

WAR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Advantages And Disadvantages Of Both Sides

(Compiled by a correspondent from information obtained from an American military officer recently returned from the Mediterranean)

NOW that Italy has joined our enemies, the following brief summary of the Allied defensive position may be of interest.

On the northern coast of Tunisia is situated the great French fortress and naval base of Bizerta, directly opposite Sicily. It commands the narrowest part of the Mediterranean, where the middle sea contracts to a width of approximately 70 miles, and a gun of the calibre and range of Big Bertha fame placed on Cape Bon could, with ease, drop shells on the shores of Sicily.

The Lake of Bizerta, which forms an inner harbour, is connected with the sea by a nine-mile canal, and has an anchorage of 50 square miles in which the largest ships can lie. Sidi Abdallah, situated at the south-eastern extremity of the lake, has dry docks in which battleships of any size can be repaired, while at Ferryville, which a few years ago was a sandy waste, and is now a modern town housing thousands of dock labourers, are barracks built to accommodate the garrison of the fort itself.

Almost Impregnable

France has in recent years spent tremendous sums in the development of Bizerta, which is to-day one of the strongest fortresses in the world, and in its natural situation, is almost impregnable. If the Allies were able to force an engagement in the region of this fort, its guns could render invaluable assistance.

Italy, with the Dardanelles and Gibraltar opposing her exit from the Mediterranean, is practically at the mercy of the Allied fleets, and her bases in the Dodecanese Islands may be subjected to continuous bombardment.

There is also some reason to believe that the French have for some years been at work on a long range gun which would enable shells to be fired right across the channel between Tunisia and Sicily; whether they have yet succeeded is a carefully guarded secret.

Gibraltar's Rival

With regard to Italy's expansion overseas, her colonisation aims have always been directed towards North Africa, and she has never forgiven France for forestalling her in Tunisia with its 80,000 Italian inhabitants,

and for ignoring her in the settlement of questions arising out of North-West Africa. This explains Mussolini's interest in the Spanish fort of Ceuta, which is situated in Spanish Morocco exactly opposite Gibraltar.

This fort is "naturally" even stronger than the Rock itself, and Italy has recently, according to some reports, formed with Spain what may prove to amount to an offensive and defensive alliance. If that is the case, she will try to use this fort to challenge the Allied domination of the Mediterranean.



News Review
ITALY'S STRATEGIC POSITION
Between German devil and Allied sea

The Moroccan Tribesmen

The position in French Morocco caused deep concern during the last war and it was only after the most difficult diplomacy that an amicable arrangement was arrived at. The southern portion of Morocco is ruled by Caids who have almost complete control over their tribesmen. They are also extremely susceptible to bribery and corruption, and in order to

combat German propaganda, France was compelled to make substantial monetary payments and promises of greater power to all the Caids concerned. A similar position may arise during the present conflict, but as the people themselves have shown that they are satisfied with their conditions under French rule the situation at present seems satisfactory. France could, in fact, in time draw anything up to three million soldiers from her colonial possessions.

In the Mediterranean itself, Italy has established air bases in the Balearic Islands, due south of Barcelona, and is in a position to intercept the communications of France with her African colonies. But the French, it is believed, have been at work on plans which they believe will offset that advantage to Italy.

German Bases in Spain?

Germany's influence in the Mediterranean is uncertain. During the Spanish civil war, in which Germany participated partly in order to try out her new aeroplanes, guns, etc., a large number of aeroplane bases and artillery fortifications were built in the North and North-west of Spain, with German money and labour. They are still there, and still believed to be Germany's, and France is just across the border. On the other hand Germany has so far made no use of them, and that is difficult to explain if they really are useful.



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