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TUNIS AS VITAL TARGET

With the port of Tripoli growing more and more vulnerable to Allied air attack, the enemy may soon be obliged to rely increasingly on Tunis as a supply base for his armies on both sides of the North African bridge head. Importance attaches, therefore, to the bombing attacks which have been carried out during the past four days. On the night of December 13/14, during a large-scale R.A.F. attack, three ships were left burning in the harbour, the oil fuel depots were on fire and buildings on the island of La Goulette were also burning.

The port of Tunis resembles a large inland lake with a five-mile causeway running down the centre and stretching from the docks to the lake entrance, which gives exit to the sea. Down the centre of this causeway is the canal through which all shipping must pass to reach the docks situated by the town at the innermost end of the lake. On one side of the canal runs the railway which joints the mainland from the long causeway by an iron bridge. The rail track brings freight from La Goulette into the town of Tunis. While much shipping comes down the canal to the port of Tunis a great deal is unloaded at La Goulette, the port at the sea entrance to the big lake. At this end of the canal-causeway there is an area known as Goulette Island. At this point the canal is narrow and constructed for the safe berthing of vessels.

On the night of December 15/16, an air bombardment which lasted for eight hours resulted in a great pounding of the vital spots in this important enemy shipping centre. Again large fires were started in Goulette island. An oil storage plant in the Goulette docks was set on fire. The railway marshalling yards at the Tunis end of the causeway were hit and explosions resulted. The Goulette end of the same railway line was also pumelled. After accurate bombing, flares were dropped so that observers could go down and examine the damage. The canal, it was found, was partially blocked and sand and gravel could be seen in heaps where the sides had fallen in.

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