

26/8/43. No. 4

A.A. IN NORTH AFRICA

Anti-aircraft artillery is commonly looked upon as a defensive arm. That it has an essential part to play in an offensive campaign is an unfamiliar thought. Perhaps for that reason the work done by A.A. gunners in North Africa has not attracted the attention it deserves. It was most valuable.

When the last phase began the Allied command planned to make full use of Tunis and Bizerta for the final land and sea operations, as soon as those places had been captured. Naval light forces were to be based on Bizerta at once. They would need the uninterrupted service of the dockyard at Ferryville, on the Gulf of Bizerta, which must therefore be occupied undamaged and shielded from any Axis counter-stroke.

Tunis also had a special importance, both military and political. In the minds of the French people the city stood for the whole province and they would assess the prospects of the Allies by their power to save it from destruction.

With such purposes in view an A.A. brigade ^{were} grouped far forward on the line of advance in the first days of May. They kept close on the heels of the foremost troops and took an active part in breaking down the final resistance, their guns being used with crushing effect against German artillery and machine-guns. In Tunis and Bizerta they knew exactly what to do. Battery and searchlight sites had been chosen beforehand after careful study of maps and air photos, and experience on the ground soon confirmed these selections in the most remarkable manner.

Nothing was allowed to stand in the way of the rapid and complete organisation of the new defences. For example, the strong current in Bizerta harbour swept away a boat which was being used to carry across an electric cable. Thereupon the signal officer of the brigade plunged into the water and swam to the opposite shore, towing a line.

In both towns, within 48 hours of the entry, all guns and searchlights were in position and linked up with Headquarters and each other. Ack-ack were on their toes ready to defend what had been won.

MILITARY AFFAIRS