

The United States 1st Armored Division and Mission Command at the Battle of Faid Pass

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The United States 1st Armored Division and Mission Command at the Battle of Faid Pass, by MAJ Don Y. Kim, USA, 65 pages.

The primary research question of this historical case study was, “How did the 1st Armored Division (AD) build mutual trust, create shared understanding, use mission orders, and exercise disciplined initiative prior to the Battle of Kasserine Pass?” This monograph posits as its thesis that the US 1st AD was unable to establish mutual trust with Major General Fredendall, the US II Corps Commanding General, prior to the Battle of Faid Pass. This prevented its creation of shared understanding, use of mission orders, and exercise of disciplined initiative during and immediately following that series of actions. It also set conditions for the 1st AD’s subsequent, more calamitous defeats during the initial phases of the Battle of Kasserine Pass. The findings of this study point to the need to establish mutual trust across the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) team in times of peace to enable early success in war. Based upon these findings, this monograph recommends the future study of how to increase National Guard and Reserve above-the-line, and below-the-line force participation in already resourced training events. It also proposes the study of the use of prescriptive measures such as decision point, vice synchronization, focused orders and rehearsals to enable the exercise of mission command. Lastly, it recommends the examination of the flexible and massed employment of battalion and company mortars in a manner similar to the use of division artillery.

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Acronyms

AD	Armored Division
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AFHQ	Allied Force Headquarters
AGF	Army Ground Forces
ASC	Air Support Command
BG	Brigadier General
CCA	Combat Command A
CCB	Combat Command B
CCC	Combat Command C
CCD	Combat Command D
CG	Commanding General
COL	Colonel
FM	Field Manual
FSR	Field Service Regulation
GEN	General
GLOC	Ground Line of Communication
JIIM	Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational
LSA	Logistics Support Area
LTG	Lieutenant General
MG	Major General
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
TF	Task Force
UBL	Unit Basic Load
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

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Introduction

Mission command is not new. Though its label and definition have changed over time, its central tenets have not. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command*, defines mission command as, “The exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.” As the philosophy is not new, neither are the challenges with executing it. The US Army struggled with mission command at points throughout its history. These struggles were most acute at the beginning of major wars.¹

The early campaigns of World War Two (WWII) were no exception. In its first major test, the US 1st Armored Division (AD) responded unremarkably to the opening Axis thrusts at the Battle of Faid Pass on January 30, 1943. It would begin its second test, the Battle of Kasserine Pass, on February 14, 1943 in similar fashion. Despite its initial troubles, the 1st AD eventually improved its ability to execute mission command and shared what it learned with uncommitted formations.² Understanding how the 1st AD initially applied what are now called the principles of mission command may help the US Army better train its leaders in applying these same principles against peer and near-peer competitors in the opening phases of future conflicts.

Problem

Advancements in technology since WWII have exponentially increased soldiers’ access to information. This enhanced access, however, has not always resulted in shared understanding and mutual trust. Instead of lifting the fog of war and reducing friction, it sometimes achieved

¹ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), v and 1-1.

² George F. Howe, *United States Army in World War II: The Mediterranean Theater of Operations*, vol. 1, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, ed. Kent R. Greenfield (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1957), 447-474.

the opposite by inundating leaders with excessive information and tempting them to micromanage their organizations. The resulting inability to focus cognitive efforts negatively impacted units across the spectrum of conflict.³

The constriction of information flow, though, does not necessarily reverse these effects. The abrupt loss of digital mission command systems—a real possibility against the cyber and electronic warfare capable actors outlined in the 2015 US National Security Strategy—could paralyze organizations accustomed to their use.⁴ Paradoxically, units could be simultaneously inhibited by and dependent on voluminous information flows. To win against capable adversaries on the complex and dynamic battlefields of the future, the US Army must find ways to escape this paradox.

The capability of a force adept at mission command is less impacted by fluctuations in such information flows. When such flows are great, the force distributes and processes information across its network of subordinate organizations. When such flows are minimal, the isolated nodes of its network act as independent decision makers and capitalize on emergent opportunities.⁵ Mission command enables the US Army to maximize its intellectual capital—one of its asymmetric advantages—and operate effectively in any environment.⁶

³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 117-121 and Paul Hemp, “Death by Information Overload,” *Harvard Business Review* (September 2009), accessed December 1, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2009/09/death-by-information-overload>.

⁴ Robert Martinage, *Toward a New Offset Strategy: Exploiting US Long-Term Advantages to Restore US Global Power Projection Capability* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2014), accessed December 1, 2016, <http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Offset-Strategy-Web.pdf>.

⁵ Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 2-11 to 2-24.

⁶ Daniel Sukman, “Asymmetric Offsets,” *The Bridge*, March 30, 2015, accessed December 1, 2016, <https://medium.com/the-bridge/the-asymmetric-offsets-d75a6378c367#.hxt5931uc>.

Consequently, the US Army has renewed its focus on mission command. It renamed the “command and control” warfighting function as “mission command” in 2009, established the Mission Command Center of Excellence in 2010, and identified “exercising mission command” as one of the Army Warfighting Challenges in 2014.⁷ The US Army’s own history has much to contribute to this renaissance. To find still relevant lessons on how to meet these challenges, the US Army has but to study the 1st AD during the Battle of Faid Pass.

Thesis

The US 1st AD was unable to establish mutual trust with MG Fredendall, the US II Corps Commanding General (CG), prior to the Battle of Faid Pass. This prevented its creation of shared understanding, use of mission orders, and exercise of disciplined initiative during and immediately following that series of actions. It also set conditions for the 1st AD’s subsequent, more calamitous defeats during the initial phases of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Scope

The scope of this monograph includes all units that had command and support relationships with 1st AD. It also includes organic 1st AD units that were detached to other headquarters. Examinations of these units are limited to leaders at and between the corps and battalion task force levels. Temporally, the study is constrained to the period between the formation of the 1st AD on July 15, 1940 and the initiation of the Battle of Kasserine Pass on January 30, 1943.⁸ The purpose of restricting the scope of this study is to isolate the conditions that influenced 1st AD’s initial attempts to execute mission command.

⁷ Fred Wong, *Army Warfighting Challenges*, Army Capabilities Integration Center Information Paper (Fort Eustis, VA: ARCIC, 2015), 6, accessed December 1, 2016, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cact/ArmyWarfightingChallenges.pdf>.

⁸ Martin Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass* (New York, NY: Berkley Publishing Group, 1983), 330.

Limitations and assumptions

This study does contain some research limitations. The first is that all sources are in English. This circumvents the need for a translator, but limits French, German, and Italian perceptions of 1st AD operations to documents translated previously. A second limitation is that all sources are unclassified. This broadens the potential readership of the monograph, but excludes any classified studies or accounts produced during or after 1992. These more recent documents have yet to be declassified and are, in any case, few in number. The final limitation is that all sources are drawn from or through the Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library at Abilene, Kansas. This avoids the requirement for research grants, but precludes the use of original documents not authorized for interlibrary loans. These limitations make the challenge of existing narratives in the historiography of the battle difficult as they may disqualify sources containing anomalous evidence.

Each of these limitations necessitates an assumption that bounds the validity of this monograph. The sole use of English sources assumes that available translated material does not introduce biases born of partial historiography. Secondly, the use of only unclassified material assumes that participants of the Battle of Kasserine Pass did not alter their accounts after 1992. Lastly, sourcing material through two reputable but niche libraries assumes that the compositions of their collections were not shaped by institutional biases. Though necessary given the limitations of this study, challenges to the validity of these assumptions would bring into question aspects of this monograph's findings.

Organization

This monograph is divided into six chapters: introduction, literature review, methodology, case study, findings, and conclusion. The literature review chapter outlines previous writings on mission command, the US Army's understanding of mission command at the outbreak of WWII,

and theories underlying mission command's current definition. The methodology section includes research questions, a review of referenced sources, and evaluation criteria. The case study chapter covers pre-deployment training, context, the Battle of Faid Pass, and preparations for the Battle of Kasserine Pass. The findings chapter explores lessons learned from the battle that bear upon the contemporary application of mission command. Lastly, the conclusion chapter outlines the relevance of these lessons and recommends areas for future study.

Literature review

Further analysis first requires an examination of existing literature in the outlined field, and a deeper understanding of the history and philosophy of mission command. Reviewing previous works on this and related topics helps demarcate the limits of normal science and identify gaps in professional knowledge that require additional study.⁹ Part of this review also entails determining the origins of mission command and the understanding of the concept at the time of the considered case study. It further demands a detailed account of the underlying principles, theories, and benefits of the US Army's preferred method of exercising command.

Normative

There is much written on the US Army's philosophy of mission command. This literature includes numerous applications of the concept to past battles. The events surrounding the Battle of Kasserine Pass, specifically, have also garnered considerable interest from historians. Historiography generally highlights the negative aspects of the US Army's performance against its more experienced German adversary.¹⁰ Despite such numerous writings, there has not yet been a

⁹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 42.

¹⁰ Mark T. Calhoun, interview by author, Fort Leavenworth, KS, August 1, 2016.

detailed analysis of the Battle of Faid Pass using the lens of mission command. This monograph attempts to fill this void.

The Battle of Faid Pass provides a unique case study for the execution of mission command. This smaller action directly preceded and significantly influenced the better-known Battle of Kasserine Pass. The Battle of Faid Pass was the first attempt to employ a US armored division against opposing armored divisions in combat. It was also one of the last times that an inexperienced US Army division fought without air superiority against an equal and arguably superior combatant.¹¹ Furthermore, the battle showcases how the limitations and vulnerabilities of a promising new communications technology, such as the radio, could in some cases actually increase friction in warfare.¹² Lastly, Faid Pass provides insight into how inexperienced American soldiers both initially intended to and actually applied the principles of mission command. Many of these factors have bearing on future conflicts in which the US Army may find itself.¹³ Given the US Army's emphasis on leveraging human capital to offset eroding technological advantages, case studies that identify how the US Army can better prepare new soldiers to execute mission command are of vital importance.¹⁴

Historical understanding of mission command

Despite its maturity as an area of study, mission command has existed as a concept far longer than it has had a title. The term came into being with the publication of Field Manual (FM)

¹¹ Shawn P. Rife, "Kasserine Pass and the Proper Application of Airpower," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Autumn/Winter 1998-1999), 1.

¹² Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 3-7.

¹³ Barack Obama, *National Security Strategy* (February 2015): i, accessed December 4, 2016, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf.

¹⁴ Martin E. Dempsey, interview by Joseph J. Collins and R.D. Hooker, Jr., National Defense University, January 7, 2015, "From the Chairman: An Interview with Martin E. Dempsey," ed. William T. Elliason, *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 78 (3rd Quarter, 2015), 3.

6-0, *Command and Control* in 2003. The concept, however, existed in US Army doctrine almost a hundred years earlier. Published in 1905, the *Field Service Regulations (FSR)* discuss many of the central tenets of mission command.¹⁵ In Article II: Orders, for example, it states that, “An order should not trespass on the province of the subordinate. It should contain everything which is beyond the independent authority of the subordinate, but nothing more.”¹⁶ This and other mission command-related threads can be found in all superseding US Army publications of similar nature. These tenants are commonly traced further back to the German Army’s concept of *Auftragstaktik*—mission-type tactics—formed during its time under Helmuth von Moltke, and made famous during the Austro-Prussian and Franco-Prussian Wars.¹⁷

An American contemporary of Moltke, however, practiced a markedly similar philosophy of command during the US Civil War. In his now famous letter to then Major General (MG) William Tecumseh Sherman, then Lieutenant General (LTG) Ulysses S. Grant wrote, “I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply to lay down the work it is desirable to have done, and leave you free to execute it in your own way.”¹⁸ Perhaps through convergent evolution in response to the introduction of the railroad and telegraph into warfare, both Moltke and Grant came to rely upon systems similar to what would later be called mission command. The concept of mission command thus existed in the US Army’s consciousness well before it was codified in its doctrine in 1905.

¹⁵ Clinton J. Ancker, III., “The Evolution of Mission Command in Army Doctrine,” *Military Review* (March 2013): 49, accessed December 2, 2016, http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20130430_art008.pdf and John Case, “The Exigency for Mission Command: A Comparison of World War II Command Cultures,” *Small Wars Journal* (November 4, 2014), 3.

¹⁶ *Field Service Regulations (FSR)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905), 30.

¹⁷ Helmuth von Moltke, *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings*, ed. Daniel J. Hughes, trans. Daniel J. Hughes and Harry Bell (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1993), 183-187.

¹⁸ Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble Books, 1885), 392.

At the time of the Allied invasion of North Africa, the US Army was operating from the 1941 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*, which built upon earlier FSRs and FMs of the same number, and sought to inculcate an opportunistic mindset in the inexperienced leaders of the US Army. In Chapters Three: Leadership, it states that, “Every individual must be training to exploit a situation with energy and boldness, and must be imbued with the idea that success will depend upon his initiative and action.”¹⁹ The 1st AD, therefore, went to war with an updated and institutionalized doctrine similar to the current ideation of mission command.²⁰ Applying the current concept of mission command to its actions at Faid Pass is thus not only appropriate, but also useful in drawing parallels to the challenges that the US Army faces today.

Underlying theory of mission command

The modern mission command philosophy of centralized intent and dispersed execution requires decision-making at the point of action. These decision-makers must be critical and creative thinkers who are comfortable with acting in complex and uncertain environments. Commanders enable their subordinates by removing physical, mental, and emotional impediments. This allows them to concentrate on penetrating the fog and overcoming the friction of war to achieve their prescribed end states.

The principles of mission command provide a framework for these efforts. The six principles listed in ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*, are: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander’s intent, use mission orders, exercise disciplined initiative, and accept prudent risk. Mission command is founded on an element of the

¹⁹ Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 18.

²⁰ Ancker, “The Evolution of Mission Command in Army Doctrine,” 44.

first: mutual trust. This foundation enables the application of all other principles. The collective output of mission command is itself one of the principles: the exercise of disciplined initiative.²¹

This study does not address building cohesive teams, providing a clear commander's intent, and accepting prudent risk. It does not speak to the first because, as will be shown in the case study, 1st AD and II Corps did not have significant interactions prior to the Battle of Faid Pass. Their ability to build cohesive teams, therefore, was largely limited. Providing a clear commander's intent is omitted as the effective use of mission orders entails the provision of such guidance. Additionally, the 1st AD CG never had an opportunity to develop his own intent. The purpose of 1st AD's operations, therefore, was exactly the same as II Corps' and does not warrant further examination. The study excludes accepting prudent risk because its application is implied in the proper exercise of disciplined initiative. The four elements requiring more specific definition are, thus, mutual trust, shared understanding, mission orders, and disciplined initiative.

Mutual trust is defined as shared confidence between members of a team. Members build it over time by demonstrating competence, concern for others, and a willingness to share hardships and danger. They do this during all shared experiences, but especially during demanding training and combat. Trust flows in all directions in effective organizations. Leaders who trust their subordinates issue broader guidance and delegate greater authority. Subordinates who are trusted by their leaders exercise greater initiative. Mutual trust allows a more balanced distribution of authority and initiative between leader and led.²²

It also aids organizations in sensemaking. This collective and iterative process is dependent on the open sharing, interpretation, and debate of knowledge. Mutual trust facilitates

²¹ ADRP 6-0, 2-1.

²² Ibid., 1-1 to 1-2 and 2-1 to 2-5.

this openness. As sensemaking is a necessary part of creating shared understanding, its catalyst, mutual trust, can be seen as a foundational element of mission command.²³

Commanders create shared understanding of operational environments, purposes, problems, and approaches in order to enable unity of effort. They do this through regular and, ideally, personal dialogue with their staffs and subordinate leaders. The result of this dialectic is the formation of collaborative networks that institutionalize common tactical paradigms. These networks extend across the breadth and depth of organizations, and share common doctrines.²⁴ Commanders, in essence, socially construct their formations' realities and establish the normal science by which they operate. By seeing their surroundings and the ways that they can influence those surroundings in the same light, many disparate units can achieve unity of effort and synergy even if some elements become temporarily disassociated.²⁵ The fog of war may never fully lift from battlefields, but shared understanding may at least thin it within the footprints of effective organizations.

Mission orders assign tasks, priorities, resources, and broad guidance. These minimalist orders maximize subordinate freedom of action and initiative by avoiding specific guidance on how to accomplish tasks. Commanders expect units to coordinate both vertically and horizontally to synchronize operations.²⁶ Mission orders provide general, centrally-determined, intended approaches whose details emerge from subordinates' planning efforts and reactions to

²³ Karl E. Weick, Kathleen M. Sutcliff, and David Obstfeld, "Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking," *Organization Science*, July-August 2005, accessed March 21, 2017, <http://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/pdf/10.1287/orsc.1050.0133>, 412.

²⁴ ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

²⁵ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 54-61 and Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 44-50.

²⁶ ADRP 6-0, 2-4 to 2-5.

contingencies.²⁷ In other words, they are formal vehicles that depend upon mutual trust, propagate shared understanding, and supplement the in-person dialogue between commanders and their organizations.

Disciplined initiative creates opportunity through the development of situations by subordinates in the absence of relevant orders. Once such opportunities are created, subordinates aggressively exploit them within the bounds of the commander's intent. This process facilitates rapid, distributed decision-making and coordination, and allows large institutions to overcome their own substantial inertia.²⁸ It enables military formations to probe, sense, and respond rapidly to feedback from complex adaptive systems on modern battlefields.²⁹ Each component of the whole observes, orients, decides, and acts without the need for continuous central direction.³⁰ The cumulative effect is the ability to maneuver to positions of advantage, mass superior combat power at decisive points, and attack enemy critical vulnerabilities at unmatched tempos. Doing so undermines an enemy's center of gravity, and leads to his paralysis and loss of cohesion. This, in turn, enables even outnumbered forces to achieve swift victories with minimal casualties.³¹ Vertical stratification and horizontal compartmentalization—common characteristics of militaries given their hierarchical structures—may introduce friction into a system, but disciplined initiative can at least alleviate such friction along that system's fault lines.

²⁷ Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, and Planners* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994), 24-25.

²⁸ ADRP 6-0, 2-4.

²⁹ Mary E. Boone and David J. Snowden, "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making," *Harvard Business Review* (November 2007): 4 and Robert Jervis, *Systems Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 7 and 125.

³⁰ Frans P.B. Osinga, *Science, Strategy, and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 1-2.

³¹ Tucker, *False Prophets: The Myth of Maneuver Warfare and the Inadequacies of FMFM-1 Warfighting*, 14.

Building mutual trust, creating shared understanding, using mission orders, and exercising disciplined initiative are critical to the application of mission command.³² Though the current doctrinal diction and some of its aligned theories did not exist during WWII, the philosophy as a whole did. Chapters Three: Leadership and Four: The Exercise of Command of FM 100-5, *Operations* are not far removed from ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*. As such, mission command provides a relevant lens for interpreting the 1st AD's actions during the Battle of Faid Pass.

Summary

Understanding the scope of previous writings on, the history of, and the philosophy behind mission command provide the basis for expanding its study to the Battle of Faid Pass. The addressed fields are well-developed ones. There is, however, a yet claimed and relevant niche that could advance the body of professional military knowledge if suitably filled.

Methodology

Filling this niche naturally lends itself to the historical case study methodology. This methodology offers a means to examine the events of Faid Pass in great detail. Such analysis, however, first requires the outlining of specific research questions, sources of evidence, and evaluation criteria in order to guide research and structure subsequent findings.

Research questions

The primary research question of this monograph is, "How did the 1st AD build mutual trust, create shared understanding, use mission orders, and exercise disciplined initiative prior to the Battle of Kasserine Pass?" This is supplemented by five secondary research questions. What US Army doctrine related to the above principles did the 1st AD train on and plan to execute? What II Corps command climate issues impeded the execution of mission command in 1st AD? How did

³² ADRP 6-0, 1-1 to 1-2 and 2-1 to 2-5.

the 1st AD plan to apply the above principles after the Battle of Kasserine Pass? How does this plan differ from contemporary US Army doctrine? What specific changes to contemporary US Army doctrine does this plan suggest?

Evidence

Answering the primary research question requires primary and secondary source accounts of the application of mission command during the Battle of Faid Pass. For primary sources, this study relies upon operations orders and reports in the Combined Arms Research Library's collection of WWII unit histories. It also leverages the memoirs of key 1st AD leaders. These sources provide a foundation for understanding the conditions internal to the division that secondary sources do not always supply. For secondary sources, initial research began with the US Army Center for Military History's *US Army in World War II* series, Martin Blumenson's *Kasserine Pass*, and Rick Atkinson's *An Army at Dawn*, and leveraged their referenced sources for the Battle of Faid Pass. Such derivative sources provide a general understanding of the battle, and common interpretations of its events.

The secondary research questions require after action reports, interwar period and early WWII US Army doctrinal publications, and contemporary US Army doctrinal publications. These provide an understanding of how the division planned to conduct operations before and after the battle. They also identify deficiencies in existing US Army doctrine. An example of such sources is the US Army Center for Military History's *Kasserine Pass Battles* collection. Lastly, this study incorporates sources identified by the CARL research librarians, 1st AD historians, and the US Army Armor School. The purpose of US Army Armor School sources is to identify what doctrine the 1st AD actually trained with prior to its departure from the US. These include official studies, reports, professional journals, and monographs. Taken together, these sources provide the breadth and depth of information to address the posed research questions.

Evaluation criteria

Appraising evidence in these varied sources entail both objective and subjective assessments. With respect to building mutual trust and creating shared understanding, evidence was culled from the statements, correspondence, and memoirs of 1st AD and II Corps members, and then compared against the definitions outlined in the May 17, 2012 version of ADRP 6-0, *Mission Command*. For mission orders, the study employed line counts to identify the portion of written and verbal communications dedicated to the assignment of resources, commanders' intents, concepts of operations, decision points, and priorities vice specific tasks to subordinate units and coordinating instructions. For exercising disciplined initiative, the study examined the number of incidents where subordinates executed decision points in the absence of communications with their higher headquarters and disregarded assigned tasks in order to achieve their commanders' intents. The combination of these criteria enable a value judgment on 1st AD's overall execution of mission command.

Summary

The listed research questions, sources of evidence, and evaluation criteria frame the approach to the remainder of this case study. They also forecast the expected findings of ensuing research. With the outline of this and the two previous chapters as a guide, this study now turns to the detailed analysis of the Battle of Faid Pass.

Case Study

Understanding the application of mission command during and after the Battle of Faid Pass requires a contextual understanding of the events leading up to it. As such, this case study is divided into four parts: pre-deployment training; strategic, operational, and tactical context; the Battle of Faid Pass; and preparation for the Battle of Kasserine Pass. It also includes a brief summary of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Pre-deployment training: July 1940-November 1942

The 1st AD's preparation for combat in North Africa took place in three stages. The first began with the division's formation on July 15, 1940, and culminated with the Louisiana and Carolina Maneuvers in September and October of 1941.³³ The second encompassed individual and small-unit training up to the division's embarkation for Northern Ireland in April 1942.³⁴ The final stage entailed additional individual and small-unit training until the division's deployment to North Africa in November 1942.³⁵ Though this regimen introduced the division to many essential skills, it did not adequately prepare them for operations in Tunisia.

The Army had to overcome significant obstacles to field effective armored divisions in the early campaigns of WWII. Following World War I (WWI), the National Defense Act of 1920 disbanded the Tank Corps and subsumed individual tank companies into infantry divisions.³⁶ This relegated the tank to the role of infantry support and, to an extent, arrested its development during the interwar years.³⁷

In the wake of German successes in Poland and France, the Army reformed its tank companies into a Provisional Tank Brigade and tested the formation during the Georgia and Louisiana Maneuvers in April and May of 1940. These maneuvers convinced General (GEN) George C. Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the Army, to establish the Armored Force on July 15,

³³ Martin Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," in *America's First Battles: 1776-1965*, ed. Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 233-234.

³⁴ *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, Study No. 11 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1948), 12-14.

³⁵ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 240.

³⁶ *History of the Armored Force, Command and Center*, Study No. 27 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), 1-4.

³⁷ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 227.

1940. At its conception, it consisted of the I Armored Corps, comprised of the 1st and 2nd ADs.³⁸

After refining doctrine and conducting additional small-unit training, the newly-formed Armored Force participated in the Louisiana and Carolina Maneuvers in September and October of 1941. These exercises enabled the Armored Force, and the Army at large, to simulate large-unit battles, experiment with mechanized warfare and air-ground cooperation, and practice reconnaissance.³⁹ The maneuvers yielded many lessons. One was that the division was the ideal team at the tactical level of warfare. A second was that units across the Army were woefully deficient in individual, leader, and lower echelon collective training. Inter-branch cooperation, to include infantry-armor and air-ground cooperation, were beyond the pale of the 1941 Army. The Army was far from where it needed to be, but at least had a better idea of how to get there.⁴⁰

With the results of these exercises fresh on his mind, Lieutenant General (LTG) Lesley J. McNair, the new Commanding General of Army Ground Forces (AGF) as of March 1942, planned to focus on individual to regimental-level deficiencies in early 1942, and graduate to inter-branch division-level training in the latter half of that year. To that end, the AGF established the Desert Training Center under MG George S. Patton, Jr. in April 1942 in Indio, California. It also planned to conduct additional large-scale maneuvers in the fall to validate doctrine, and improve the readiness of division and higher headquarters.⁴¹

³⁸ *History of the Armored Force, Command and Center*, 6-12 and Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 233.

³⁹ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 233-234.

⁴⁰ Christopher R. Gabel, *The US Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1991), 171-172 and 176-182 and *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*.

⁴¹ *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, 1-6 and Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 237.

The 1st AD, however, never took part in these exercises. In April 1942, the 1st AD assembled at Fort Dix, New Jersey for shipment to Northern Ireland and staging for Operation Torch. Prior to departure, it received a large number of new soldiers to bring it to authorized strength. It did not, however, receive its full complement of equipment until late that summer.⁴² After the fall of British-held Tobruk, Libya on June 21, 300 of the division's new M4 Sherman tanks were shipped to Egypt to refit the beleaguered British Eighth Army.⁴³ These conditions compelled the division to retrain on individual, crew, and small-unit tactics.⁴⁴ While certainly both helpful and necessary, this training fell short of advancing the division's ability to fight as a coordinated whole.

The future combatant in the Battle of Faid Pass, therefore, missed valuable lessons on division operations. These lessons included the need to write succinct orders, limit the extent of defensive lines, conduct aggressive reconnaissance, understand the time and space factors of mechanized warfare, coordinate combined arms teams, mass divisional fires, establish liaison relationships with adjacent formations, maintain communications, maximize flexibility, and rid units of ineffective leaders.⁴⁵ They also emphasized the need to leverage the mobility, firepower, and protection of armor to conduct decisive, sustained offensive operations against vulnerable enemy positions and flanks.⁴⁶ Critical to this was mass, and a key enabler of mass was the provision of independent tank battalions to infantry divisions to prevent the dilution of armor

⁴² Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 235-238.

⁴³ Rick Atkinson, *The Liberation Trilogy*, vol. 1, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 16.

⁴⁴ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 235-238.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 237-238 and *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, 1.

⁴⁶ *History of the Armored Force, Command and Center*, 15-16.

division assets.⁴⁷ Such lessons greatly improved the readiness of participating units.⁴⁸ The 1st AD, unfortunately, was not a direct beneficiary of these formative experiences.

As a result of these circumstances, 1st AD's capacity to conduct division-level maneuver had essentially not improved since the Louisiana and Carolina Maneuvers of 1941. "[Its] organizations and men were still largely in tune with the time and space factors that had prevailed in the previous war. They had yet to adjust to the accelerated tempo and increased distances of the battlefield—in particular, the necessary speed of reaction so well understood by their adversaries."⁴⁹

This was true of II Corps to an even greater extent. Pulled from the 1942 maneuvers along with 1st AD, II Corps had even less experience with armor warfare. 1st AD had at least operated as part of the Armored Force in the 1941 maneuvers. II Corps, on the other hand, trained as a standard infantry-centric entity. Its staff did not have the opportunity to incorporate large armor formations into its operations and had little interaction with 1st AD during this critical training period.⁵⁰

The future II Corps CG, MG Lloyd R. Fredendall, had little more experience than his staff. An infantry officer who served as a training school commandant during WWI, MG Fredendall had maneuvered neither a combat command, nor an armored division in training. He had also never maneuvered an infantry formation of any size in combat. MG Fredendall was

⁴⁷ *History of the Armored Force, Command and Center*, 47 and Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 237.

⁴⁸ *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, 31.

⁴⁹ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 240.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 237 and *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, 1.

known as a detail-oriented planner and tough disciplinarian, but not a battle proven leader of armor formations.⁵¹

When 1st AD embarked for North Africa in November 1942, it possessed a dated understanding of the requirements for success in maneuver warfare. It had not had the opportunity to conduct a division-level maneuver in nearly a year. It had also never trained with II Corps as its higher headquarters. II Corps and its CG, for their part, had even less experience maneuvering armor forces. 1st AD and II Corps entered combat with few shared experiences and disparate knowledge sets. The first time they would truly attempt to operate in concert and bridge their differences would be in combat against Axis forces in North Africa.

Strategic, operational, and tactical context: July 1942-January 1943

The US entered the North African Campaign on November 8, 1942 with the execution of Operation Torch. It would see the campaign to its conclusion on May 13, 1943 with the surrender of the German Army Group Africa in Tunis. This campaign took place during a decisive period of WWII. In the Pacific, the US began its first operational offensive, the Guadalcanal Campaign, on August 7, 1942. With its successful conclusion on February 9, 1943, the US permanently seized the strategic initiative from the Empire of Japan. On the Eastern Front, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) launched Operation Uranus on November 19, 1942 and isolated Stalingrad. By February 2, 1943, it had forced the surrender of the German 6th Army and set the stage for the decisive Battle of Kursk the following campaign season. Over Western Europe, the British Royal Air Force accelerated strategic bombing of German military and industrial targets. On January 27, 1943, the US Eighth Air Force joined the Combined Bomber Offensive with its first attack into Germany against the docks of Wilhelmshaven.

⁵¹ Mark Murphy, "Major General Lloyd R. Fredendall," in *These Are the Generals* (New York, NY: Borzoi Books, 1943), 229-232.

Concurrent to these efforts, the US and United Kingdom continued to mass forces in England for a cross channel invasion of France in 1944.⁵² By the conclusion of the North Africa Campaign, the Allies had seized the operational initiative in almost every theater and were on the verge of seizing the strategic initiative for the remainder of the war.

In North Africa, the British Eighth Army finally blocked Lieutenant General (LTG) Erwin Rommel's Panzer Army Africa's attack into Egypt during the First Battle of El Alamein from July 1-27, 1942. Under GEN Bernard L. Montgomery, it transitioned to the offensive during the Second Battle of El Alamein on October 23. By November 4, the Eighth Army was pursuing Panzer Army Africa west across Egypt and into Libya.⁵³

Days later on November 8, GEN Dwight E. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, North African Theater of Operations, launched Operation Torch.⁵⁴ Its objectives were the destruction of all Axis forces in Africa, clearance of the Mediterranean Sea Lines of Communication, establishment of basing for an invasion of Sicily and Italy, and reconstitution of Free French Forces. This would prevent Germany from massing its forces against the USSR and enable the Allies to open a second front on mainland Europe in 1943.⁵⁵

To achieve these objectives, the Allies formed three amphibious task forces. The Western Task Force, commanded by MG George S. Patton, Jr., seized Casablanca, Morocco. The Center Task Force, commanded by MG Fredendall and incorporating Combat Command B (CCB), 1st AD, seized Oran, Algeria. The Eastern Task Force, commanded by LTG Kenneth A.

⁵² Mary H. Williams, *United States in World War II: Special Studies*, ed. Kent. R. Greenfield, *Chronology: 1941-1945* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), 48, 64-65, 68, 84, 89-91, and 110.

⁵³ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 44-47 and 60-63.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

⁵⁵ Ralph J. Hornaday, *The Battle of Kasserine Pass: February 14-23, 1943*, Advanced Infantry Officers Course Monograph (Fort Benning, GA: The Infantry School, 1949), 4.

N. Anderson, seized Algiers, Algeria. After initially resisting the Allied landings, Admiral Francois Darlan ordered French forces to cease opposition on November 10.⁵⁶ This enabled the Allies to advance rapidly east toward Tunisia and Panzer Army Africa's rear.

These events introduced US forces to combat against western opponents. The French, however, had improved their forces little since their surrender in 1940 and offered only reluctant opposition. They were not an apt comparison to the better equipped, more experienced, and markedly more motivated German formations that US forces had yet to meet. Despite this discrepancy, US forces, to include MG Fredendall and CCB, the only 1st AD formation to take part in the initial landings, advanced with the belief that they had proven themselves, their equipment, and their practices in action.⁵⁷

In response to Operation Torch, Germany invaded French Tunisia on November 9 and unoccupied France on November 11.⁵⁸ German forces, arriving in Tunis at 1,000 personnel per day, immediately occupied Bizerte, Sfax, and Gabes in order to protect the ground lines of communication (GLOCs) to Tripoli, Libya. They then advanced west to occupy key terrain to forestall the arrival of Allied forces from Algeria.⁵⁹ These decidedly more experienced forces, which would eventually form 5th Panzer Army under the command of GEN Hans-Jurgen Von Arnim, made initial contact with the British First Army on November 16 just south of Tabarka.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 64-66.

⁵⁷ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 243.

⁵⁸ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 65-66.

⁵⁹ C. Betances-Ramirez, *The Battle of Tunisia: April-May 1943*, Advanced Infantry Officers Course Monograph (Fort Benning, GA: The Infantry School, 1949), 6-7.

⁶⁰ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 67.

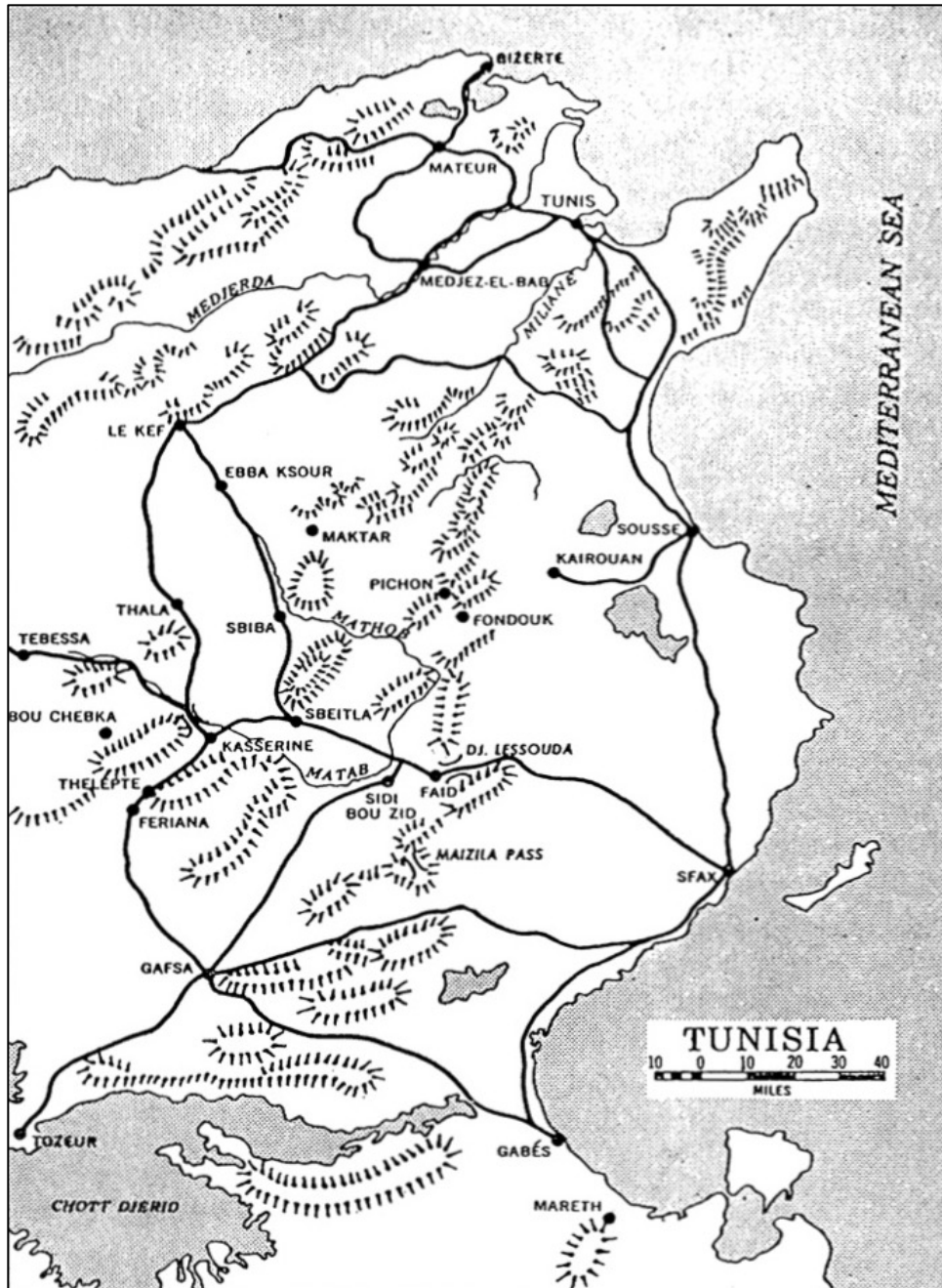


Figure 1. Tunisian Topography. United States Army Center of Military History, *Kasserine Pass Battles: Maps and Sketches Appendix* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 2.

The Allies, by this point, had nearly culminated. In their race to Tunisia, they had stretched their forces and GLOCs, and outrun the coverage of their forward airfields.⁶¹ They had

⁶¹ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 320-321.

also committed units into Tunisia as soon as they were available, accepting haphazard task organizations and command relationships in the process.⁶² On November 23, the Allies reached a verbal agreement to place all forces, regardless of nationality or parent organization, north of the Le Kef-Zaghoun line under the new British First Army commanded by LTG Anderson, and all forces south of it under the French XIX Corps commanded by GEN Marie-Louis Koeltz.⁶³ Despite this agreement, the scattered French formations refused to serve under British command. GEN Alphonse Juin, the commander of French land and air forces in Northwest Africa, thus only coordinated their actions with the British First Army.⁶⁴ The Allies, in addition to their sustainment and basing issues, thus entered Tunisia lacking unity of command.

Seeking to at least achieve unity of effort, GEN Eisenhower tasked LTG Anderson with coordinating all Allied operations in Tunisia on January 21.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, MG Fredendall, the commander of II Corps as of January 1, disdained LTG Anderson and viewed II Corps as an independent command reporting directly to GEN Eisenhower at Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ).⁶⁶ These contentious relationships and fractured chains of command permeated the Allied command structure, and exacerbated its challenge of achieving unity of effort between its scattered detachments.

These conditions significantly impacted the US 1st AD and its subordinate elements. The division's CCB, commanded initially by Brigadier General (BG) Lunsford E. Oliver and later by BG Paul M. Robinett, was the only 1st AD element to see significant action prior to the Battle of

⁶² William S. Myrick, Jr., "Field Artillery Observer Report," in *Notes on Recent Operations on the Tunisian Front* (Tunisia: Army Ground Forces, 1943), 11.

⁶³ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 69 and 73.

⁶⁴ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 245.

⁶⁵ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 87.

⁶⁶ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 245.

Faid Pass. A combined arms task force composed of infantry, armor, and artillery units, CCB was frequently divided and attached to disparate headquarters for ad hoc purposes. Originally a part of the Center Task Force, it detached an armor battalion to the British 6th Armored Division on November 24, 1942, was attached to the British First Army on November 27, detached a separate armor battalion to the British 78th Infantry Division on November 28, and was then attached as a whole to the 78th Division on December 1. Not long after, it became the British V Corps reserve on December 11. After three weeks of operating under British command, CCB finally began its return to its parent organization. It detached an armor battalion to the US 1st AD on December 15, and was reassigned to the 1st AD on January 8, 1943. After less than two weeks with its own division, however, CCB was placed under tactical control of the French XIX Corps on January 20. It returned to US control and became the US II Corps reserve on January 29, but then reverted to British control as the British First Army reserve only two days later on January 31.⁶⁷ These task organizations and command relationships of convenience did not set favorable conditions for CCB's initial encounters with German forces.

The first of these encounters took place during the British 78th Infantry Division's defense of the El Guessa Heights southwest of Tebourba from December 3-10, 1942. CCB's performance was less than satisfactory. After an initial penetration by 7th Panzer Regiment, 10th Panzer Division on the morning of December 6, CCB launched a belated, disjointed, and costly counterattack that never gained credible momentum. Its failure obliged forward infantry elements of CCB on the El Guessa Heights and the adjacent British 11th Brigade to withdraw or risk envelopment.⁶⁸ By the end of its first action against Axis forces, CCB had lost three-quarters of its combat power and compelled LTG Anderson to relieve it at the front. It had also compelled

⁶⁷ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 70-75, 83, 86, and 89.

⁶⁸ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 326-329.

GEN Eisenhower to replace its commander, BG Oliver, with BG Robinett. CCB had finally met the real enemy and been found wanting.

The fault, however, was not CCB's alone. The US and British had "fought in each other's presence...not as an army, but as a disjointed confederation."⁶⁹ The British had also employed US armored forces contrary to their doctrine of division-level, decisive offensive operations.⁷⁰ FM 17, *The Armored Division*, stipulated that, "The armored division must be...used for offensive operations," and, "kept together so that their action is united and simultaneous in attack."⁷¹ CCB's independent use clearly violated this dictum. It also presaged the future experiences of its sister combat commands during the Battle of Faid Pass.

Regardless of blame, the events of December bred resentment and mistrust between the US and British forces. They also contributed to GEN Eisenhower's decision on December 24 to postpone further attempts to seize Tunis and transition to a defense of the Eastern Dorsale until after the rainy season.⁷² As 1943 dawned, the exasperated Allies settled into a period of begrudged stalemate, resigned to resolve their sustainment and basing issues before Panzer Army Africa could join the growing 5th Panzer Army in a combined offensive.

CCB's second major action punctuated this period of relative calm. Partially reconstituted during its reassignment to 1st AD, CCB then consisted of the 13th Armor Regiment (minus 1st and 3rd Battalions), 2nd Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, and 27th Field Artillery

⁶⁹ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 208, 234-235.

⁷⁰ *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, 1.

⁷¹ Field Manual (FM) 17, *Armored Force Field Manual: Employment of Armored Units, The Armored Division* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office), 1-24.

⁷² Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 258-261.

Battalion.⁷³ This reformed force participated in the French XIX Corps' defense and later clearance of the Ousseltia Valley from January 21-27, 1943. Though CCB—and other US units—helped prevent German success and, thereby, removed some of the tarnish from its British-held reputation, it did enable MG Fredendall to further complicate already troubled command relationships.⁷⁴ He had the opportunity to do so because LTG Anderson possessed coordinating rather than command authority over the US II Corps.⁷⁵ Thus, while ostensibly under French tactical control, CCB continued to receive cryptic and contradictory orders from II Corps.⁷⁶ This set a precedence of command overreach that would persist throughout MG Fredendall's tenure.

The Battle of Ousseltia Valley did produce at least one positive outcome. The inability to achieve unity of effort in their own area of operations and the resultant catastrophic XIX Corps losses convinced the French of the need for unity of command.⁷⁷ On January 24, GEN Eisenhower attached the French XIX Corps and US II Corps to the British First Army. LTG Anderson withdrew the majority of French forces, reduced the XIX Corps' battlespace, and placed all forces south of the Thala-Sbiba-Fondouk line and north of Gabes under II Corps. These forces included the XII Air Support Command (ASC), 1st AD (reinforced by the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion), commanded by MG Orlando Ward, the 26th Regimental Combat

⁷³ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 2.

⁷⁴ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 304-305.

⁷⁵ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 2, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 4 and Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 87.

⁷⁶ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 380-381 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 304-305.

⁷⁷ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 305.

Team (RCT) (reinforced by the 5th Field Artillery Battalion and 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion), commanded by COL Alexander Stark, 443rd Coastal Artillery Battalion (minus 1st Platoon, A Battery), 2nd Battalion, 16th Medical Regiment, and mixed elements of the French Constantine Division.⁷⁸ He then tasked II Corps with conducting a mobile defense in order to protect the Allied southern flank.⁷⁹ Although this solved the unity of command issue at the corps and higher level, it did not address the same issue at the division and lower organizations which would have to support vulnerable French forces in case of attack.⁸⁰

The effects of CCB's commitments extended beyond the British, French, and US II Corps commands. They also influenced the organization and employment of the 1st AD. Assigned to II Corps on January 18 to serve as a concentrated and mobile reserve, 1st AD had few forces assigned to it.⁸¹ It had even fewer forces under its actual control. On January 21, the day after CCB's detachment to XIX Corps, AFHQ directed II Corps to reconstitute an armor reserve in vicinity of Sbeitla in order to support French forces defending Fondouk and Pichon Passes in case of attack.⁸² II Corps assigned this task to Combat Command A (CCA), 1st AD.⁸³ Commanded by COL Raymond E. McQuillin, the untested CCA consisted of the 1st Armored Regiment (minus 1st and 2nd Battalions), 26th RCT (minus 2nd and 3rd Battalions), commanded by COL Alexander Stark, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, 33rd Field Artillery Battalion, 91st Field Artillery Battalion, A Company, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, D Battery (minus 2nd

⁷⁸ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 1 and 4.

⁷⁹ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 305.

⁸⁰ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 382-383.

⁸¹ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 86 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 305.

⁸² II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 3.

⁸³ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 245.

Platoon), 443rd Coastal Artillery Battalion, B Company, 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, and C Company, 16th Engineer Battalion.⁸⁴ Such circumventions of 1st AD headquarters would become a common occurrence in Tunisia.

Encouraged by GEN Eisenhower to conduct limited offensives and introduce the remainder of 1st AD to combat, MG Fredendall decided to conduct a raid on Station de Sened, a small town and rail stop between Gafsa and Maknassy lightly defended by an Italian garrison.⁸⁵ Committing CCA to the above mission and CCB to the reinforcement of the XIX Corps, however, left II Corps with no available combat commands. On January 23, MG Fredendall thus constituted Combat Command C (CCC), 1st AD.⁸⁶ Commanded by Colonel (COL) Robert I. Stack, the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment Commander, CCC included 6th Armored Infantry Regiment (minus 1st and 2nd Battalions), G Company, 13th Armor Regiment, B Company (reinforced by 1st Platoon, D Company), 81st Reconnaissance Battalion, C Battery, 68th Field Artillery Battalion, B Battery (minus 2nd Platoon), 443rd Coastal Artillery Battalion, and 1st Platoon, 16th Engineer Battalion.⁸⁷ CCC executed its II Corps-directed raid on Station de Sened and then withdrew to Gafsa on January 24. Though this minor action was successful, it continued the trends of dispersing and micromanaging elements of 1st AD by II Corps Headquarters.⁸⁸

MG Fredendall planned to follow up his triumphant raid with an attack to seize Maknassy on February 1. His plan called for a two-pronged attack: one from the west going through Station de Sened and one from the north going through the Maizila Pass. It also called for a reserve in

⁸⁴ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

⁸⁵ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 385 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 305-306.

⁸⁶ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 88.

⁸⁷ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

⁸⁸ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 306-307.

Sbeitla that could reinforce the Maknassy attack or French forces further north. With the detachment of CCB to serve as the British First Army reserve, however, 1st AD had only two available combat commands. II Corps, therefore, constituted a temporary Combat Command D (CCD), 1st AD, to provide the necessary third maneuver task force.⁸⁹ Commanded by COL Robert V. Maraist, the 1st AD Artillery Commander, and supported by his artillery section staff of five soldiers, CCD contained 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion (minus G Company), 13th Armor Regiment, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (minus A and B Companies), 68th Field Artillery Battalion (minus C Battery), Cannon Company, 39th Infantry Regiment, D Company (minus 1st Platoon), 16th Engineer Battalion, and a platoon from the 443rd Coastal Artillery Battalion. CCD assembled in Bou Chebka on January 30.⁹⁰ The creation of CCD not only further diluted 1st AD's combat power, but also robbed it of the ability to coordinate fires at the division level. It also deprived both the division and CCD of the personnel necessary to execute other key staff actions. The organization as a whole thus had a more limited capacity to plan and execute operations.

In addition to its four combat commands, 1st AD also possessed Division Reconnaissance and Division Reserve elements located with CCD in Bou Chebka. The Division Reconnaissance element was comprised of the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion (minus B Company and 1st Platoon, D Company) and Reconnaissance Platoon, 18th Engineer Battalion.⁹¹ Its doctrinal mission was to make and maintain contact with the enemy, and provide accurate and

⁸⁹ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 388 and 394-395.

⁹⁰ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2. A unit basic load (UBL) is the standard amount of ammunition with which a unit deploys.

timely information to the commander.⁹² In habitually subordinating these forces to the combat commands and with no dedicated reconnaissance assets of his own, MG Fredendall effectively robbed both II Corps and 1st AD of the ability to conduct ground reconnaissance and security operations outside the commitment of a combat command. Operating in such a manner, particularly in a mobile defense, would make the execution of decision points a difficult proposition.

The Division Reserve, the one element consistently under MG Ward's command, consisted of 1st Battalion, 13th Armor Regiment, 2nd Battalion, 1st Armor Regiment, 16th Engineer Battalion (minus C and D Companies), D Battery, 106th Coastal Artillery Battalion, and 1st Platoon, D Battery, 443rd Coastal Artillery Battalion.⁹³ Though the Division Reserve initially possessed combat power on the order of a small combat command, it did not have a fully staffed headquarters. Division Reserve Commands, commanded by a colonel and supported by a mixed cadre of sixteen soldiers, were designed to control units in rear areas, not to fight them at the front. Armored divisions later in the war would routinely reinforce and employ their Reserve Commands as third combat commands, but the 1st AD had yet to adopt this practice.⁹⁴ Combined with the dispersion and micromanagement of its units by II Corps, the lack of a cohesive and fightable Division Reserve limited options available to the 1st AD CG. He could, in effect, parcel out these forces to the combat commands to be employed by his higher headquarters—something he would be later forced to do because of combat losses—or attempt to retain them at division

⁹² Army Ground Forces Cavalry School, "Operations of the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion in Tunisia," in *Cavalry Reconnaissance*, no. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1953), forward.

⁹³ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

⁹⁴ *History of the Armored Force, Command and Center*, 35-36.

level.⁹⁵ Unfortunately, both courses of action would lack both unity of command and unity of effort.

To support all of these forces, II Corps established its logistics support area (LSA) in Tebessa, the primary rail terminus feeding central Tunisia.⁹⁶ It stockpiled fuel and four unit basic loads (UBLs) in the LSA and pushed forward additional UBLs to forward support areas near Sbeitla, Kasserine, Thelepte, and Feriana.⁹⁷ These stockpiles, particularly the main store in Tebessa, were of significant interest to both sides.⁹⁸ Axis seizure of Tebessa would not only isolate II Corps, but also extend their forces' operational reach into First Army's rear area and retard Allied offensive operations for several weeks.⁹⁹

The last elements of 1st AD and II Corps were their command posts. 1st AD established its headquarters at Sbeitla, a major crossroad between its most northern combat command, CCA, and its reserve.¹⁰⁰ The XII ASC, tasked with air-ground coordination between the Allied air forces and II Corps, established its headquarters at Youks les Bains Airfield just west of Tebessa.¹⁰¹ It also established a forward airfield at Thelepte, thirty-five kilometers southwest of Kasserine Pass.¹⁰² II Corps established its headquarters in a ravine outside Tebessa, 180 kilometers from the front and twenty-five kilometers from the XII ASC headquarters. This

⁹⁵ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 116.

⁹⁶ Myrick, "Field Artillery Observer Report," 11.

⁹⁷ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 2.

⁹⁸ Ernest N. Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, ed. Milton MacKaye and William R. MacKaye (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 118.

⁹⁹ Hudel, "The Tank Battle at Sidi bou Zid," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 21.

¹⁰⁰ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

¹⁰¹ Rife, "Kasserine Pass and the Proper Application of Airpower," 1.

¹⁰² Hornaday, *The Battle of Kasserine Pass: February 14-23, 1943*, 10.

underground bunker was accessible by a single road built by engineers, but was not in a location conducive to ease of communications or battlefield circulation.¹⁰³ Its appearance of permanence also suggest an expectation for static operations and an aversion to risk.¹⁰⁴ MG Fredendall rarely left this bunker, which GEN Eisenhower found troubling. GEN Eisenhower stressed the need for commanders to visit the front in a letter to MG Fredendall, a letter that the out-of-touch II Corps Commander disdainfully read out loud to MG Ward. The location of the II Corps headquarters not only made it difficult to conduct in-person briefs and rehearsals, but also bred mistrust between MG Fredendall and his subordinate commanders.¹⁰⁵

As January and the rainy season drew to a close, the Allies looked to renew their offensive and seize Tunis. They had largely addressed their sustainment and basing shortfalls, and, with Panzer Army Africa yet to close on the Mareth Line after ceding Tripoli on January 23, sensed an opportunity for decisive action.¹⁰⁶ The British First Army, however, had many unresolved issues. They had intermingled units that held disparate doctrines and lacked mutual trust at almost every level. Their center, the French XIX Corps, was under-strength, poorly equipped, and undergoing reconstitution. Yet, it was responsible for the four key passes through the Eastern Dorsale: Pichon and Fondouk in the north, and Faid and Rebaou in the south.¹⁰⁷ Behind this fragile center lie Tebessa, the nexus of their sustainment efforts and GLOCs in central Tunisia.

¹⁰³ Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, 111-113.

¹⁰⁴ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 124.

¹⁰⁵ Mark T. Calhoun, *Defeat at Kasserine: American Armor Doctrine, Training, and Battle Command in Northwest Africa, World War II*, School of Advanced Military Studies Monograph (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2003), 67-70.

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 88.

¹⁰⁷ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 241-245.

Despite these concerns, the 1st AD was naively optimistic. The division, with the exception of CCB, had seen little or no combat against German forces. They—and, to be fair, all Army forces in North Africa—were confident in themselves and oblivious to the challenges that they would soon face.¹⁰⁸ Many of these were not of the enemy's making. The 1st AD went into battle having failed to learn from CCB's limited experiences and anticipate the pending German offensives. It would soon rely on its ability to adapt to avert catastrophic failure.¹⁰⁹

The Battle of Faid Pass: January 30-February 2, 1943

The Axis forces were now compelled to act. The 5th Panzer Army at this point had grown to over 100,000 men. As it continued to secure Tunis, Panzer Army Africa's 70,000 men were delaying the pursuing British Eighth Army and withdrawing from Tripoli to the Mareth Line.¹¹⁰ With Tripoli in British hands, the Axis forces now relied solely on Tunis for their supplies. This made the GLOCs along the eastern Tunisian coastal plain key terrain.

In addition to understanding their own circumstances, the Axis also had a clear understanding of Allied dispositions and weaknesses. With their hard surfaced airfields in Tunis and Bizerte, their air forces could conduct reconnaissance missions during the rainy season while the Allied air forces largely could not.¹¹¹ This intelligence led the 5th Panzer Army to believe that the British First Army's most likely course of action was for the US II Corps to attack through Faid Pass to seize Sfax. A second possibility was an attack further south from Gafsa to

¹⁰⁸ Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1990), 228-230.

¹¹⁰ Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, 111, and Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 88 and 91.

¹¹¹ Betances-Ramirez, *The Battle of Tunisia: April-May 1943*, 10.

seize Gabes. II Corps success would simultaneously isolate the 5th Panzer Army and cut Panzer Army Africa's GLOCs.¹¹²

Preventing this would require preemptive action. With the British First Army massing for an offensive to their west and the British Eighth Army pursuing from their east, the Axis' relative position was weakening with time. This made an operational offensive in the near-term necessary. With the pending union of their two armies and a central position from which to operate, the Axis could achieve temporary local superiority against fragile French and dispersed American forces in central Tunisia, which made an operational offensive in late January possible.¹¹³

To set the conditions for such action, the Axis had to control the passes through the Eastern Dorsale, an extension of the Atlas Mountains that runs northeast into Tunis.¹¹⁴ The most important of these was Faid. The road through it was the most direct route between Sfax and Tebessa, and it was the pass most threatened by II Corps forces. 5th Panzer Army thus tasked the 21st Panzer Division on January 24 to seize Faid Pass and protect the Tunisian coastal roadway.¹¹⁵

21st Panzer Division attacked at 0430 on January 30. The reinforced division was formed into two task forces and a reserve. Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer, the main effort, attacked Faid from the east and Kampfgruppe Gruen attacked through Maizila Pass from the south. By mid-afternoon, they had seized both passes, the surrounding minor passes of Sidi Khalif and Ain

¹¹² Fifth Panzer Army, "Order for the Conduct of Operations in the South Sector, January 24, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 1.

¹¹³ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 6.

¹¹⁴ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 241-245.

¹¹⁵ Fifth Panzer Army, "Order for the Conduct of Operations in the South Sector, January 24, 1943," 1.

Rebaou, and Faid Village. They also forced defending French forces to withdraw to Sidi bou Zid.¹¹⁶ This action opened the Battle of Faid Pass.

Five hours after the 21st Panzer Division initiated its attack, LTG Anderson gave MG Fredendall vague guidance to restore the situation at Faid. With MG Ward in Gafsa supervising CCC's preparations for II Corps' directed attack against Maknassy, MG Fredendall bypassed the 1st AD headquarters and communicated directly with CCA headquarters—both of which were in Sbeitla.¹¹⁷ He ordered them to counterattack in order to enable the French to reestablish their defense of the pass. He also included two caveats: do not compromise the ability to defend Sbeitla, or reinforce the Fondouk and Pichon Passes.¹¹⁸ CCA, whose previous mission was simply to reinforce the latter two passes, thus received a commander's intent from two levels up with three competing end states.

CCA did not receive any intelligence with its new orders. MG Fredendall had little contact with the isolated French forces at Faid. He also did not task 1st AD or other II Corps assets to conduct reconnaissance east of Sbeitla prior to CCA's move. Though he did not know it, the II Corps CG had committed a fraction of CCA to counterattack against the bulk of the 21st Panzer Division. These CCA elements would execute their mission without any additional fires or effective aviation support from corps or division.¹¹⁹ They would also be 125 kilometers away from the closest supporting unit, nearly four times the thirty-two kilometer divisional frontage

¹¹⁶ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 390-391.

¹¹⁷ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 246.

¹¹⁸ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 391.

¹¹⁹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 107-108.

counseled by FM 17, *The Armored Division*.¹²⁰ Despite the situational uncertainty, II Corps did not put in place measures to prevent failure or exploit success.¹²¹

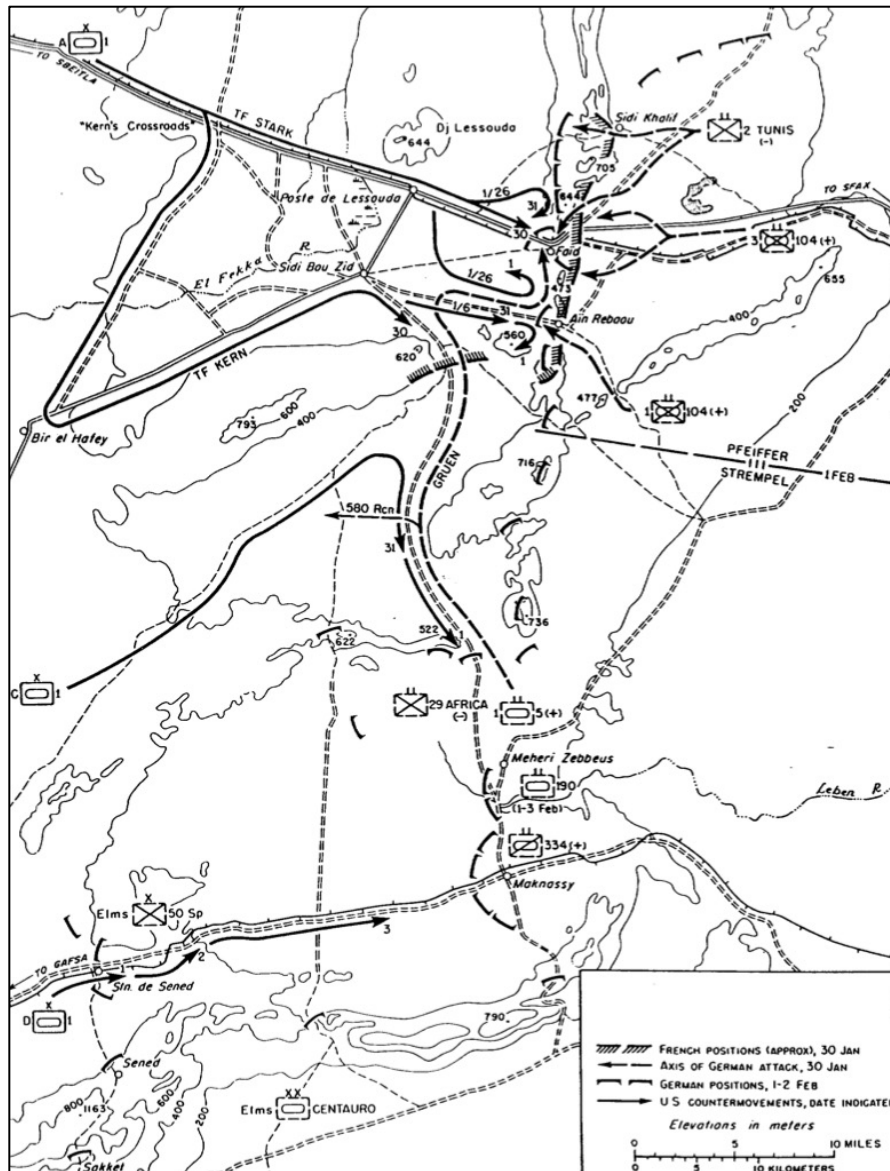


Figure 2. The Battle of Faid Pass. United States Army Center of Military History, *Kasserine Pass Battles: Maps and Sketches Appendix* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 7.

¹²⁰ FM 17, 1-24.

¹²¹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 107-108.

The commander of CCA, BG McQuillin, however, performed his own reconnaissance, tasking a battalion sized combined arms task force to conduct area reconnaissance in vicinity of Faid.¹²² At 1200, this task force mistakenly reported that Axis forces had already seized Faid and Ain Rebaou Passes.¹²³ BG McQuillin then dispatched a second task force to reinforce the first, but it was interdicted first by Axis, and then Allied aircraft, which mistook it for elements of Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer. At 1430, BG McQuillin decided to postpone his attack until the next morning, and halted CCA's two task forces halfway between Sidi bou Zid and Faid. During this delay, the Axis forces cleared the remaining French positions, and also emplaced and concealed anti-tank guns in expectation of an Allied counterattack.¹²⁴

After thirteen hours of planning, BG McQuillin issued his plan of attack at 0330 on January 31. Task Force (TF) Stark, the main effort, would occupy an assembly area just south of Djebel Lessouda and conduct a frontal attack to seize Faid Pass. On its right flank, TF Kern would occupy an assembly area in vicinity of Sidi bou Zid, penetrate the Ain Rebaou Pass, and envelop the Axis positions from the south. The attack would begin at 0700.¹²⁵ This left his subordinate formations three and a half hours to plan. There were no written orders or rehearsals. MG Ward, sidelined from this action by MG Fredendall, was physically present for, but did not contribute to the orders brief.¹²⁶

This essentially two-battalion frontal attack against the entirety of Kampfgruppe Pfeiffer's and the northern elements of Kampfgruppe Gruen's hastily prepared defenses did not achieve much success. It was met with coordinated and combined arms defense. The unexpected

¹²² Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 391.

¹²³ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 246.

¹²⁴ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 308-309.

¹²⁵ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 391-392.

¹²⁶ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 309.

intensity of Axis aerial, artillery, anti-tank, tank, and infantry fires induced confusion and indecision in the CCA task forces.¹²⁷ The only decision BG McQuillin made that day was to withdraw, reorganize, and attempt a second frontal attack the following afternoon. This attack met a similar fate. On February 2, CCA transitioned to an area defense just east of Sidi bou Zid and Djebel Ksaira, a hill five kilometers to the southwest of Ain Rebaou Pass.¹²⁸ In its first major action, CCA lost 210 men. The French Constantine Division suffered 900 casualties. While the Allies lost men, equipment, and mutual trust, the Axis gained two key passes and the initiative in central Tunisia.¹²⁹

Concurrent to his commitment of CCA in the north and in spite of French pleas for decisive action at Faid, MG Fredendall committed CCD in the south, believing that an attack there would draw Axis forces toward Maknassy and thereby relieve the pressure at Faid. He thus ordered CCD, with 1st AD Reconnaissance attached, to seize Station de Sened and the high ground six kilometers to its east.¹³⁰ CCD moved from Bou Chebka to Gafsa on January 30.¹³¹ 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment and 175th Field Artillery Battalion reinforced them on January 31, and, together, they moved to an attack position five kilometers west of Station de Sened. Axis forces observed their move and interdicted their tightly spaced, road bound columns

¹²⁷ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 246.

¹²⁸ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 394.

¹²⁹ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 246 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 311.

¹³⁰ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 312.

¹³¹ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 5-6.

twice with a total of twenty-four Axis aircraft.¹³² CCD suffered over fifty casualties and postponed their attack until the following morning.¹³³

CCD began its attack at 0916 on February 1.¹³⁴ Unbeknownst to them, the Axis had reinforced Station de Sened from Gabes during the night.¹³⁵ Despite this and additional Axis air attacks, CCD seized the village at 1730.¹³⁶ MG Fredendall, however, was not pleased with their pace. He ordered them to seize a defensible position on high ground six kilometers east of Station de Sened no later than 1000 on February 2. Once complete, CCD would occupy Gafsa and become II Corps' Reserve. MG Fredendall also placed BG Ray E. Porter in temporary command of CCD effective 1800 on February 1. MG Ward, unaware of this message, sent a contradictory order for CCD to detach the 168th Infantry Regiment and 175th Field Artillery Battalion to BG Porter's command after seizing the position east of Sened CCD. His order did not place CCD under BG Porter's command. After some deliberation, MG Fredendall's order stood with the caveat that BG Porter would determine when to detach 168th Infantry Regiment and 175th Field Artillery Battalion from, and relieve CCD of the Sened mission.¹³⁷

CCD renewed its attack under BG Porter at 0930 on February 2. Opposed, again, by a coordinated and combined arms defense and counterattack, CCD did not secure their objective until 1900.¹³⁸ BG Porter did not release CCD that evening as originally intended by the 1st AD CG, but instead, CCD continued to attack to seize Maknassy on February 3. Its attack culminated

¹³² Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 396.

¹³³ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 312-313.

¹³⁴ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

¹³⁵ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 396-397.

¹³⁶ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 314-315.

¹³⁷ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 397-398.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 398.

ten kilometers west of Maknassy.¹³⁹ At 1830, MG Fredendall ordered it to detach the 1st AD Reconnaissance and withdraw back to Bou Chebka. It completed its withdrawal and went into II Corps reserve on February 4.¹⁴⁰ The Division Reconnaissance, meanwhile, joined the 1st AD Reserve in Sbeitla.¹⁴¹ After four days of fighting, CCD had suffered 331 casualties. Its attack, rather than draw Axis forces at Faïd south, had drawn additional forces from Gabes north.¹⁴²

CCD's attack was not supposed to be executed in isolation. MG Fredendall's initial concept had called for a second combat command to attack Maknassy from the north. LTG Anderson's order to restore the situation at Faïd, however, forced him to shelve that more grandiose effort.¹⁴³ At 1300 on January 30, while Axis and Allied aircraft were interdicting CCA's movement east, MG Fredendall diverted CCC from its planned attack on Maknassy to support the counterattack at Faïd. MG Ward, collocated with CCA, supported the massing of 1st AD against Faïd and verbally confirmed this order.¹⁴⁴

CCC thus marched northeast from Gafsa immediately. When it was within twenty kilometers of Faïd, it received new orders. Believing that CCA's first counterattack on January 31 was succeeding, MG Fredendall had ordered CCC at 1600 to, "turn south and join in coordinated effort [with CCD]...on Maknassy."¹⁴⁵ This was his chance to follow-up his earlier success at Station de Sened. As CCD moved to its attack position under enemy air attack, CCC

¹³⁹ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 316.

¹⁴⁰ 1st Armored Division, "Field Order No. 5, February 3, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 2.

¹⁴¹ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 397.

¹⁴² Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 316.

¹⁴³ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 107.

¹⁴⁴ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

¹⁴⁵ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 312.

attacked Maizila Pass from the north at 1710 and seized its southern exits at a cost of sixty-six casualties. On February 1, it continued its attack south toward Maknassy. This posed a second dilemma for the Axis task force in the south, Kampfgruppe Stempel, for CCD at this point had initiated its attack on Station de Sened from the west. As CCC closed within twenty kilometers of Maknassy, however, MG Fredendall issued new orders for CCC to countermarch northwest to Hadjeb el Aioun, fifty-five kilometers north of Sidi bou Zid.¹⁴⁶ Just as CCA had before it, CCD would have to continue its mission independent of the greater II Corps effort.

MG Fredendall made this last change because of a second threat that developed further to the north. The day after the 21st Panzer Division's successful attack at Faid, the 10th Panzer Division attacked to seize Fondouk and the western exits of Pichon Pass. GEN Von Arnim eventually called off this attack, but the pressure that it placed on the French XIX Corps had caused LTG Anderson to dictate two II Corps actions.¹⁴⁷

The first was to order the cessation of the Station de Sened and Maknassy attacks as soon as practicable, and the, "maximum possible...[concentration of] a mobile reserve in the area of Hadjeb el Aioun."¹⁴⁸ MG Fredendall translated this order to the establishment of CCC as the 1st AD reserve in that location. Its priority of planning would be the reinforcement of French positions west of Pichon and Fondouk Passes. CCD, II Corps reserve, would occupy positions further to the rear and refit at Bou Chebka.¹⁴⁹ With the exception of its minor engagement at Maizila Pass, CCC's primary activity from January 30 to February 2 was logging 240 kilometers of road marches, contributing neither to CCA's counterattack at Faid nor CCD's attack against Maknassy.

¹⁴⁶ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 395-398.

¹⁴⁷ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 110-111.

¹⁴⁸ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 6.

¹⁴⁹ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 3.

LTG Anderson's second decision was to reposition CCB further to the north.¹⁵⁰ By February 2, it was 115 kilometers north of Sidi bou Zid in Maktar. It would remain outside the US II Corps area of operations and in British First Army's reserve for the remainder of this phase of the battle.¹⁵¹ As it mostly had since Operation Torch in November, CCB would remain detached from its parent division.

Though much had occurred during these four days, three constants during these actions were the micromanagement, dispersal, and unsynchronized employment of 1st AD forces. When the fighting subsided, MG Ward still did not control any forces outside of his Division Reserve. First Army held CCB in reserve at Maktar. II Corps held CCD in reserve at Bou Chebka, CCC in 1st AD—in name, but not in practice—reserve at Hadjeb el Aioun, and CCA in an area defense of Sidi bou Zid. The division was spread out over a 150 by 125 kilometer area. Two of its combat commands were reeling from unsuccessful, independent attacks against superior forces. Its other two had been kept out of the fight by higher headquarters' indecision. Given the demonstrated Axis threat along both XIX and II Corps' extended and weakly held fronts, there was a clear doctrinal need to adopt a mobile defense and form a decisive counterattack force.¹⁵² It was also clear that a concentrated 1st AD should be this force. GEN Eisenhower knew this, and insisted on it with LTG Anderson.¹⁵³ He and his subordinate commanders would have a short respite from Axis attacks to implement this guidance.

The actions of January 30 to February 2 had gone unfavorably for the Allies. First Army had lost two key passes in the Eastern Dorsale and further eroded trust between its national

¹⁵⁰ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 110-111.

¹⁵¹ 1st Armored Division, "Field Order No. 5, February 3, 1943," 1 and Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 394-395.

¹⁵² FM 100-5, 152-158.

¹⁵³ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 397.

forces. The Axis had protected their GLOCs, and enabled the linkup of Fifth Panzer Army and Panzer Army Africa. The opportunity to divide the Axis armies had turned into the risk of Allied division, both physical and psychological. The Axis had seized the initiative; the Allies just did not know it yet.¹⁵⁴

Preparations for the Battle of Kasserine Pass: February 3-13, 1943

The operational pause following the Battle of Faid Pass enabled the Allies to reassess the situation in Tunisia. GEN Eisenhower and LTG Anderson believed that Axis forces would transition to the defense. Though the Axis possessed a four to three advantage in infantry, the Allies possessed an eight to five advantage in artillery and four to three advantage in armor. The relative combat power of the two belligerents suggested that neither could currently mount a significant offensive. Signals intelligence reinforced this assessment by identifying Axis sustainment difficulties.¹⁵⁵ With the improving weather enabling greater numbers of sorties from their unimproved airfields and the build up of supplies enabling the deployment of additional forces into Tunisia, the Allied position was improving with time.¹⁵⁶ A decisive offensive to seize the eastern coastal road could wait until March.¹⁵⁷

The belief that the Axis would not attack—or would attack further north at Pichon Pass or Ousseltia Valley—coupled with the desire for a rapid penetration east led GEN Eisenhower and LTG Anderson to assume greater operational risk in central Tunisia.¹⁵⁸ II Corps would retain their positions between the Western and Eastern Dorsales. It would do so despite significant

¹⁵⁴ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 323-327.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 323-324.

¹⁵⁶ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 117-118.

¹⁵⁷ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 399.

¹⁵⁸ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 3.

vulnerabilities. II Corps had a tenuous hold of Fondouk Pass in the north and Gafsa in the south. The losses of Faid, Ain Rebaou, and Maizila Passes in its center created a real possibility for the envelopment of all forces east of Sbeitla.¹⁵⁹

This opportunity materialized coincident to the Axis need and possibility for offensive action in central Tunisia. Panzer Army Africa would complete its occupation of the Mareth Line on February 15 and the Axis would have limited time before it would have to face the simultaneous attacks by both the British First and Eighth Armies.¹⁶⁰ The Axis finalized their plans on February 9. The offensive would occur in phases in order to mass limited armor assets.¹⁶¹ It would begin with Fifth Panzer Army's seizure of Sidi bou Zid. Operation Fruehlingswind would mass the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions' 200 tanks against CCA.¹⁶² The Axis would follow this attack with a Panzer Army Africa-led attack to seize Gafsa. This second operation would mass the 21st Panzer Division and the Italian Centauro Divisions' 160 tanks against predominantly infantry forces. The US 1st AD, if massed, could oppose these thrusts with 294 medium and light tanks. These lines of operation would naturally lead Axis forces toward Sbeitla and Feriana.¹⁶³

The 1st AD, unfortunately, would not be massed. On February 3, II Corps tasked 1st AD to conduct a mobile defense to "contain the enemy in the Fondouk, Faid, and Maizila positions," a distance of eighty kilometers.¹⁶⁴ MG Fredendall specifically assigned responsibility for the

¹⁵⁹ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 399.

¹⁶⁰ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 241-251.

¹⁶¹ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 406.

¹⁶² Fifth Panzer Army, "Order for the Operation Fruehlingswind, February 8, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 1-2.

¹⁶³ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 406-410.

¹⁶⁴ 1st Armored Division, "Field Order No. 5, February 3, 1943," 1.

effort to MG Ward on February 6.¹⁶⁵ Later that same day and without explanation, MG Fredendall rescinded the assignment. MG Ward would not command his division's forces in the coming battle.¹⁶⁶

MG Fredendall was under great pressure from LTG Anderson not to cede any additional terrain.¹⁶⁷ In response to this and what he viewed as 1st AD's wanting performance during the Battle of Faid Pass, MG Fredendall issued a detailed directive on the defense of Sidi bou Zid on February 11.¹⁶⁸ This directive dictated CCA's concept of operations. An infantry battalion reinforced with an artillery battery and a tank company would retain Djebel Lessouda to the north. An infantry battalion would retain Djebel Ksaira to the east. 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry and the remainder of CCA's armor would serve as a reserve in Sidi bou Zid itself. To support CCA's defense, the bulk of 1st AD Reconnaissance would establish a counter-reconnaissance screen south of DJ Ksaira. The directive also stipulated foot patrols, the use of obstacles, and other details. Additionally, MG Fredendall ordered MG Ward to forward a copy of the directive to CCA and to report when its instructions had been carried out.¹⁶⁹ This would be the only formal guidance published by II Corps or 1st AD from February 4-18.¹⁷⁰

MG Fredendall had not only done MG Ward's job, but BG McQuillin's also. Worse, he had done so without personal knowledge of the situation or terrain in CCA's area of operations.

¹⁶⁵ II Corps, "Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943," 5.

¹⁶⁶ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 325.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 121-122.

¹⁶⁹ II Corps, "Defense of the Faid Position," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 1-2.

¹⁷⁰ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: February 3-18, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 5.

The 1st AD staff pleaded with the II Corps staff to rescind the directive or to at least visit the front to verify the feasibility of its execution.¹⁷¹ In the eyes of the 1st Armored Regimental Commander, COL Peter C. Hains, III, they were reminiscent of the static defenses of WWI. The plans may have looked good on a map, but failed to appreciate the time and space factors associated with armored combat.¹⁷² In the words of Martin Blumenson, a noted historian on the Battle of Kasserine Pass, “MG Fredendall’s islands of resistance [on Djebels Ksaira and Lessouda would be] marooned in a sea of enemy troops.”¹⁷³ It was no use. CCA would array its forces in accordance with MG Fredendall’s directive and take its orders during the battle from his headquarters in Tebessa also.¹⁷⁴

Commanders issued similar orders within CCA. After II Corps attached the 168th Infantry Regiment to CCA on February 7, the Regimental Commander, COL Thomas D. Drake, issued specific instructions for the dispositions of his platoons and sections on Djebel Ksaira.¹⁷⁵ On Djebel Lessouda, equally detailed orders resulted in the spreading of an infantry battalion over eight kilometers of unfavorable terrain.¹⁷⁶ These orders provided much in the way of friendly force dispositions, but little in the way of decision points. The positions on Djebels

¹⁷¹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 122-123.

¹⁷² Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 325.

¹⁷³ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 129.

¹⁷⁴ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 326-327.

¹⁷⁵ 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment, “Report of Operations: February 3-19, 1943,” in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 11-13.

¹⁷⁶ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 326.

Ksaira and Lessouda were to be held at all costs.¹⁷⁷ MG Fredendall's manner of writing orders permeated his subordinate organizations.

In addition to directing CCA's defenses and continuing to exercise operational control over CCC, II Corps detached all CCD elements with the exception of the 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion (minus A and B Companies) to the 26th RCT. This occurred in vicinity of Feriana from February 9-11. 1st AD attached the 701st to CCC and disbanded CCD on February 12. While this reestablished 1st AD headquarters' capacity to coordinate divisional fires, it did not translate into any actual battlefield capability. The Division Artillery could not contribute to the fight because all of 1st AD's artillery, minus two guns in the Division Reserve, was either attached to First Army, or under the operational control of II Corps.¹⁷⁸

While MG Fredendall took great pains to specify the dispositions and tasks of 1st AD, he did quite the opposite with other formations in his battle space. After the departure of CCC and CCD during the Battle of Faid Pass, elements of the French Constantine Division under MG Marie Joseph Edmond Welvert assumed responsibility for Feriana, Gafsa, and Tozeur further south. MG Fredendall, however, never assigned him or his subordinate elements a specific mission.¹⁷⁹ These elements included COL Stark's now-reinforced 26th RCT, 1st Ranger Battalion, a British armored car battalion, three French infantry battalions, and their supporting artillery and anti-tank formations. Presumably attached to II Corps, but bereft of guidance, the US and British formations were uncertain of their higher headquarters and the end state that they were to achieve.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ 1st Armored Regiment, "Report of Operations: February 13-17, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 1, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 21-22 and Hudel, "The Tank Battle at Sidi bou Zid," 21-22.

¹⁷⁸ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: February 3-18, 1943," 2-3.

¹⁷⁹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 126.

¹⁸⁰ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 246-247.

All these actions incensed MG Ward. The forcible divestiture of MG Ward's authority had only increased since November. "My division has been taken away from me...I have no command," he lamented. He was at a loss for what to do.¹⁸¹ He could not synchronize the actions of his combat commands as all were under the operational control of his higher headquarters. The only thing he could do was assist the subordinate elements in his immediate vicinity.

On February 13, MG Ward inspected CCA's positions at Sidi bou Zid, and on Djebels Ksaira and Lessouda. Afterwards, he reviewed CCA's concept of operations and decision points with BG McQuillin and his subordinate commanders. They considered seven possible counterattacks with CCA's reserve, 3rd Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment under the command of LTC Louis Hightower. When the discussions concluded, the force commanders were in accord on their plan of action.¹⁸² MG Ward would employ his Division Reserve, built around 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment (minus B Company), in concert with CCA's mobile forces, but it would provide little reinforcement as it was at half strength. Given the division's dispersed state and MG Fredendall's directive, the synchronization of these limited assets represented the maximum extent of subordinate initiative that 1st AD could achieve.¹⁸³

All of these issues did not escape the notice of GEN Eisenhower. He decided to visit the II Corps sector just before the Battle of Kasserine Pass. After meeting with LTG Anderson and MG Fredendall in Tebessa on the morning of February 13, GEN Eisenhower visited the 1st AD and CCA headquarters.¹⁸⁴ MG Ward, BG McQuillin, and BG Robinett all expressed concern

¹⁸¹ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 326.

¹⁸² 1st Armored Regiment, "Report of Operations: February 13-17, 1943," 1-2.

¹⁸³ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 413-416.

¹⁸⁴ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 124-127.

over the dispersed dispositions of CCA and 1st AD as a whole.¹⁸⁵ Given the recently heard tank noises and observed dismounting of an infantry regiment east of Faid Pass, and the identification of strong counter-reconnaissance and anti-tank defenses in vicinity of Maizila Pass, they—minus BG McQuillin—also felt that these dispersed forces would soon face a concentrated attack.¹⁸⁶ GEN Eisenhower, however, was a leader unlike MG Fredendall. Though this led him to actually visit formations as far forward as CCA, it also led him to not interfere in the affairs of his subordinates. There would be no overruling of MG Fredendall's orders.¹⁸⁷

Thus, on the eve of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, the 1st AD was in a worse position than it was just prior to the Battle of Faid Pass. II Corps now exercised operational control of 1st AD's Reconnaissance and CCA's subordinate units. First Army still retained CCB in reserve at Maktar opposite a 10th Panzer Division that had already shifted its armored and mechanized forces south to Faid Pass. II Corps still retained operational control of CCC in Hadjeb el Aioun to respond to the same attack as CCB, but under a different headquarters. II Corps had also siphoned CCD's combat power to strengthen elements protecting 1st AD's southern flank, but did not provide those forces any guidance. Instead of dealing with a single weak flank to its north, 1st AD would now contend with a second weak flank to its south. Most importantly, it would also now face the better part of three Axis divisions in a committed offensive instead of just one.

To counter this greater threat, the 1st AD CG would control a battalion-sized reserve in Sbeitla, but no other forces. He would not be able make decisions as the battle unfolded. Executing branch plans to mass his combat commands and division artillery in Sidi bou Zid, or respond to Axis attacks against his easily exposed flanks was infeasible. Sequels in case of

¹⁸⁵ Calhoun, *Defeat at Kasserine: American Armor Doctrine, Training, and Battle Command in Northwest Africa, World War II*, 65.

¹⁸⁶ Hudel, "The Tank Battle at Sidi bou Zid," 21-22.

¹⁸⁷ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 128.

unexpected success or catastrophic failure were also beyond his purview. His combat commands would rely on the timely and sound decisions of an underground corps commander 180 kilometers to the rear. Fragmented, dispersed, and without an empowered division commander, the 1st AD was far from the concentrated mobile striking force that GEN Eisenhower had intended.¹⁸⁸ The stage was set for a second piecemeal commitment of its formations. The operational risk associated with this repeat performance, unfortunately, was markedly larger.

The Battle of Kasserine Pass: February 14-25, 1943

The Axis had their initial plan. If successful, it would carry them to Sbeitla and Feriana. Achieving operational success, however, would require them to go much further quickly. To do so, they would have to aggressively exploit success and cross the Western Dorsale.

The two major passes through it were Sbiba in the north and Kasserine in the south. Penetrating either could potentially defeat the US II Corps as much of its remaining forces would be isolated behind Axis lines. Attacking north through Sbiba toward Le Kef in a shallow envelopment would enable the Axis to isolate much of what was left of the French XIX Corps. It would alleviate the immediate threat against Tunis, but leave the British First Army with the basing and sustainment necessary to reconstitute its forces.

Attacking west through Kasserine toward Tebessa in a deep envelopment, on the hand, would enable the Axis to not only isolate the French XIX Corps, but turn the British V Corps further north as well. The seizure of Allied supplies in Tebessa would have the additional benefit of extending the operational reach of Axis forces and allow further exploitation into the British First Army's rear in Algeria. With no defensible terrain between Tebessa and Constantine, the entire British First Army would be compelled to withdraw.

¹⁸⁸ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 397.

This would provide the Axis the time and space to leverage their central position in Tunisia, and mass against the British Eighth Army as it advanced on the Mareth Line in the east.¹⁸⁹ A subsequent tactical victory there would secure the Axis foothold in North Africa for at least several months at the operational level, and delay the Allied opening of a second front in Europe for even longer at the strategic level. Given their struggles on the European Eastern Front, Axis victory at Kasserine could have profound implications during a decisive period of the war.

Though outnumbered overall in North Africa, the Axis were able to achieve swift victories in their initial advances and nearly achieved their operational objectives. After opening their offensive on February 14, they massed superior combat power at decisive points between Faid and Tebessa, and threatened Allied critical vulnerabilities—headquarters, airfields, and forward supply depots—faster than they could displace toward and beyond Tebessa. The initial disparity in the two belligerents' abilities to exercise disciplined initiative nearly led to 1st AD's paralysis and loss of cohesion. Where the Allies introduced additional friction and stymied subordinate initiative, the Axis enabled its subordinates to create and exploit opportunities.¹⁹⁰

After nine days of fighting, the Axis forced the 1st AD and II Corps to withdraw all the way back to Thala and Tebessa. There, a consolidated and reinforced 1st AD under MG Ward, and without MG Fredendall's interference, finally blocked the Axis main effort.¹⁹¹ Unable to achieve his ultimate objectives before the British Eighth Army attacked the Mareth Line in strength, LTG Rommel ordered his forces to withdraw to the Eastern Dorsale on February 22.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 76-80.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 115-271.

¹⁹¹ Hornaday, *The Battle of Kasserine Pass: February 14-23, 1943*, 22 and Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 94-95.

¹⁹² Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 260.

The conditions for these critical events, particularly the early US defeats, were set well prior the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Findings

In the months leading up to the Battle of Faid Pass, the II Corps CG had set a precedence of circumventing 1st AD headquarters, and issuing detailed orders to and dispersing its subordinate formations across central Tunisia.¹⁹³ His interference and mismanagement was born of a lack of mutual trust with 1st AD.¹⁹⁴ With an out-of-touch corps, out-of-the loop division, and extended front, favorable conditions did not exist for the creation of shared understanding, issuance of mission orders, and exercise of disciplined initiative. This contributed to 1st AD's defeat during the Battle of Faid Pass and set conditions for further defeats in the initial days of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Mutual trust

1st AD did not establish mutual trust with the II Corps CG prior to the Battle of Faid Pass. Despite their early identification for Operation Torch, they had little time to do so as they did not train together during the Louisiana and Carolina Maneuvers of 1941, and did not conduct any division or corps exercises during their deployment to Northern Ireland in mid-1942.¹⁹⁵ 1st AD, as a whole, also did not operate under II Corps in North Africa until January 18, 1943, less than two weeks prior to the Battle of Faid Pass.¹⁹⁶ The only 1st AD element that had significant interaction

¹⁹³ Betances-Ramirez, *The Battle of Tunisia: April-May 1943*, 10.

¹⁹⁴ Case, "The Exigency for Mission Command: A Comparison of World War II Command Cultures," 3.

¹⁹⁵ *Training in the Ground Army: 1942-1945*, 1 and Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 237.

¹⁹⁶ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 305 and Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 86.

with MG Fredendall before this point was CCB. This interaction, however, was limited to the initial nineteen days of Center Task Force's operations in Algeria, all but three of which did not involve combat.¹⁹⁷ 1st AD and II Corps did not get to build shared confidence over time.

This lack of time gave 1st AD and MG Fredendall few opportunities to demonstrate their competence to each other. 1st AD, for its part, offered only three data points to the II Corps CG. The first two were CCB's actions during the Battles of El Gueussa Heights and Ousseltia Valley. The former resulted in the loss of three-fourths of its combat power, a mark the latter could not fully erase.¹⁹⁸ The third data point was CCC's successful but insignificant raid against Station de Sened.¹⁹⁹ The most outstanding of these was CCB's initial defeat, and this stigma stayed with 1st AD into the Battle of Faid Pass.²⁰⁰

During this same period, MG Fredendall—and the greater Allied leadership—gave 1st AD little reason to believe in his competence. CCB saw ten task organization changes, most between non-US commands.²⁰¹ It also experienced the confusing receipt of orders from both the French XIX Corps and US II Corps during the Battle of Ousseltia Valley.²⁰² When it finally reached the front, 1st AD found itself mixed in with an amalgamation of French and US units without clearly defined areas of operation or responsibilities.²⁰³ It also endured, against doctrine, the prolonged detachment of its most experienced formation, CCB, and the stripping of units and staff to form two

¹⁹⁷ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 70-75, 83, 86, and 89.

¹⁹⁸ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 208, 234-235, and 304-305.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 306-307.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 258-261.

²⁰¹ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 70-75, 83, 86, and 89.

²⁰² Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 380-381 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 304-305.

²⁰³ Myrick, "Field Artillery Observer Report," 11.

additional combat commands.²⁰⁴ II Corps' direct assignment of CCC to the Station de Sened raid only added to the list of 1st AD's negative experiences.²⁰⁵ These interactions led 1st AD and its subordinate formations to question whether their higher headquarters had a handle on the situation.

On top of its lack of confidence in the competence of its higher headquarters, 1st AD also doubted MG Fredendall's and II Corps willingness to share in its dangers. MG Fredendall committed substantial engineer assets to build an underground headquarters 180 kilometers to the rear. He also made infrequent visits to his subordinates at the front.²⁰⁶ The physical separation and lack of presence gave 1st AD soldiers little sense of connection with their corps commander.

Thus, prior to the Battle of Faid Pass, neither 1st AD nor II Corps had demonstrated competence in the eyes of the other. MG Fredendall had also exhibited an unwillingness to share his frontline soldiers' dangers. These factors produced a shared confidence deficiency, a lack of mutual trust, between the two organizations. Mutual trust is the foundation of mission command, and, without it, the distribution of authority and initiative between II Corps and 1st AD became markedly skewed.

Shared understanding

Consequently, 1st AD did not create shared understanding with the II Corps CG. The lack of mutual trust prevented the open sharing, interpretation, and debate of knowledge.²⁰⁷ II Corps'

²⁰⁴ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 388 and 394-395 and Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 70-75, 83, 86, and 88-89. See also footnote no. 71.

²⁰⁵ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 306-307.

²⁰⁶ Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, 111-113 and Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 124.

²⁰⁷ Weick, "Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking," 412.

distance from and MG Fredendall's unwillingness to visit the front multiplied this effect.²⁰⁸ This made regular and in-person dialogue between the two, the hallmark of a functioning collaborative network, rare occurrences. The result was an inability to create shared understanding of purposes, problems, and approaches during and immediately following the Battle of Faid Pass.²⁰⁹

1st AD's formations did not share a common purpose during the Battle of Faid Pass because they did not know which higher commander's purpose they were trying to achieve. In the opinion of one 1st AD officer, "The generals of three nations had borrowed, divided, and commanded one another's troops until the troops were never quite certain who was commanding them."²¹⁰ This confusion pervaded throughout the division. During its counterattack against Faid, CCA was supervised in-person by MG Ward, but took orders directly from MG Fredendall.²¹¹ CCC received an order from MG Ward to support this counterattack, but then received an order from MG Fredendall less than three hours later to support CCD's attack against Maknassy.²¹² In the south, CCD not only received contradictory orders from MG Ward and MG Fredendall, but also contended with the question of whether it fell under the command of BG Porter.²¹³ In their first action as a division, the three combat commands of 1st AD struggled to untangle the divergent

²⁰⁸ Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, 111-113; Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 124; and Calhoun, *Defeat at Kasserine: American Armor Doctrine, Training, and Battle Command in Northwest Africa, World War II*, 67-70.

²⁰⁹ ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

²¹⁰ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 324.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 309.

²¹² 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2.

²¹³ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 397-398.

purposes of three separate headquarters. The result was their, and particularly CCC's, indecisive employment during the Battle of Faid Pass.²¹⁴

The lack of shared understanding continued after the Battle of Faid Pass as well. Beyond the issues of command relationships, 1st AD and II Corps held conflicting views of the problems they faced and the approaches to solving them. Given their extended frontage and advantage in armor, MG Ward and his subordinate commanders believed that they should concentrate the division and conduct a mobile defense. This would necessarily cede terrain during the initial phases of an enemy attack.²¹⁵ MG Fredendall, on the other hand, thought that ceding additional terrain was the principal problem, and aligned combat commands with threatened avenues of approach.²¹⁶ This violation of doctrine dispersed the division and prevented mutual support between combat commands.²¹⁷ The 1st AD's leadership highlighted this difference during their meeting with GEN Eisenhower the day before the Battle of Kasserine Pass.²¹⁸ Save an intervention by an unwilling supreme Allied commander, 1st AD would enter its second battle without shared understanding of the actions necessary to defeat a concerted Axis offensive.²¹⁹

The lack of mutual trust between 1st AD and II Corps hindered their ability to create shared understanding. As a result, "Many of the men [would go] through the Tunisian campaign without

²¹⁴ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2; Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 395-398; Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 70-75, 83, 86, and 89; and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 312.

²¹⁵ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: January 27-February 3, 1943," 2 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 305.

²¹⁶ Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 395-398 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 325.

²¹⁷ FM 17, 1-24.

²¹⁸ Calhoun, *Defeat at Kasserine: American Armor Doctrine, Training, and Battle Command in Northwest Africa, World War II*, 65.

²¹⁹ Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 128.

knowing exactly where they were or where they had been.” They would also not know “how [their units’ missions] fit into the big picture.²²⁰ This unfortunate condition thickened the fog of war and inhibited unity of effort in II Corps’ area of operations.²²¹

Mission orders

The lack of mutual trust also prevented the use of mission orders. MG Fredendall clearly did not trust MG Ward.²²² This led him to issue detailed guidance and retain authorities at his level. It also caused him to circumvent consistently 1st AD headquarters and issue orders directly to its subordinate formations. As such, the II Corps CG exercised de facto operational control over the combat commands. MG Fredendall did this even if MG Ward or the 1st AD headquarters was collocated with the combat command being tasked.²²³ This occurred both during and after the Battle of Faid Pass.

The most blatant example of this was the revoking of MG Ward’s responsibility for the defense of Sidi bou Zid on February 6 and issuing of the directive, “Defense of Faid Position,” on February 11.²²⁴ This order devoted all forty-eight of its lines to specific guidance on CCA’s scheme of defense and adjacent unit coordinations. Despite its level of detail, it neither provided priorities or additional resources for its many tasks, nor explained how CCA’s mission fit into II

²²⁰ Army Ground Forces Cavalry School, “Operations of a Reconnaissance Company in Tunisia,” in *Cavalry Reconnaissance*, no. 7 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1953), 3

²²¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117-121.

²²² Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier*, 119.

²²³ Blumenson, “Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943,” 246.

²²⁴ II Corps, “Report of Operations: 1 January-15 March 1943,” 5 and Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 325.

Corps' greater concept of operations. Forwarded directly to CCA, it was about as far from a mission order as one could make it.²²⁵

The directive also had some unfortunate second order effects. As it blatantly omitted 1st AD from the operations process, MG Ward would not issue another formal order prior to the Battle of Kasserine Pass.²²⁶ It also compelled leaders within CCA to dictate similar instructions to their subordinates. These poorly conceived and centrally determined courses of action were so specific that they removed the need for subordinate units, even several levels down, to conduct detailed planning.²²⁷ As a result of this one directive, 1st AD and nearly the whole of CCA ceased to use mission orders for the remainder of the preparatory phase of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

Rather than propagate shared understanding and maximize subordinate initiative, MG Fredendall's orders imposed his misunderstandings on his subordinates and inhibited their freedom of action. His orders were not only the antithesis of mission orders, but they prevented others from using mission orders as well. This outcome arose directly from his mistrust of MG Ward and 1st AD.

Disciplined initiative

In addition to impeding the creation of shared understanding and use of mission orders, the lack of mutual trust also obstructed the exercise of disciplined initiative. It precluded it at both the division and combat command levels during and after the Battle of Faïd Pass. This led to 1st AD's first major defeat, and constrained initiative to small-unit actions in vicinity of Sidi bou Zid during the opening phases of the Battle of Kasserine Pass.

²²⁵ II Corps, "Defense of the Faïd Position," 1-2.

²²⁶ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: February 3-18, 1943," 5.

²²⁷ 2nd Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment, "Report of Operations: February 3-19, 1943," 11-13.

MG Ward understood that he did not have MG Fredendall's confidence. Though the manner in which his superior exercised authority over his division infuriated him, MG Ward could not even take initiative out of spite. He had no forces outside of his battalion-sized reserve and served no function other than to relay MG Fredendall's orders.²²⁸ Without the resources and authorities that came with mutual trust, MG Ward was unable to exercise initiative at the division level.

The combat commands were no better off. MG Fredendall's positioning of combat commands outside of mutual supporting distance and robbing of 1st AD's Artillery Headquarters limited rapid, distributed decision-making and coordination to localized actions. With no prospect of reinforcement from adjacent or divisional units, the combat commands were left to fight independent engagements. These engagements provided subordinate battalions, and, in some cases, regiments, opportunities to take disciplined initiative in support of one another, but offered few prospects for the next higher echelon of command.²²⁹ MG Fredendall's operational control of 1st AD's subordinate units—born of mistrust—thus not only trespassed upon the province of MG Ward, but that of the combat command commanders as well.²³⁰

As a result, the Battle of Faid Pass produced no examples at the division or combat command level of the execution of decision points in the absence of communications with II Corps. It also produced no examples at the same echelons of the disregarding of assigned tasks to achieve MG Fredendall's intent. Combined with an incoherent II Corps concept of operations, the inability to execute disciplined initiative resulted in the 1st AD's never achieving local superiority against

²²⁸ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 326.

²²⁹ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: February 3-18, 1943," 2-3 and Blumenson, *Kasserine Pass*, 107-108.

²³⁰ FM 100-5, 31.

the 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions. This occurred despite 1st AD's three-to-two overall advantage in armor.²³¹

The only example of the preparation of decision points at these echelons occurred after the Battle of Faid Pass. On February 13, MG Ward and the CCA leadership developed seven decision points for the commitment of CCA's reserve at Sidi bou Zid and 1st AD's reserve at Sbeitla. Though this empowered CCA and its subordinate formations to develop situations and create opportunities in the absence of relevant orders, it did not enable CCA or 1st AD to exploit aggressively such opportunities. With less than three battalions between the two reserve forces, they were not able to contain two massed panzer divisions on the open plains surrounding Sidi bou Zid.²³² Unlike the US 1st Infantry Division and French XIX Corps further north, there would not be an attempt to conduct decision point rehearsals at the greater 1st AD or II Corps level.²³³ The inability to exercise disciplined initiative across the breadth of the division would prevent a collective response of sufficient scale to defeat a determined Axis offensive.

The absence of mutual trust between 1st AD and II Corps inhibited disciplined initiative during and after the Battle of Faid Pass. This placed 1st AD in a precarious position on the eve of renewed Axis action. Without continuous, detailed direction from II Corps, the combat commands of 1st AD would cease to be a cohesive fighting force.²³⁴ The cost of this top-down imposed form of cohesion was increased inertia and friction at all levels.²³⁵ The division's cohesion was thus exceptionally fragile to communications disruptions, unanticipated enemy actions, and unfavorable

²³¹ Fifth Panzer Army, "Order for the Operation Fruehlingwind, February 8, 1943," 1-2 and Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 406-410.

²³² 1st Armored Regiment, "Report of Operations: February 13-17, 1943," 1-2.

²³³ Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, 324.

²³⁴ Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1, *Warfighting* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997), 72-74.

²³⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117-121.

operational tempo discrepancies. It would experience all three stressors during the Battle of Kasserine Pass.²³⁶

Summary

Mutual trust is the foundational element of mission command. Creating shared understanding, using mission orders, and exercising disciplined initiative all rely on the existence of shared confidence within an organization. The 1st AD was unable to establish this shared confidence prior to the Battle of Faid Pass, and was thus unable to apply the remaining principles of mission command during and immediately after it. These conditions placed 1st AD at a marked disadvantage on February 14, 1943. Despite its losses, it had yet to demonstrate the ability to learn, anticipate, or adapt to the dynamic battlefields of North Africa.²³⁷ The Battle of Kasserine Pass would soon change that, and compel 1st AD and II Corps to reframe their approaches to mission command.

Conclusion

The notion that mutual trust is essential to mission command is not revolutionary. This historical study's findings, however, do carry some implications that are relevant to today's Army. They also suggest several areas that warrant additional future study.

Implications of findings

Mission command will only grow in importance. The environmental conditions that compelled the US Army to renew its focus on mission command will not only persist, but also

²³⁶ Nassim N. Taleb, *Antifragile: Things that Gain from Disorder* (New York, NY: Random House Trade, 2012), 8-13.

²³⁷ Cohen, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*, 228-230.

become increasingly dominant in the twenty-first century.²³⁸ The need to maximize the asymmetric advantage that is the intellectual capital resident in Army formations through the practice of mission command will, therefore, only increase with time.²³⁹ Additionally, the reemergence of assertive, near-peer, nation-state actors will make the potential costs of prosecuting wars outside this preferred style of command considerably greater than they have been in post-Cold War era.²⁴⁰ Even with these risks, Army forces will have less time to deploy if they are to serve as effective deterrents or rapidly seize the initiative in still developing conflicts.²⁴¹ These factors combine to place a premium on the ability to exercise mission command from the outset of combat operations. Given its status as a foundational element of mission command and requirement to be built over time, mutual trust between members of a deploying team should thus exist prior to the outbreak of hostilities.²⁴² Establishing such shared confidence beforehand will help units succeed in complex environments by making them less dependent on any one individual, commander or otherwise.²⁴³ Failing to do so, on the other hand, may lead units toward a second Faid or Kasserine Pass.

Relevance

The need to establish mutual trust before deployments applies not just to practitioners of mission command in the US Army, but to all members of the joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) team. The importance of building shared confidence across this broader

²³⁸ Martinage, *Toward a New Offset Strategy: Exploiting US Long-Term Advantages to Restore US Global Power Projection Capability*.

²³⁹ Daniel Sukman, "Asymmetric Offsets."

²⁴⁰ Obama, *National Security Strategy*, i.

²⁴¹ Martinage, *Toward a New Offset Strategy: Exploiting US Long-Term Advantages to Restore US Global Power Projection Capability*.

²⁴² ADRP 6-0, 1-1 to 1-2 and 2-1 to 2-5.

²⁴³ Yaneer Bar-Yam, *Making Things Work: Solving Complex Problems in a Complex World* (Cambridge, MA: New England Complex Systems Institute, 2004), 66-67.

collective will most likely grow as limited wars continue to dominate global conflict. This poses significant challenges for Army forces, particularly when it comes to maintaining regular interactions with non-US military organizations.²⁴⁴ There is room for improvement, however, even within the more limited scope of the US Army. An area that could serve as an initial point of focus could be increasing interactions between Regular Army, National Guard, and Reserve above-the-line forces, combat formations identified for employment as part of operation or contingency plans, and below-the-line forces, combat support and service support forces required to support above-the-line forces. This would build upon the routine interactions of Regular Army above-the-line forces that result from resourced training exercises, and begin to cultivate greater shared confidence across the broader Army team.²⁴⁵

Recommendations for future study

The implications and relevance of this study's findings naturally point to the subsequent study of how to increase National Guard and Reserve above-the-line, and below-the-line force participation in already resourced training events. This could be expanded to include other services in tactical-level exercises. Given 1st AD's difficulties in coordinating close air support during the Battles of Faid and Kasserine Pass, priority should be given to the inclusion of US Air Force assets in division and below training.²⁴⁶

A second recommended area of future study is the use of prescriptive measures to enable the exercise of mission command. Prior to the Battle of Kasserine Pass, MG Ward focused on

²⁴⁴ "Developing U.S. Army Officers' Capabilities for Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational Environments," RAND Arroyo Center, 2011, accessed March 23, 2017, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/2011/RAND_RB9631.pdf.

²⁴⁵ Army Regulation (AR) 71-11, *Total Army Analysis* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-2.

²⁴⁶ Rife, "Kasserine Pass and the Proper Application of Airpower," 1.

rehearsing decision points with the leaders of CCA.²⁴⁷ He continued this focus during the actual battle. 1st AD's orders between February 19-24, 1943 devote the majority of their text to the specification of decision points.²⁴⁸ Though often viewed as antithetical to mission command, prescriptive measures such as decision point, vice synchronization, focused orders and rehearsals may help newly indoctrinated soldiers.²⁴⁹ Without experience to draw upon, such individuals may more readily comprehend and apply detailed procedures. This may also be true for experienced leaders who are not predisposed to execute mission command. For this demographic, science may come more naturally than art. Explicitly defining how this sizeable element of the total force can apply the principles of mission command in planning and decision-making processes may, at the macro level, help set the conditions for the successful execution of mission command.²⁵⁰

Though a low tactical application, a final recommended area of future study is the employment of battalion and company mortars in a manner akin to the use of division artillery assets. In one of the decisive points of the Battle of Kasserine Pass, the US 9th Infantry Division Artillery massed three artillery battalions and two cannon companies to defeat the 10th Panzer Division's attack to seize Thala.²⁵¹ The battalion and company mortars of Stryker and infantry brigade combat teams, if coordinated and provided adequate communications systems, could

²⁴⁷ 1st Armored Regiment, "Report of Operations: February 13-17, 1943," 1-2.

²⁴⁸ 1st Armored Division, "Report of Operations: February 19-25, 1943," in *Kasserine Pass Battles*, vol. 1, part 2, *Readings*, ed. United States Army Center for Military History (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1995), 1-9.

²⁴⁹ Michael Flynn and Chuck Schrankel, "Applying Mission Command through the Operations Process," *Military Review* (March 2013): 26-31, accessed December 4, 2016, <http://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/mccoe/ApplyingMissionCommandThroughTheOperationsProcess.pdf>.

²⁵⁰ Antoine Henri Jomini, "The Art of War," in *Roots of Strategy*, Book 2, ed. J.D. Hittle (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1987), 769.

²⁵¹ Blumenson, "Kasserine Pass, January 30-February 22, 1943," 259.

potentially mass ten mortar systems on up to four separate targets in support of the battalion main effort.

Summary

Applying the lens of mission command to the 1st AD's actions during Battle of Faid Pass provided many unique insights. Foremost of these was the need to establish mutual trust in times of peace to enable early success in war. Given the US's continuing leadership role in maintaining the international security order, the US Army should seek to build greater shared confidence across the JIIM team. Doing so will ensure not only the domination of the land domain in complex future conflicts, but the attainment of broader national policy aims as well.

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