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|  | |  |  | | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | [Open in app](https://open.substack.com/pub/ww2today/p/the-mareth-line-battle-hots-up?utm_source=email&redirect=app-store) or [online](https://substack..NrS5zSX71TuokaQ_YBcCkgOa9uvNv75YbPU6hTHOO8k?) | |   [**The Mareth Line battle hots up**](https://substack.com/app-link/post?publication_id=363095&post_id=108795065&utm_source=post-email-title&isFreemail=false&token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjo0MDAxNDI4NiwicG9zdF9pZCI6MTA4Nzk1MDY1LCJpYXQiOjE2NzkzODIxNjYsImV4cCI6MTY4MTk3NDE2NiwiaXNzIjoicHViLTM2MzA5NSIsInN1YiI6InBvc3QtcmVhY3Rpb24ifQ.WSjNEW1oXnXnc_pyG2cWBMuPvYkhA27epV-PWId4f0g)  21st March 1943: As the British Eighth Army attacks the German positions, a flanking move into the desert is discovered by the Luftwaffe   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | MAR 21 |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | | | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | | --- | |  | | | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | [SAVE](https://substack.com/app-link/post?publication_id=363095&post_id=108795065&utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email&action=save&triggerSave=true&token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjo0MDAxNDI4NiwicG9zdF9pZCI6MTA4Nzk1MDY1LCJpYXQiOjE2NzkzODIxNjYsImV4cCI6MTY4MTk3NDE2NiwiaXNzIjoicHViLTM2MzA5NSIsInN1YiI6InNhdmUtcG9zdCJ9.5QFsjgbo4zL4HO_zzLnx5C-eDbQ-7T19_6kWPQhOSwo" \t "_blank) | |  | |  | | --- | | [▷  LISTEN](https://open.substack.com/pub/ww2today/p/the-mareth-line-battle-hots-up?utm_source=email-ufi&play_audio=true&token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkIjo0MDAxNDI4NiwicG9zdF9pZCI6MTA4Nzk1MDY1LCJpYXQiOjE2NzkzODIxNjYsImV4cCI6MTY4MTk3NDE2NiwiaXNzIjoicHViLTM2MzA5NSIsInN1YiI6InBvc3QtcmVhY3Rpb24ifQ.WSjNEW1oXnXnc_pyG2cWBMuPvYkhA27epV-PWId4f0g" \t "_blank) | | | | | | |  | | | |  |  |  |   'BOMBS ON THE MARETH LINE: ALLIED AIR FORCES' "SHUTTLE SERVICE" From the beginning of the air offensive against the Mareth Line on March 19, the Allies Air Forces have been striking at airfields, transport and enemy positions every day. the attacks made by light bombers operating from forward bases in Tripolitania and Tunisia have already reached an intensity greater than that which preceded the El Alamein offensive. Mitchell B-25 Bombers of the USAAF and Baltimore bombers of the South African Air Force flying together in formation on their way to attack Rommel's positions in North Africa   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   The opening of the night barrage by the heavy guns of the 8th Army.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   r the battle ‘Infantry demonstrate how they used ladders to scale the sides of Wadi Zigzuoa on the Mareth line.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   Exhausted British troops sleep in a trench after fierce night fighting in the Mareth Line.  In Tunisia as a frontal assault was being made on the Mareth Line, a strong force was makings it’s way across the desert to outflank the German positions much further north.  *As the poor devil, apparently on fire, hurtled earthwards and thumped into the ground to burst near us, we all cheered, and cheered again as the bomber with the rest of the crew inside also hit the ground, exploded into flame and in a single ‘whoosh’ incinerated the crew.*  *…*  *We were not ghouls because we laughed and cheered; we had been on the receiving end from the Luftwaffe for a very long time.*  Weeks earlier the Long Range Desert Group had made a covert reconnaissance to check that the route was viable. Now the New Zealand Division, re-inforced with British troops to form the 'New Zealand Corps' made the trip in two long overnight marches, staying camoufaged during the day. Their objective was a pass between the mountains known as the Tebaga Gap. A surprise attack here would force them through to the German rear lines.  New Zealander John Blythe¹ was a radio operator with an artillery unit:  [W]e got into real desert with long sandy slopes; we were entering the Sahara. Absolute secrecy was essential; no dust clouds were wanted now. We put the camouflage nets over ourselves at every stop and faced north to provide as little shadow as possible, moving only at night. These measures must have been successful because we encountered no aircraft.  We were approaching Tebaga Gap when a flight of American fighters attacked H Section, killing one of our signalmen. It wasn't the first time they had done this and we were a bit anti-American at this time. H Section seemed an unlucky unit for signalmen.  The Germans apparently were now aware of us because an artillery duel broke out. Because of the little hills around us we could not see our own 25-pounders but alongside was a troop of captured 88 millimetre guns we were using, known as Mac troop.  They suddenly became the target for an air raid out of the sun. I was standing at the back of our van talking to one of our officers and watching a Major from Administration transmitting a radio message with the assistance of one of our new reinforcements.  At the whistle of a bomb coming in our direction I collided in mid-air with the officer in a joint dive for my slit trench, but I was underneath. The reinforcement witnessing our performance flung himself out the back of the van, his headphones tearing themselves from their socket, and as the shrapnel from the exploding bomb screamed over us, the Major, also wearing headphones, fell legs in the air out the back also.  Dusting himself down, furious at his temporary loss of dignity, he angrily wanted to know what the hell was going on. I could not have cared less, because in a dive-bomb attack it was every man for himself. What did he expect? Should we have said, ‘Excuse me, Sir . . .?`  The action was certainly hotting up. The guns were blazing, and long before sunset we gazed open-mouthed as a formation of large German bombers slowly circled us for a bomb run on the 25-pounders. This was most unusual and the Germans must have been getting desperate at our flanking move.  *We would cut them up for dog's meat, All around, our anti-aircraft guns and automatic fire opened up. One plane crashed immediately. I had time to watch only one other lumbering towards us on fire.*  Attacks by Stukas and fighter bombers coming from a great height out of the sun were difficult to counter because of the surprise factor and the speed at which they came in their almost vertical dives, but to lay on a level stately procession in broad daylight over a gun group such as ours was asking for trouble.  We would cut them up for dog's meat, All around, our anti-aircraft guns and automatic fire opened up. One plane crashed immediately. I had time to watch only one other lumbering towards us on fire. A parachute blossomed, then another appeared but tangled on opening. As the poor devil, apparently on fire, hurtled earthwards and thumped into the ground to burst near us, we all cheered, and cheered again as the bomber with the rest of the crew inside also hit the ground, exploded into flame and in a single ‘whoosh’ incinerated the crew.  Through the black smoke and burning sand the rest of the flight were just smoking plumes disappearing behind the hill. We were not ghouls because we laughed and cheered; we had been on the receiving end from the Luftwaffe for a very long time.  H Section had got it again. This time it was Len, hit in the chest from an airburst while standing beside the artillery command vehicle. Apparently they had got too close to jerry and amid some mild panic hurriedly withdrew, the command vehicle dragging its camouflage net behind but leaving Len lying there. He died without regaining consciousness, and although I was never able to get the full details, one or two of our chaps thought it a pretty bad show. I just felt sick. It was 21 March, the day before my birthday.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   Sgt. Albert Dunn MM (won at Alamein) who hails from Sunderland, was one of the first NCOs to get into the Mareth positions.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  |  |  |   After the battle - a demonstration of how the infantry ‘mopped up’ in the trenches of the Mareth Line.  1  [John Blythe: Soldiering On: A Soldier's War in North Africa and Italy](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1869410440/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1634&creative=6738&creativeASIN=1869410440&linkCode=as2&tag=wowaiito05-21) |  |