tunisia, the Heeresgruppe opened a C.P.

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To fulfill its mission -the defense of Tunisia in the west on a 300-km.front- the 5.Pz.Armee only had comparatively weak forces at its disposal. These forces were disposed at the front, where they stood engaged in battle or else had just been in battle. The army had at its disposal only panzer units which were being made ready after the fighting they had been in. The only reinforcements the army could expect to receive for the time being were replacements for units not up to strength. As the relative strength of the army grew worse with the passage of time, we had to attempt to make ourselves strong in the defense against later attacks, utilizing the momentary lull in operations.

The performance of the mission was regarded as calling for:

1. defeating elements of the enemy, where possible;
2. taking sectors of the terrain that could be easily held by weak forces, to enable the
3. creating of reserves.
4. Strengthening the positions themselves and preparing rearward positions.

The destruction of units of the enemy was the sort of objective most worth while. By weakening portions of the front, troops were to be rapidly concentrated at suitable points and sudden brief blows were to be struck. Especial attention had to be given to the matter of ammunition and fuel supply in this connection. As the necessary forces were lacking for striking such blows simultaneously at several points, this was not attempted.

On the north flank the Manteuffel division was engaged in a successful attack in the direction of Sedjenane. Prior to this attack it had held in its possession the hills half-way to Mateur-Sedjenane, thereby blocking exit from the mountains into the plain. The army considered a further advance west desirable in view of the importance of the Mateur situation. To be sure we were unable to put into the attack forces superior to the enemy, but we figured that the terrain there

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favorable for defense. The forces, approximately two Italian Bns., located on the coast and in the mountainous terrain south of the coast were not in a position to make attacks.

On both sides of the Medjerda plain forces approximately equal to each other stood opposed. The plan to take Medjez-el-Bab by a double envelopment at the end of February miscarried. In the north the 334. Inf.Div. had taken the heights around Toukabeur but in the south the Hermann Goering division had given up the area around Dj.Rihane again and had been forced back to its positions of departure. On this part of the front there was considerable artillery and patrolling activity on both sides. A renewal of the attacks was not possible for the time being. As a preliminary operation preparations were made for the capture of the western portion of Dj. Mansour, to serve as a base from which to support a later attack to seize Dj. Rihane and to completely dominate the gateway west of Pont du Fahs.

South of Bou Arada approximately as far as a point north of Pichon rather weak forces stood opposite each other in positions far apart. It was not contemplated that fighting on any important scale would take place here on either side.

South of Pichon the mountain rib to Gafsa was occupied chiefly at the passes. Following the blow struck in February at Kasserine against elements of the American II Corps, the 10. and 21.Panzerdivision [s] were moved away for employment elsewhere. The covering forces and reconnaissance detachments located there were busily occupied with reconnoitering, but the bulk of their forces were static and for that reason were unable to deliver any thrusts or attacks of any consequence.

In the rear area the south slope of the Zaghouan upland about on a line with Enfidaville was suited for the organization of positions. If the enemy were to make his main thrust, breaking through beyond the line Medjez-el-Bab---Pont du Fahs, it would scarcely be possible to locate a single position inherently strong from the nature of the terrain. The organization of an extensive position so necessary here was begun

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away from the sea were improved.

VI. Life with the inhabitants of Tunisia was characterized by mutual fair dealing and can be thought of as good. There was no sabotage on the part of the inhabitants and the troops did not interfere with the life of the population. The combat zones lay in thinly settled areas. There were hardly any German or Italian soldiers to be seen in the towns and cities. Life in the city of Tunis preceeded quietly on its course. Countless vehicles brought to the city the products of the land. Theatres and movies were running. Wherever bombing attacks had left destruction or where such attacks were to be expected , there the people's lives were altered. Thus it was that most of Bizerte which had been hard hit by bombing had to be evacuated by the civilian population. The French elements of the population were tactful, even reserved as a rule; the Italians were naturally ready to assist. The Arabs were ["rather": word deleted in pencil in original] decidedly friendly and eager to help. As a matter of fact it is to their assistance that many Germans, cut off on the south flank of the army at the beginning of April, owe their safe return to their units in northern Tunisia. Arabs who had volunteered for service in the German army were not to be used as soldiers in battle. As construction troops they did a good job.

VII. Events from beginning of March to the Surrender (see sketches 1 & 2)

1. North flank from beginning of March to mid April 1943

The attack of the Manteuffel division gained ground bit by bit. By mid-March this attack after several regroupings of the attacking forces, pushed forward as far as Sedjenane. In the north C.Serrat was in German hands. The Italian Bns. on the coast and south thereof had followed that far over the almost impassable terrain. The south flank of the division had reached the hills south of Sedjenane. The intervening ground, extending for 15 kms. from the south flank to the right flank of the 334. Inf.Div. was kept under surveillance by reconnaissance units. The Manteuffel division had succeeded in wrenching these peaks

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After partially replacing losses that had been sustained, the attack was renewed about mid-March. After several days of fighting, participated in by the few available Stukas, the division succeeded in pushing through to its objective and occupying the hills commanding the Madene sector astride the Sedjenane---Dj.Abiod road. A few days later however a sudden enemy attack took the division by surprise and threw it back into the mountain terrain to the north. The fruit of our local success was lost again along with the defensive line that we had attempted to establish, ~~The enemy forces probably xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ but we had probably succeeded in tying down enemy forces.

The army was unable to accomplish its plan to resume the attacks again in the sectors of the 334.Inf.Div. and the Hermann Göring division. No success could be expected without bringing up a strong attack grouping. The 10.Pz.Div. that it had been intended to use for that purpose was required to have the bulk of its forces in the south on the boundary between the armies. The same was true of the march [provisional] companies that had just been brought over to Africa. As the two divisions, in view of their widely extended fronts and the existing close contact with the enemy were in no position, unaided, to set up attack groupings of sufficient strength, activity on that portion of the front until the beginning of April continued to be limited on both sides to artillery fire, local encounters and work on the positions.

On 7 April the British attacks opened against the center of the 334. Inf.Div. and continued uninterruptedly at this point until the close of all fighting. The heights dominating the Medjerda valley in the north were the objective of these attacks, which were hard fought on both sides, with success shifting from one to the other frequently. Well supported by strong artillery and a number of tanks the enemy succeeded in gradually pressing back the center of the 334. Inf.Div. a few kilometers to the north. In mid-April the fighting for the important hills of the Dj. el Ang (called "Longstop" Hill by the Allies)

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2. South flank from beginning of March to 13 April 1943

The fighting on the south flank was closely connected with that of the 1.Pz.Armee.

While the 1.Pz.Armee was making its attack on 6 March from the Mareth position against the British 8th Army, there was only reconnaissance activity on the southern wing of the 5.Pz.Armee until mid-March. This reconnaissance was conducted as far to the front as the general vicinity of Sbeitla. This and air reconnaissance confirmed the presence of the American II Corps, which captured Gafsa about 17 March. As a result of this enemy success and on the basis of the results of further reconnaissance it was expected that the enemy would now attempt to drive into the rear of the 1.Pz. Armee from the west. It became the new mission of the 5.Pz.Armee to prevent this from happening in its sector. At this time the boundary between the two armies was the line of the hills from Dj.Orbata to Dj. bou Hedma.

Approximately on 21 March the attacks of strong American forces (at least one armored division and one inf.div.) were launched astride the boundary line of the two armies. While the attack on the south struck the mass of the 10.Pz. Div. southeast of El Guettar, the northern attack hit the positions of the Italians, whose lines near Sened were broken through at the first assault. Not even the German combat echelon of the Hq. 1.Pz.Armee could stop the breakthrough there. Consequently the troops garrisoning the adjacent positions on the north as far as Dj. Meloussi were also lost, altogether some 4 Italians Bns. The enemy who had been identified as part of the 9th U.S. Div. pushed a mobile force ahead and on or about 22 March took Maknassy, thereby almost gaining a débouchement from the hill country into the steppe. East of Maknassy the attack ran into the first German troops of any consequence to be brought up and was checked. By degrees 4 Bns. of various organizations with artillery, about 15 Tiger tanks, 2 Abteilungen of 8, 8-cm. Flak reached that area and under the vigorous leadership of a regimental commander stopped the enemy who by this time was much superior in

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and was marked by frequent shifts in the tide of battle. In some places the Kampfgruppe was attacking but as a rule it was on the defensive, even with its tanks. Numerous enemy tanks were knocked out without our suffering any losses to speak of. The enemy artillery fire was powerful and accurate. A Stuka staffel intervened in the defensive action successfully -this probably being the last time aircraft took part in ground fighting in Africa. The Allied air superiority which from now on made itself felt more and more still was offset by our defense; air reconnaissance still yielded good results.[Text garbled?]

In constituting this Kampfgruppe the 5.Pz.Armee used up its last reserves and weakened its western front by the withdrawals of troops there. From this point on, the 5.Pz.Armee had no freedom of maneuver.

The Maknassy fighting lasted until 7 April and accomplished its purpose which was to protect the flank of the 1.Pz.Armee, which on 6 April had abandoned the Akarit position. On 4 April this Kampfgruppe passed to the control of the 1. Pz.Armee and fell back north on the right flank of that army.

On 7 April the first Allied attacks began at Fondouk pass, aiming at a break through here into the plain and in rear of the 1.Pa.Armee. The two blocking units there and at Pichon had in the meantime each been reinforced by one Bn. (less vehicles) of a regiment of the 999. Inf.Div. that had been brought in by air from Europe. The first attacks which were delivered by infantry in superior force and powerful armored units (as now known, the British 6.Armored Div. and the U.S. [sic] Inf. Div. attacked here) were beaten off in heavy fighting. The Kampfgruppe that had been brought up from Maknassy also took part in repulsing the enemy attacks here after 10 April. By committing all our forces here until 11 April protection was given to the flank of the retreating 1.Pz.Armee which on that same day reached Sousse. Starting about 9 April the troops [of the 5.Pz.Armee] that were in action here were attached to the 1.Pz. Armee. As the 1.Pz.Armee fell back, the south flank of the 5. Pz.Armee, sector by sector, was attached to the former

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Meantime the Enfidaville position, especially around Enfidaville, had been laid out on the map with tank traps and mine blocks here and there. On 13 April the 1. Pz.Armee reached that position. There were isolated German units on the south flank of the 5.Pz.Armee who were unable to get north as they had no transportation. Large bodies of Italian troops were taken prisoner. On the whole however the south flank of the 5.Pz.Armee succeeded in effecting a withdrawal and the 1.Pz.Armee was especially successful. As it turned out, fortunately the enemy attacks from the west had been made at several points and at different times.

3. The Enfidaville position was given a cursory reconnaissance at the beginning of March, following which a detailed reconnaissance had been made by 2 or 3 construction staffs (1 senior officer and several assistants). It was 100 km. long. Work began on it in mid-March, the German-Arabic Lehrabteilung doing most of the labor, with some Italian troops assisting. By 13 April the position at Enfidaville was provided with an uncompleted tank trap and in addition had mine blocks at the valley entrances into the upland. Positions had been selected on the map -especially for artillery and heavy weapons- and these were turned over to troop units as they reached the position.

4. Supplies had been coming from Europe in constantly decreasing amounts in the time between the beginning of March and the middle of April. It developed that the two armies had been limited to a single supply route -via Bizerte and Tunis- for weeks. In view of the small number of shipments by water the two armies had first of all to be fed; the movement of additional troops across to Africa had to take second place. For some time the army had not been adequately rationed. The munitions stores were low. The fuel situation had become critical. Supply across to Africa was handled by separate ships and by ferries and similar vessels. It all depended on luck, as the Allies' air force, which had grown stronger, now attacked ships and ferries and

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and loading. Frequently if the ships did succeed in unloading, they did not contain the things most urgently needed. To what extent the incompetency or lack of cooperation of Italian officials was to blame for this situation will have to be determined by somebody else. Groups of transport planes were used on a rather large scale to get supplies over by air, and personnel in particular was brought in thus. That is how replacements for the combattant elements were brought across and how the 999.Div. started to come in. The great disadvantage connected with transport by air was that troops coming in by that method landed minus vehicles.

5. Except for special selected officers and N.C.O.'s the units of the 999. Inf.Div. consisted of men who had been punished for infractions of military discipline. For example, it contained officers and N.C.O.s who had been reduced to the ranks, black butchers [1], etc. They had the chance to square their punishments by their behavior in the presence of the enemy. About 10% of this division continued to be unreliable and deserted at the first opportunity. The units of the division that were in action around Fondouk fought well, some of them in fact, very well. The division commander had been shot down while flying to Africa. At the end of March one infantry regiment (2 battalions) was flown across and one in April. These were not followed by any other units on account of the lack of transport space.

6. By mid-April the air situation had progressed so much in the Allies's favor that they had the upper hand from then on. This had as decisive an effect on the functioning of supply as on operations. Since the beginning of April the 5.Pz.Armee had only 2 reconnaissance planes and about 10 Stukas left to assist. These now dropped out. Naval and land air bases from mid-April on were bombed by the allied air forces at irregular intervals. This necessitated moving the airdromes to Sicily and Italy and made it difficult to use the Luftwaffe. Defense against

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Allied bombing formations was almost precluded, as our ground defense had become ineffective due to the height at which the enemy planes came in.

The practise of using air transport received a severe blow the end of April, when about 30 machines were shot down in one mission. This practically indicated the end to this last chance of supplying the army.

7. 5.Pz.Armee's estimate of situation in mid-April.

This estimate from then on figured on the Allies making an attack for a decision. This attack was expected either against the 1.Pz.Armee approximately around Enfidaville and west thereof or against the 5.Pz. Armee in the Medjerda valley. The former seemed likely because the Allies were in superior force there, the latter because of the more favorable terrain. As on the German side sufficient forces were lacking for an attack at any point with any prospects of success and it was impossible to concentrate our forces because of the low fuel situation, the only thing left was defense against the anticipated attacks. The defense had to determine where the attack was coming and place its reserves in readiness to meet it. Both of these problems entailed difficulties. Our air reconnaissance was almost entirely nil, considering the Allied air superiority. The striking power of the German organizations was lowered as a result of the lack of replacements and insufficient material. Consequently it was impossible to weaken the front by taking troops out of it. For constituting reserves we fell back on the Pz.divisions. Even if they had been through stiff fighting, they still possessed some combat value, provided they could be kept mobile and their fire power maintained. The fuel and ammunition situation was now so bad that every ferry coming by sea was of the greatest importance.

8. 5.Pz.Armee from about mid-March to the surrender

a. The enemy attacks up to the close of April did not disclose where the Allies planned to seek a decision. Apparently they wanted first of all to fix the enemy forces by simultaneous attacks at several points, hoping perhaps to force a breakthrough at some one point at

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the same time. In this way the attacks that had been in progress since 7 April against the center of the 334. Inf.Div. were continued and starting 21 April were extended to the south flank of that division. On 21 April heavy armored attacks were begun against the center of the Hermann Göring Div. The night of 19/20 April an attack opened at Enfidaville. Starting 23 April the right flank also of the 334. Inf. Div. and the Manteuffel Div. were attacked [Last sentence added in pencil].

b. The fighting was especially bitter at the centre of the 334. Inf.Div. The mountain Regt. there lost the Dj. el Ang on 26 April despite all its stubbornness in the face of the enemy's powerful artillery action. South of that point the defense succeeded in preventing the enemy who was in superior force from making any material gains northeast of Medjaz-el-Bab.

c. Starting about 16 April several attacks made against the right wing of the Hermann Göring Div. and leading to hand-to-hand fighting in places, were successfully beaten off with heavy losses to both sides. As a consequence of the absence of any air reconnaissance there the enemy situation was obscure. Ground reconnaissance had determined considerable movement and apparently new units in the wooden hilly terrain southwest of Goubellat. In this situation the division attacked independently (the 10.Pz.Div. was not yet available), with its main effort in the direction west of Goubellat, in order to forestall any attack the enemy might be preparing. The attack which was made in the night 19/20 to the best of my present recollection, advanced across the enemy front line and beyond Goubellat, establishing the certainty that strong enemy forces were in positions of readiness there for attack, and in addition netting several hundred prisoners. As the line gained could not be held against enemy counterattacks that were now opening, the division fell back to its positions of departure. The enemy attack followed, approximately 23 April, his main effort being by tanks at Goubellat and south thereof. In the first days the initial thrust was checked

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this, the 10.Pz.Div. which was now available was committed here. In the course of the violent tank fighting it maintained the upper hand inside its defensive lines, despite the fact that the enemy air force frequently got into the ground action. The opportunities to the south for developing an attack were limited by ponds and swamps, which may have been a contributory factor in the failure of this enemy attack in much superior force. The Hermann Göring Div. in stiff fighting also succeeded in beating off attacks on its center and right flank. The enemy had again succeeded in fixing the 10.Pz.Div, and in worsening the already bad ammunition and fuel situation of the 5.Pz.Armee.

d. The attacks on Enfidaville only captured the weakly held first line of the position and were then held up in front of the main position north of the town.

e. On 23 April American forces, whose entrance into line had been established several days before by the vigor of their ground reconnaissance, attacked the right flank regiment of the 334. Inf.Div. and the south regiment (Regt. Bacenthin) of the Manteuffel Div. and advanced northeast several kilometers in the next few days. Farther north the front line of the Manteuffel Div. ran west of Sedjenane. On its right flank north of the course of the Sedjenane after the Italians Bns. had gone, the next regt. of the 999.Div. (2 Bns.) to arrive had been put into line. The American attacks started approximately 23 April on both sides of Sedjenane were also in superior force and in a few days reached the general line of Jefna. The attacks of the French troops fighting farther up on the north flank met with no success; the withdrawal here followed the general pattern of the division's action.

These attacks of the American forces (3 Inf.Divs. and 1 armored div.) on the 60-km.front encountered the Manteuffel Div. and the right flank of the 334. Div., which altogether amounted to one inf.div. (without armored troops). In view of the frontages and forces available no continuous defensive line was held. At times, in the mountainous

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was favored by the passable nature of the terrain.

On 30 April the American attacks were carried forward to the last commanding heights that protect the plain around Mateur, resulting in some cases in the well initiated encirclement of these hills. With the front line broken through in several places the German High Command could not expect or demand any further resistance and consequently ordered withdrawal behind the Tine sector, with the south flank resting approximately on the Dj.Lanserine, the north flank via Ichkeul---Ferryville resting ~~approximately~~ on the prepared positions west of Bizerte. The shortening of the front led us to hope for greater strength to resist. In the night of 1/2 May these movements were executed and the Tine sector occupied. Because of its immobility the regiment in line on the north flank was only partly moved back. Quickly following the withdrawal of the division, the enemy had his tanks in Mateur on 3 May.

f. At the end of April it was apparent that the main Allied attack was being sent against the 5.Pz.Armee and that the Medjerda valley was the threatened sector. The Heeresgruppe now decided to attach strong forces of the 1.Pz.Armee to the 5.Pz.Armee. Accordingly at the beginning of May heavy artillery was brought in and placed in position against Medjerda valley, followed by the remnants of the Panzer regiment of the 15.Pz.Div. which reached a point southwest of Tunis approximately 4 May. The contemplated attachment of additional forces, as for example, the D.A.K., was never put into effect because of a shortage of gas and because the combat value and morale of the Italian troops would not stand this weakening of their front. At the same time it was arranged that in case the Heeresgruppe were split by an enemy attack, the 5.Pz.Armee would take command of the northern portion and the 1.Pz. Armee of the southern portion of all forces, and that the battle would be continued in these two groups down to the last round. The Heeresgruppe now had its C.P. on the Bon peninsula.

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As for the 5.Pz.Armee the front in the Medjerda plain was strengthened

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with all the means at its disposal and by echelonment, depth in the defensive line was obtained. The motorcycle Bn. of the 10.Pz.Div. was placed behind the 1st line with the mission of Flak protection for the port of Tunis, and the 8, 8-cm batteries of the 20.Flak Div. were sited for defense southwest of Tunis. The 10.Pz.Div. (less Panzers) was left at Goubellat facing the strong enemy forces there. The Panzers of the 10.Pz.Div. (ca.30) executed several counterattacks on 2 and 3 May in the Medjerda valley, 1-2 km. south of the river, in order to throw back the British infantry that had penetrated there. The attack was a partial success. Afterwards these Panzers were placed in readiness for further action off toward Massicault.

On the morning of 5 May the British attack which had been expected in the Medjerda plain opened there, but with surprising strength and with continuous support by powerful air forces. On the first day the attack forced its way into the positions of the 334.Inf.Div.; on the second day it broke through the positions after a fresh barrage and on the third day was in Tunis. The few panzers of the 15.Pz.Div. that got into the fighting of the 2d day were only able to hold up the enemy attack a short while. Some of the 8, 8-cm batteries were knocked out by area bombing even before they could enter the fighting. Our own Luftwaffe played no part in these actions. The ammunition situation which had in the meantime become bad, had such an adverse effect on almost all the artillery that it was unable to operate with full force. The Allies gained success by strongly concentrating all their ground and air forces on a narrow front.

The Heeresgruppe was split by the breakthrough to Tunis. The elements of the 5.Pz.Armee cut off on the south came under the command of the 1.Pz.Armee. Such units of the Hermann Göring Div. as had not been overrun started on 6 May to move back to the east, and on 6 and 7 May were fighting at the defile of Hammann-Lif and finally on 12 May were in action west of Grombalia. The units of the 10.Pz.Div. -to the best of my knowledge- fell back east to the hill country of Di.Zaghouan.

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defensive line was obtained. The motorcycle Bn. of the 10.Pz.Div. was placed behind the 1st line with the mission of Flak protection for the port of Tunis, and the 8, 8-cm batteries of the 20.Flak Div. were sited for defense southwest of Tunis. The 10.Pz.Div. (less Panzers) was left at Goubellat facing the strong enemy forces there. The Panzers of the 10.Pz.Div. (ca.30) executed several counterattacks on 2 and 3 May in the Medjerda valley, 1-2 km. south of the river, in order to throw back the British infantry that had penetrated there. The attack was a partial success. Afterwards these Panzers were placed in readiness for further action off toward Massicault.

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Until the fighting ended, the center of the 334.Inf.Div. stood in the mountains around Dj.Lanserine. Pursuant to orders the remnants of the 15.Pz.Div. fell back north across the Medjerda.

g. In the Tine sector the Americans on 5 May continued their attacks around Mateur with tanks, using infantry north of Lake Achkel and south of Mateur. North of Lake Achkel they encountered only weak German forces which fought without artillery and were unable to hold up the superior enemy force any longer. South of Mateur the attacks around Guerrat-el-Tubia were unsuccessful. There they encountered the left flank of the Manteuffel Div. Still farther south there were no other German troops. The attack in the direction of Chouigui ran into no opposition.

The troops making the attack at Mateur formed up in full view of the units of the Manteuffel Div. that were defending the hills east of the town. On account of the lack of ammunition good targets could not be taken under fire. Upon inquiry by the division as to when its last ammunition was to be fired, it was ordered to do so at the moment of the attack. Thanks to this poor ammunition situation the tank attack succeeded in pushing forward across the Tine. Fire from the defensive lines knocked out some 20 American tanks on the east bank. A counter-attack also threw the leading units of the attacker back from the hills south of Ferryville. The enemy's superior strength netted him further terrain gains to the east in the next few days. Counterattacks in the hilly terrain southeast of Ferryville resulted in gaining time here. On 8 May the remnants of the 15.Pz.Div. (15 Panzers) launched a last counterattack north of Dj. Kechabta against the armored forces attacking north and south of that place. In this action the last artillery ammunition was fired. On the morning of 9 May the last German Panzers knocked out several enemy tanks from the C.P. of the 5.Pz.Armee which had been located in the hills near El Alia since leaving Tunis on the morning of 7 May. Afterwards these Panzers were blown up. The fighting in northern Tunis [sic] was over.

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The A.O.K. had maintained very close communication with its units up to the last day. Right up to 9 May it had been in telephonic communication with the Heeresgruppe on the Bon peninsula.

The successes of the Allies were gained as a consequence of their superiority in ["personnel and" : words deleted in pencil] matériel in the air and on the ground. In the Manteuffel Div., the 334.Inf.Div. and the 15.Pz.Div. all tank and artillery ammunition had been fired at the close of the fighting, all Panzers and guns had been blown up and most all vehicles destroyed. The situation could not have been any different in other units of the 5.Pz. Armee. It is certain that before 6 May and before the breaking of direct communication between those units and the Hq. of the 5.Pz.Armee that took place then, the ammunition and gas situation had grown so serious by that time, that Panzers and artillery had only been able to operate to a limited extent. Any ammunition found by the Allies belonged to units that had not been fighting at the front, possibly Flak artillery or the seaward fortifications of Bizerte.

Commanders of all ranks had the units under them well in hand up to the close of the fighting. The German soldier went into captivity with the sense of not having been defeated on the field of battle but of having been a victim of the collapse of the supply system.

[signed:] v.Vaerst

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ANNEXES

Sketch No.1

Fighting of the 5.Pz.Armee in Tunisia

The front line at the beginning of March and developments of situation up to 13 April 1943.

Legend: ---------Railway

_____ Main road

.....Secondary road

(In blue) Front Anf.März = Front beginning of March

" Front später = " later

(In red) Ausg.Stellung Anf.März = Position of departure beginning of March

" Später = later

Sketch No.2

Front line on 13 April 1943 and developments of situation up to the surrender.

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Fighting of the 5.Pz.Armee in Tunisia

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Sketch No.2

Front line on 13 April 1943 and developments of situation up to the surrender.

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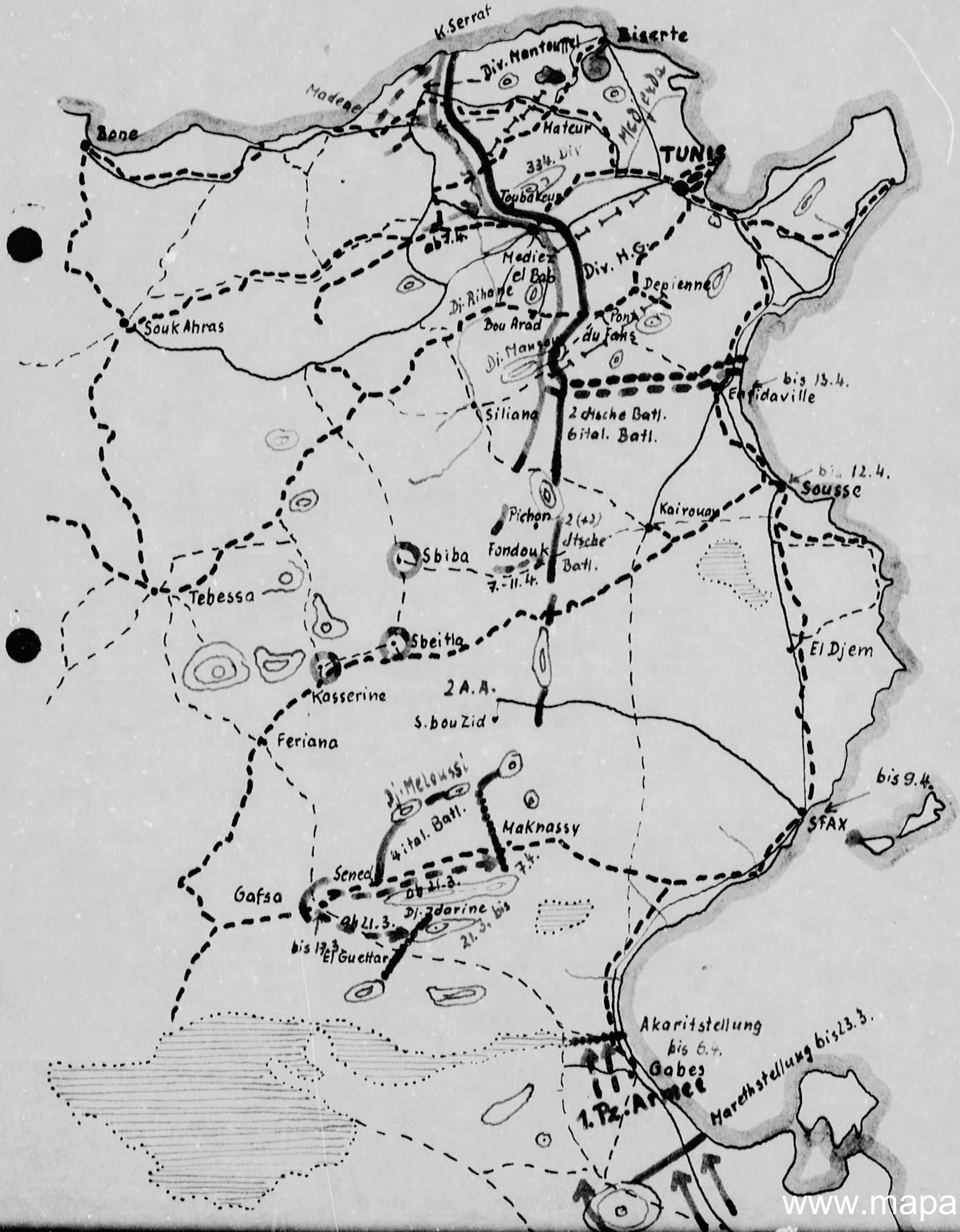
Kämpfe der 5.Pz.Armee in Tunesien.

Frontverlauf Anfang März 1943 und Entwicklung bis 13.4.1943.

D001

MS # D-001

SKIZZE 1



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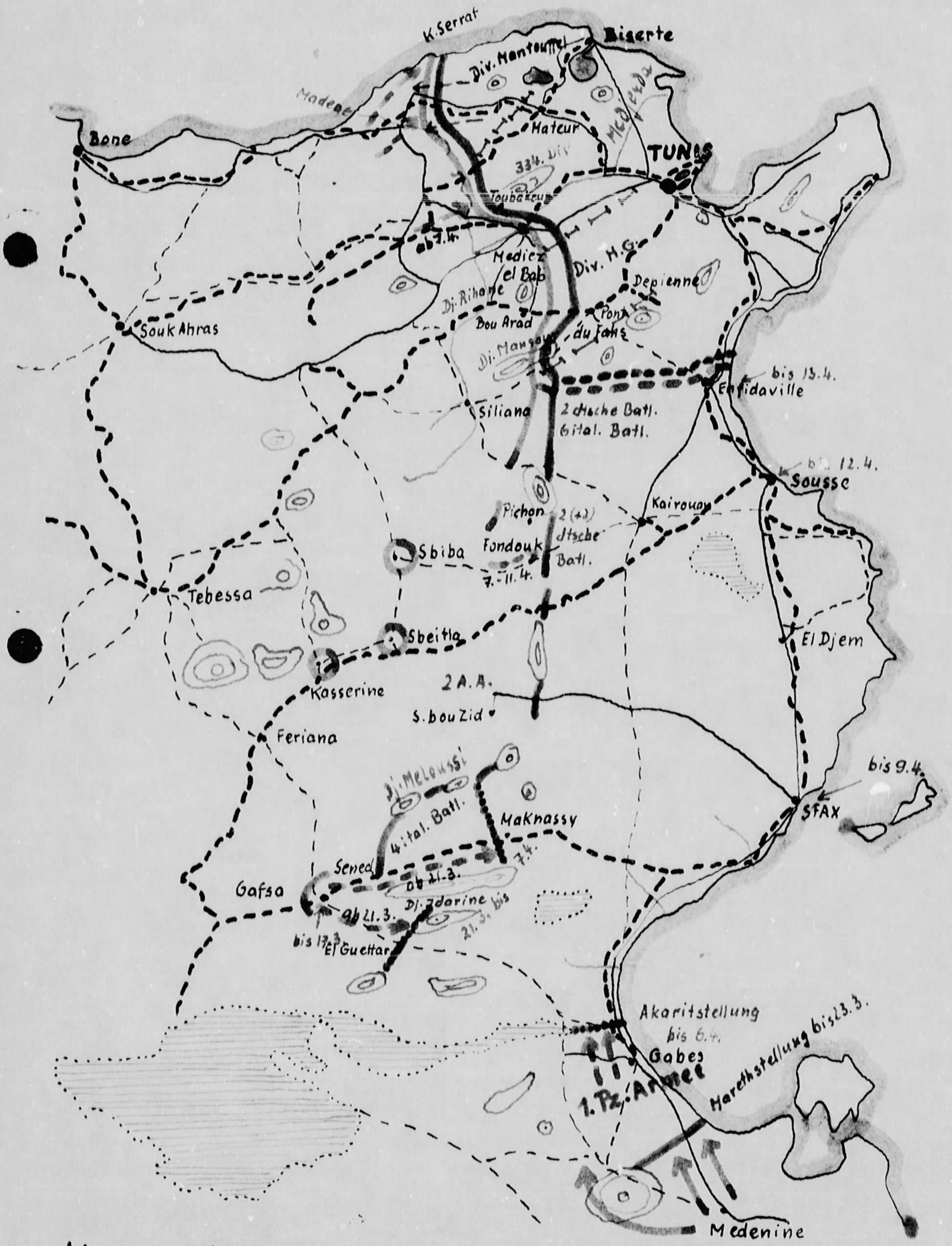

Verwendete Karte:

Afrika 1: 2 000 000

Blatt 3 Tunesien

Erläuterungen:

Eisenbahn

Hauptstrasse

Nebenstrasse

Deutsche Kräfte

Front Anf. März — später — Front 13.4.

Ausgangsstellung Anf. März — später

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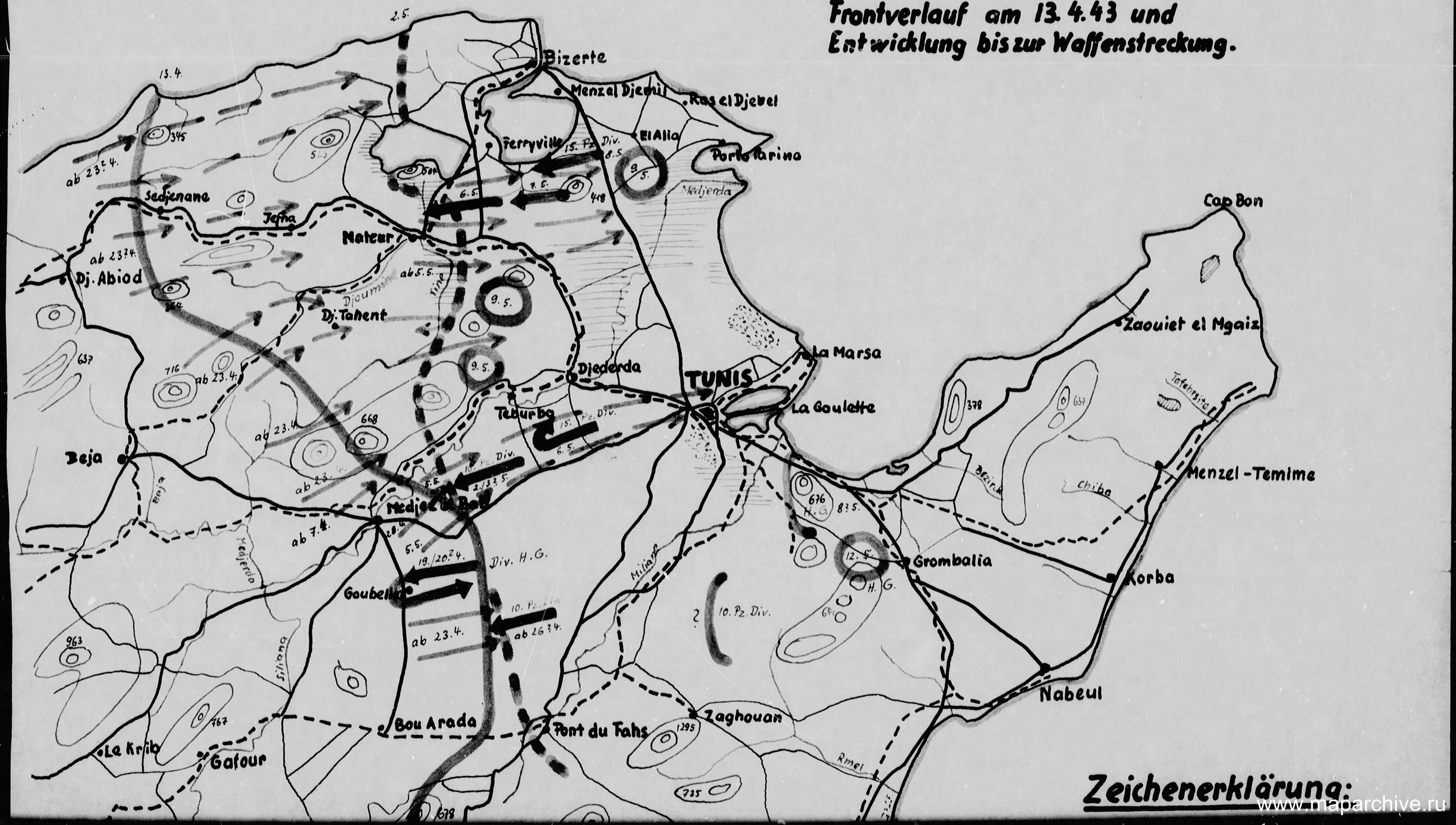
Kämpfe der 5. Pz. Armee in Tunesien.

Skizze 2.

D001

Frontverlauf am 13.4.43 und Entwicklung bis zur Waffenstreckung.



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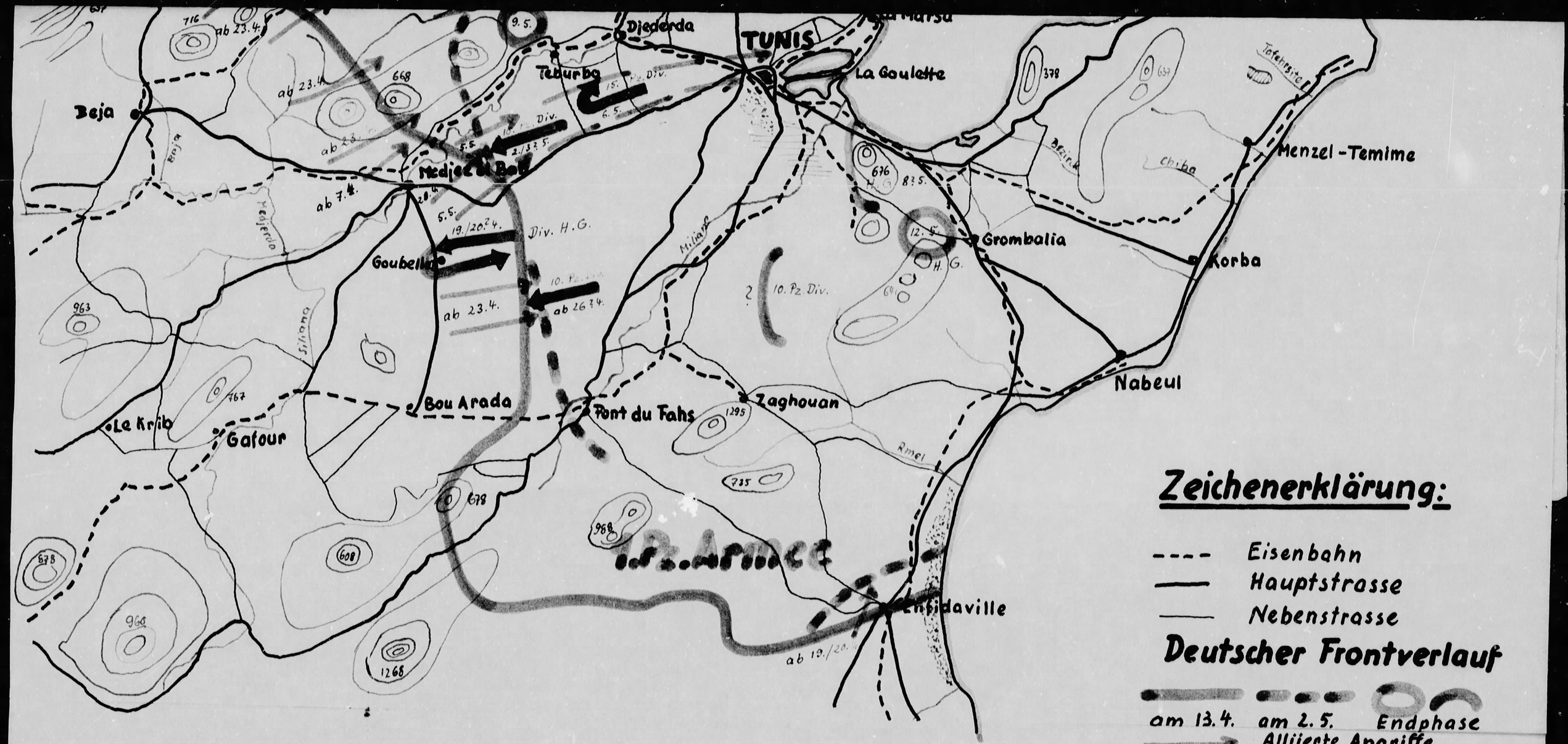

Verwendete Karte:

Deutsche Weltkarte 1:500 000, Afrika, Blatt J-32 SO, Tunis.

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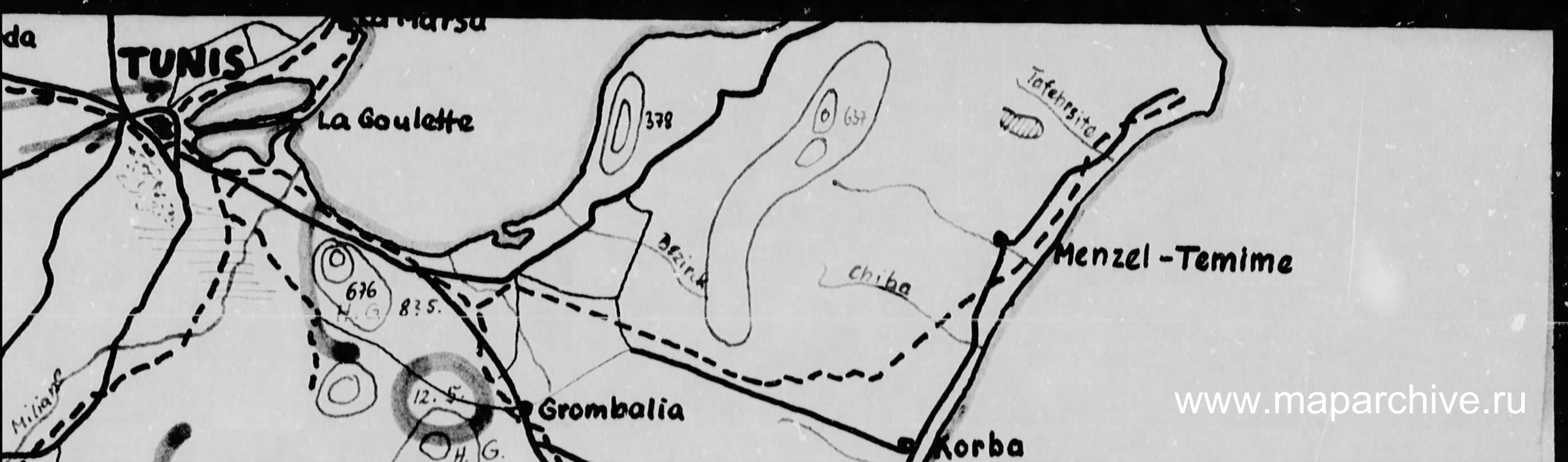
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