

GEOGRAPHY

Tunisia Tough on Troops

AS THE TUNISIAN rainy season for early 1943 draws to a close, combat activities become possible in the semi-desert areas south and west of the seaport city, Sfax. The rainy season in this westernmost of French possessions in North Africa is roughly from October to April. The other months are hot and dry - usually with little or no rainfall.

Southern Tunisia has little rain at any season. It is a desert area. Northern Tunisia is mountainous except for a flat coastal rim. The United Nations' fighting forces are in the mountainous country, the Axis on the coastal rim. American forces are reported to be in the northern part of middle Tunisia, the area stretching northward from the semi-desert country along the great salt-depression called Chott el Djerid, the largest of the salt-water lakes or chotts of Tunisia.

In the mountainous area are farms, grazing ranches, and timbered areas with growths of marketable evergreen oaks, Aleppo pines and cork trees. The olive groves for which Tunisia is famed are on the coastal rim from Sfax, which is to the northeast of the Chott el Djerid, northward to Tunis.

Mountainous middle and northern Tunisia is not an easy country for troop movements. It is a land of mountains and plains but without plateaus. It is rough and badly eroded in some sections. It is not supplied with good roads. Getting about in the rainy season is a mud-fighting job. But with new military roads constructed by the Army and with additional flying fields, the path is cleared to drive the enemy on the coastal plains into the Mediterranean.

It is a difficult country in which to obtain food and fighting equipment for an army. Considerable quantities of wheat and barley are produced, some of which are exported normally but not enough to be of much help in feeding the United Nations' troops. It produces many goats, considerable numbers of sheep, and some cattle. Goat meat is not included in the American army diet, and enough local mutton and beef cannot be purchased to meet the needs.

Supplies of all kinds must be transported over a long and difficult road. They are brought by ships to Casablanca, and from there by standard-gauge railroad to western Tunisia. Then they must be reloaded onto narrow-gauge cars or army trucks for transportation to middle Tunisia. They are carried by railroad and highway a distance equal to half the distance from Washington, D. C., to Los Angeles. Some supplies and equipment are unloaded from shipboard at Algiers. Transportation from there is over the same standard-gauge and narrow-gauge railroads.