PM

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War's Scars Heal Quickly in North Africa

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PM Exclusive

SOMEWHERE IN NORTH AFRICA, Apr. 21 (Delayed).—Kasserine Pass, a defile in which U. S. troops suffered severe casualties and learned the hardest lessons of their war in North Africa, is just another peaceful slit between the hills now. Salvage crews have cleaned it up, and there is almost nothing there to suggest that it was once a place where men killed each other.

It is the same with other celebrated battle fields of the North African campaign. Outside of the little corner of Tunisia where the fight still goes on, the war already seems remote.

Just outside of Gafsa I saw Arabs moving into a city left by Americans who had wanted a better fox hole. At the Gafsa Country Club, which was alternately headquarters for Italian officers and for the American press, the swimming pool is full of cool salt water.

On the highway to Feriana, the strip of road Americans were calling Stuka Alley only a few weeks ago, there is only one bomb crater left that is big enough to require a detour. The others have been fully or partially repaired.

Like Home

Going north toward the new front in a small caravan of jeeps and trucks was like a camping trip in the U. S. A. Some of the country we've passed through reminded me of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The weather in Northern Tunisia now is like early Fall in New York—warm, but not hot, by day and cool, but not cold, by night. It won't get really hot for another three or four weeks.

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North Africa

Kasserine Pass

Some of this territory was occupied so recently by the Germans that the children addressed us as "Kamerad" in begging for candy and cigarets. Arab farmers selling eggs along the roadsides didn't seem to know the difference either, our helmets looking about like the Germans.

Buying a dozen eggs from most country Arabs requires 12 separate and distinct transactions. They insist upon selling them one at a time and haggling over each egg. They want tea, coffee, cigarets or, in a pinch, money as a last resort. One farmer, upon whom I had tried to pass francs for eggs, pulled out a roll of francs and offered me a fancy cash price for cigarets.

Esprit Good

Allied forces were on the move along the highways—excellent hard roads most of them—back of the new line boxing off the Tunis-Bizerte corner. Domination of the air makes it possible for most of these routes to be traveled by day as well as by night.

The personnel of the three Allied Armies fraternize freely and easily. Americans are accepting the tea habit from Tommies and the British are chewing gum. The only friction I found between British and Americans in the field was caused by the insistence of one British tank crew on stopping at a twist in a snake-like mountain road to brew up a pot of tea, thus delaying a Jeep.

Except on the sides where the plain of Tunis runs down into fairly flat country already occupied by the British 8th Army, the Tunisian corner held by Rommel is protected by high hills through which there are only a few precarious corridors. As at Kasserine, these corridors will not be highways for attacking troops until the ridges above them are cleared of German troops.

Behind this front, one got the impression that the Allied forces and their commanders were no longer experimenting or improvising, but that this time there would be no slip and the strategic plan, whatever its nature, would be carried through systematically.

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