

2. Tunisia

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The long-awaited assault by the British 8th Army in Southern Tunisia was reported by the Germans to have begun on March 17. The Allies appear to have planned a simultaneous advance in three regions to converge on the main body of Rommel's forces in the Gabès hinterland:

- (a) American units pushed into Gafsa (March 17), El Guettar (the 18th), Seneb (the 21st) and Maknassy (the 22nd), with the intention of establishing a line to the sea across the narrowest part of Tunisia;
- (b) Part of the British 8th Army, accompanied by Le Clerc's Fighting French troops from Brazzaville, made a 100-mile detour behind the Mareth Line from the south and has now reached a point approximately 35 miles west of Gabès;
- (c) Other units of the British 8th Army have broken through the outer defences of the Mareth Line at its strongest point near the coast, with the intention of following the coast road to Gabès.

Rommel apparently expected the two thrusts from the south, and concentrated his forces in positions where they could best resist the British forces. He seems to have been quite unprepared, however, for the rapid advance of the Americans on Maknassy, where a totally inadequate Italian garrison was forced to withdraw on the approach of Patton's troops. German aircraft, sent to interfere with the American advance, were driven off by anti-aircraft guns with which Patton's men had been adequately supplied.