COVER FEATURE

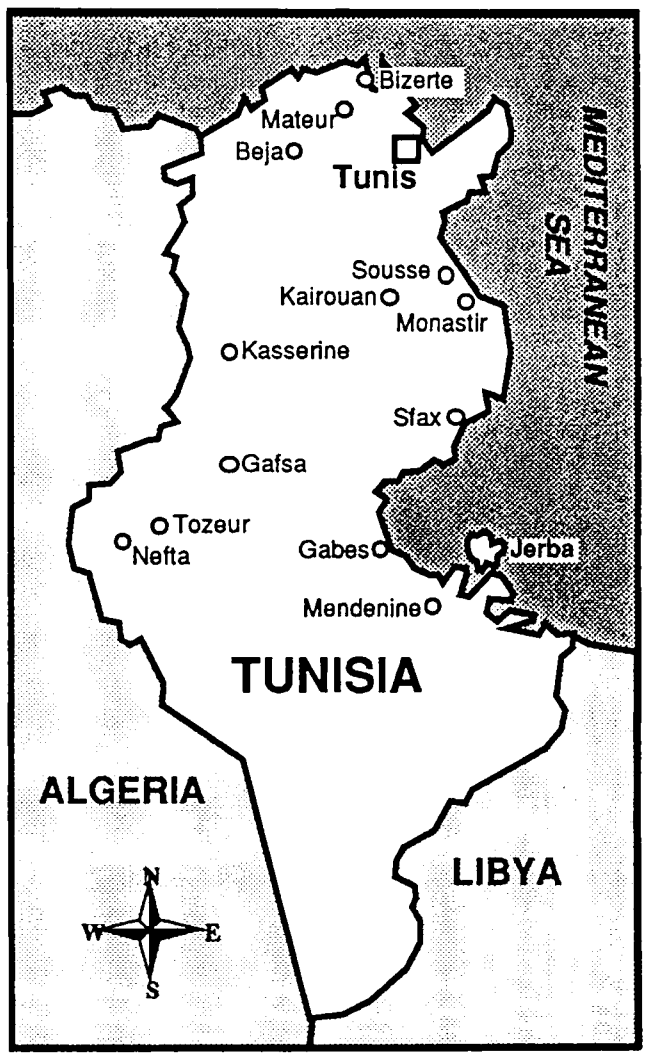
Tunisia: A Tradition of Openness and Hospitality

By The

United States Liaison Office-Tunisia (USLOT)
Security Assistance Team

INTRODUCTION

Carthage is known throughout the world as one of the great cities of western civilization. Most know of the titanic struggle between the Romans and Carthaginians for control of the Mediterranean; and about the march of Hannibal across Gaul and the Alps. But travelers are still startled to find that this ancient city, founded in the 9th century BC, is located on a peninsula near the site of modern Tunis, Tunisia. Many are equally startled to learn that U.S. cooperation with Tunisia began in the late 1870s when Ahmed and Mohammed el Sadiq Bey, respectively, ruled the country. That beginning marked the start of an enduring partnership that continues today. During the past several years of government-to-government cooperation, both of our nations have faced a world where fundamental change has continued to occur. The most recent change and perhaps the most turbulent of our relations involved differences over the Gulf Crisis. With that page turned in our relationship and a new world order emerging, we are again sharing a desire for peace and stability so that democracy can grow and flourish. In the emerging new world of diminishing security assets, USLOT continues to manage and administer FMS material, services, and equipment transactions in order to build a military relationship based upon mutual interests and available training opportunities.



HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Tunisia is a small North African nation wedged between northern Libya and Algeria. It juts north into the balmy Mediterranean sea and dips south into the Sahara Desert. The country has been a natural crossroad since ancient time, providing Tunisia with a rich and occasionally turbulent history. Mediterranean, African, and Arab influences have combined to shape its culture and politics.

Tunisia's roots in Arab culture sprang from an invasion in the mid-600s of Muslim Arabs from the Middle East. Before that, Tunisia was ruled by Byzantines, Vandals, Romans, and Phoenicians, who founded the Carthaginian Empire in Tunisia around 900 B.C. The city of Carthage was near the present-day city of Tunis. After Arab Muslims gained a foothold, the nation slowly absorbed their culture. Tunisia was consumed by the Ottoman Empire in the 1500s, and then became a French protectorate in 1881.

A drive for autonomy began early in the twentieth century and concluded when France granted Tunisia full independence in 1956. A hero of that struggle, Habib Bourguiba, was elected the republic's first President in 1957, and held the post until he was deposed by his Prime Minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who subsequently was elected to the Presidency in 1989. The President, his Cabinet and the National Assembly of 90 legislators elected by the people preside over a nation that boasts of modern cities like Tunis, Mediterranean beaches, and picturesque rural villages and farms where many residents still wear traditional Arab attire.

The American Cemetery at Carthage

During World War II, North Africa—specifically the Tunisia Campaign—became an important component of a peripheral military strategy to ultimately defeat Germany. "Operation TORCH," which began with American troops landing in Morocco in December 1942, and ended with a German surrender in Tunisia on 12 May 1943, was America's first campaign in the crucial European Theater. Led by General Eisenhower, the Allied Commander, the Tunisian Campaign represented a laboratory in which both men and concepts in allied military cooperation were

tested. "Operation TORCH" and the subsequent Mediterranean operations (many in Tunisia) were a period in which Eisenhower matured and gained self-confidence as a commander.

For example, 14-22 February 1943, marked a period of perhaps the best known of World War II battles fought in Tunisia. These battles involved German offensives against Allies at Le Kef in northern Tunisia to Kasserine Pass in the south central region. For the U.S., losses resulting from numerous mistakes exposed during the attack were devastating—300 men killed, 3000 wounded, 3000 taken prisoner, plus the loss of 183 tanks, 194 halftracks, 208 artillery pieces, 512 trucks and jeeps. Private Nicholas Minue was one of three soldiers who earned the Congressional Medal of Honor for action during the Tunisia Campaign. His remains are buried at the American Cemetery in Carthage shown above. Nevertheless, "Operation TORCH" resulted in a German surrender in Tunisia on 12 May 1943, and paved the way later for a successful landing in Sicily and Italy.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

The Government of Tunisia has worked hard in recent months to repair the damage to its foreign relations caused by its stance during the Gulf crisis. Tunisia's relations with coalition countries are in most cases back to normal levels and it has resumed its traditional moderate role in the Arab world. As a result, the Government once again supports U.S. regional objectives. For example, it has strongly endorsed U.S. efforts to advance the Middle East Peace Process, and has contributed to these efforts in tangible ways. It participated in the Madrid and Moscow meetings and was the first Maghreb country to agree to participate in the Middle East Peace Process Multilateral Working Groups. Moreover, Tunisian officials often reiterate their government's commitment to a democratic political system and to respect for human rights. This commitment has been slow in development but measurable progress has been made in liberalizing the electoral, judicial, and press codes.

THE UNITED STATES LIAISON OFFICE TUNISIA (USLOT)

USLOT is organized in accordance with the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved Joint Manpower Plan which authorizes 12 personnel to manage Army, Navy, and Air Force programs, a training section, and an administration section. Generally, USLOT's mission is to represent U.S. defense interests in Tunisia by managing U.S. security assistance programs, supporting cooperative arms programs, coordinating host nation support, conducting joint planning, and acting as liaison for other defense matters of mutual concern. USLOT's objectives and security assistance goals in Tunisia and the North Africa region center on the following:

- insuring a continuing viable security assistance/foreign military sales program through an emphasis on force modernization and training;

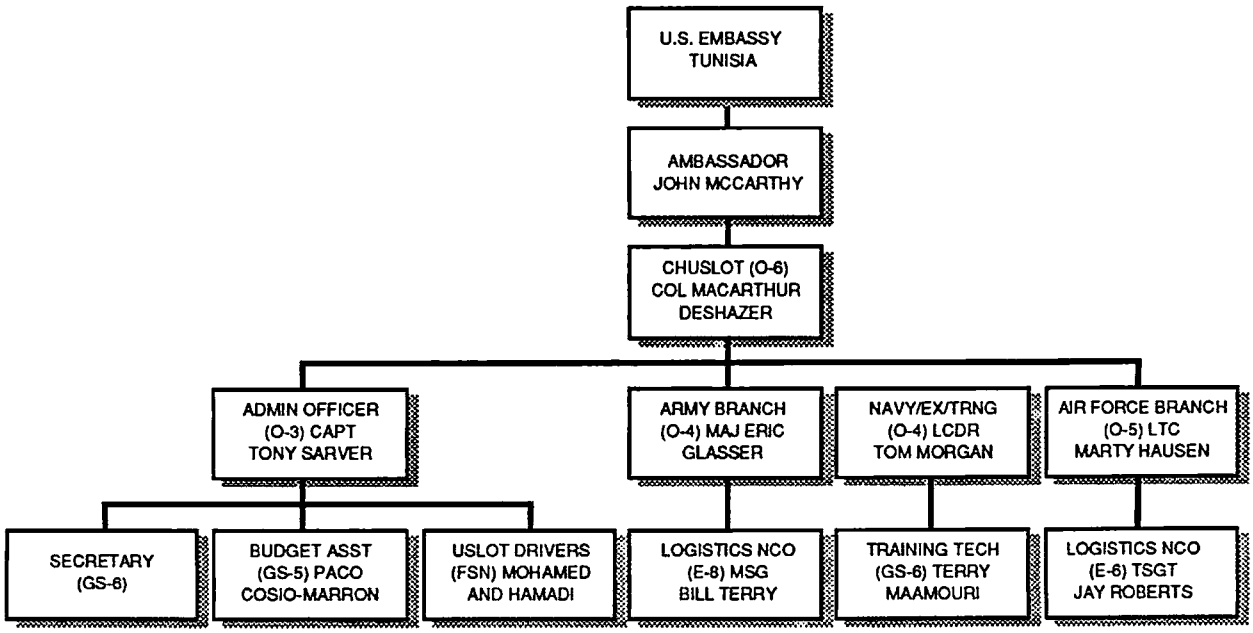
- providing in-country liaison for the Secretary of Defense and the United States theater commander with appropriate in-country authorities; and

- more recently, supporting the marketing efforts of U.S. companies in the defense trade arena as in all other spheres of commercial activity.

Described in other terms, the focus of USLOT is aimed at developing and maintaining fruitful military-to-military relations. It was to accomplish these objectives that USLOT was first established on 1 April 1968, to oversee the U.S. government's security assistance program in Tunisia.

U.S. Embassy, Tunisia

USLOT Mission Organization and Functions. The position of Chief USLOT rotates every two years between an Army and an Air Force Colonel. The officer holding this position directs the efforts of the Security Assistance Organization and is responsible for planning and implementing all U.S. security assistance activities in Tunisia. As the U.S. Defense Representative in Tunisia, the Chief USLOT is also responsible for advising the Ambassador as to the best way to achieve the goals of the United States insofar as they pertain to the U.S. military efforts in Tunisia. He also assists USCINCEUR in the implementation of his programs and initiatives within the parameters of the Embassy's broader objectives. Also, as the U.S. Defense Representative, the Chief, USLOT is responsible for effecting and coordinating contacts between Department of Defense agencies and the Tunisian armed forces/government.



The Administrative Section consists of a U.S. Army captain, two U.S. Government civilians (a budget assistant and a secretary), and two FSN [foreign service national] drivers. This section performs all of the joint administrative, logistical, personnel, and fiscal functions necessary for this Security Assistance Organization (SAO) to operate as a separate military unit hundreds of miles from its headquarters, the U.S. European Command in Stuttgart, Germany. The Chief of the Administrative Section is responsible for budget management, property accountability, personnel and finance actions, housing, communications, out-of-country medical care, transportation, official travel and shipping, vehicle and equipment maintenance, procurement, and quality of life actions.

The Army Section consists of one field grade officer and one senior NCO. Day-to-day activity includes visits to Tunisian Army (TA) bases to provide assistance in defining TA material and training requirements. The U.S. team is involved in teaching TA logistical representatives the proper procedures for using FMS credits. They also supervise a large number of mobile training, technical assistance, and site survey teams.

The Air Force Section also has one field grade officer and a senior NCO. The primary focus of the Air Force Team is to maintain the spirit of self-sufficiency manifested by a U.S. Air Force Technical Assistance Field Team (TAFT) in sustaining U.S. supplied equipment. The Air Force Section team visits Tunisian Air Force (TAF) bases and provides assistance with special requisition needs. The team also facilitates complex transactions by serving as a liaison between key USG logistics agencies and the TAF. Another major tasking filled by the Air Force Section team involves coordinating major exercises involving USAF or USN and TAF aircraft. Finally, they supervise a large number of mobile training, technical assistance, and site survey teams.

The Navy Program Officer in USLOT, assisted by a civilian GS-06, manages the training program which is primarily IMET funded, and is responsible for all English Comprehension Level (ECL) testing.

PROGRAMS

The USLOT Army Section currently manages some 105 cases valued at nearly $282 million. Twenty-four cases were closed in 1991. Tunisia's Army (TA) program has focused on modernizing the Army with U.S. equipment in order to build and maintain a defensive capability against its potentially unstable, hostile neighbors. The modernization effort has centered on procurement of the M60A1/3 tank, the M113A1 armored personnel carrier, the M198 howitzer and the Chaparral Air Defense System. Smaller programs include acquisition of the TOW and HMMWV.

Tunisian participation in the U.S. Army's FY91 Tactical Wheeled Vehicle Survey resulted in the recent inspection and acceptance of 56 M49A2C Tanker Trucks from excess stocks in Germany. A reduction in U.S.-appropriated FMF funds, has caused the Excess Defense Articles Program to receive greater consideration in Tunisian Army planning. Earlier this year, the Army was surveyed to determine requirements for excess Vulcan 20mm Gun systems, and M198 Howitzer and Chaparral parts.

The reduction in U.S. funding has caused the TA to concentrate on sustainment issues. A Program Management Review in 1991 resulted in reprogramming nearly $5 million from old cases to new sustainment cases. Tunisia received $10 million in concessional loans at the end of FY1991—about one third the of the almost $30 million in grant funding in FY 1990. The Tunisian Government is currently analyzing Price and Availability data on a large order of engineer and construction equipment.

In May and June 1992, the Army Section was involved in assisting the Tunisian Ministry of Defense prepare for a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping deployment to Cambodia. Following the UN's unexpected acceleration in its deployment schedule, USLOT, in cooperation with a number of other Security Assistance agencies, was instrumental in rapidly providing combat rations, tents, cots, jungle fatigues, and boots.

The Tunisian Air Force (TAF) manages 117 cases valued at $210 million, of which 75 are supported by USAF logistics, 26 by US Army logistics, and 17 by U.S. Navy logistics. The cases supported by U.S. Army and Navy logistics involve support for the UH-1H and UH-1N helicopter programs. Overall program objectives for FY 1990-92 were significantly altered as a result of the dramatically reduced FMF funding levels mentioned above. The main focus of program objectives shifted from procurement to sustainment, with the aim of keeping U.S. acquired systems viable and active. To relieve the funding crunch, the TAF, with the help of USLOT, sought alternate sources of funding. A primary source of alternate funding was reprogrammed funds made available through case closures. The majority of closures were processed with the aim of recouping idle funds and reprogramming them to fund active spares cases. Significant progress was made in reducing the number of TAF FMS cases. In the past year alone, 34 case lines were processed for closure, bringing the total number of cases processed for closure since January 1990 to 76 case lines. The overall result of the case closure effort was that all U.S. acquired systems remained fully active. An additional benefit realized from the reduction in cases was the resultant simplification in program management.

The Tunisian Navy falls well behind the Army and Air Force when FMS dollars are being prioritized by the Government of Tunisia. This is almost certainly a function of the strengths and weaknesses of their neighbors, Algeria and Libya, neither of whom are maritime powers. The mission of the Navy is primarily to stop fishermen from other Mediterranean countries from poaching in Tunisian territorial waters. The recent acquisition of three sophisticated Fast Patrol Boats from the French has lent a much needed credibility to the Tunisian Navy. It has also allowed the Tunisians to start participating in a series of exercises with the U.S. Sixth Fleet. In August alone, the Tunisian Navy will host an amphibious exercise with the Marine Expeditionary Unit operating in the Mediterranean, as well as a Surface Warfare exercise with two U.S. Navy cruisers.

The big news in the Tunisian Navy is the recent offer by the USN to lease them a USNS hydrographic ship. The Tunisians would transform this into a training ship to replace a 1955 destroyer that is no longer usable. Other Navy FMS funding is used for an ongoing hydrographic study of Tunisian harbors. Future projects also might include an ambitious plan to deploy coastal radar stations that would aid in fishery control.

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING (IMET)

Tunisia has a highly successful IMET program, and has sent more than two thousand military students to the United States (including President Ben Ali) since the founding of USLOT in 1968. In FY 1991, the total IMET funding reached $1.5 million and still was not enough to cover Tunisia's total training needs. For FY 1992, Tunisia requested over $1 million for Army Courses alone, and by mid-July had almost exhausted all funds for the year. The training program has traditionally been well balanced and in keeping with IMET objectives, and has included many senior officer courses and necessary technical training.

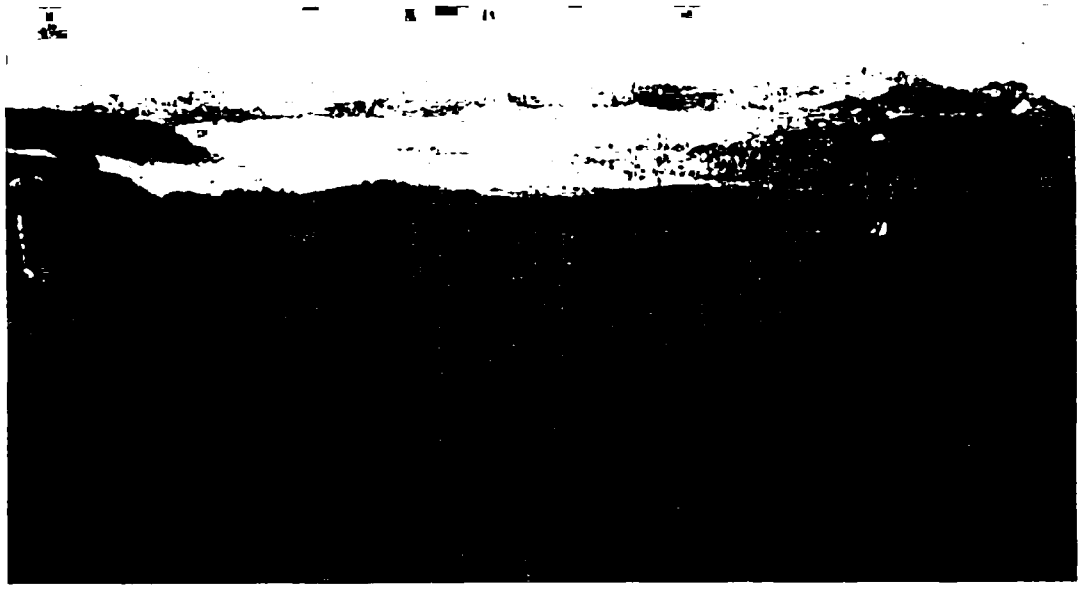
Since the in-country English language program has been successful in preparing most students for the English Comprehension Level examination, very few IMET dollars are used for language training in the U.S. Tunisia has made special efforts recently to improve the

capabilities of their language instructors and particularly to prepare them for better management of their teaching resources and equipment. In 1991, the visit of a DISAM Mobile Training Team (MTT) was one of the highlights of the year. More than thirty Tunisians learned the finer points of managing the IMET program and this should have a direct impact on training planning in the future. In the past, Tunisia has sent the majority if its graduating Naval cadets to Surface Warfare Officer School (SWOS). Now that they are developing their own in-country school, they will be sending the graduates to the U.S. for On-the-Job Training only, which will free up more funds for other training.

QUALITY OF LIFE

The quality of life in Tunisia is superb. There is plenty for SAO personnel and their families to see and do, and the needs of the family are more than amply met.

The weather greatly favors the outdoor enthusiast—mild in the winter and warm in the summer—and off-duty recreation opportunities are unlimited. Tunisia's biggest industry is tourism and beaches; sailing and paragliding are only a short drive from Tunis. Golfing enthusiasts make the 45 minute trip to the tourist area in Hammamet. Numerous hiking trails exist and hunters find boar in the mountainous north, and scuba drivers find dive shops in Tabarka and Sousse. The are several horse riding clubs. Sailboats can be rented or owned and the USLOT Unit Fund has its own sailboard for wind surfing.



One of several new Golf Courses at Tabarka

Facilities for fitness training and competitive sports are also available. There are excellent weight training facilities at the "Marine House" and at the Embassy itself. Tunis has an international running group known as the "Hash House Harriers," who make something of a game out of short (3-6) kilometer runs. Facilities for competitive sports include basketball, softball, squash, racquet ball, football, etc.

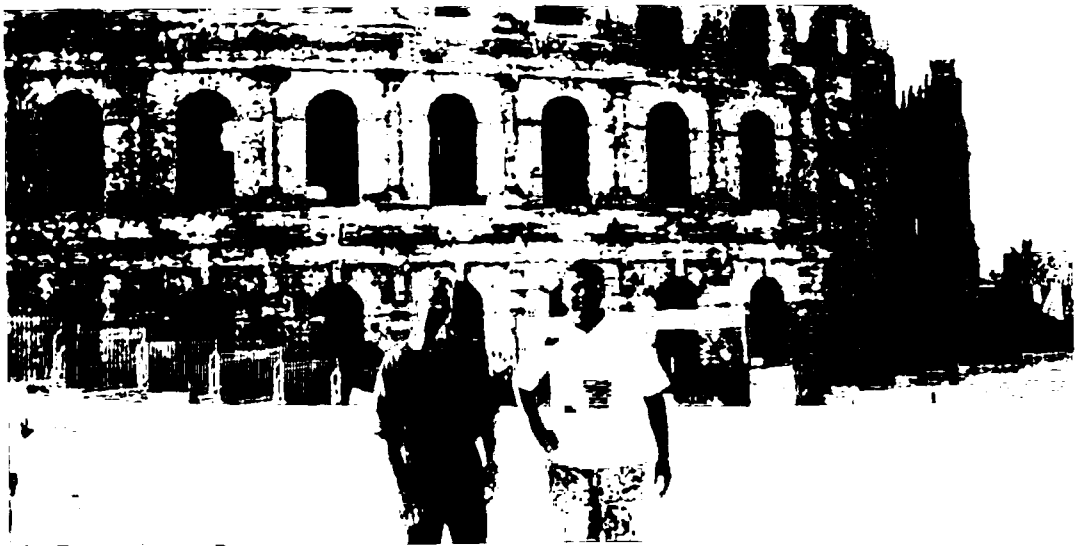
For those who prefer a slightly more sedate pace, the opportunities are equally impressive. Dining enthusiasts will find numerous great restaurants, many at the hotels. Food prices are very reasonable and a dinner out for two with a local wine will cost under $20. Tunisia produces sumptuous fresh fruits and vegetables that please the palate the whole year round. There are

local bridge and chess clubs. There is an opera in Tunis that attracts European productions. There are discos at the hotels. Every year a chorus is formed and culminates its season with a recital at a local Christian church. Shopping addicts will find themselves returning to the souks and medinas in search of ever better bargains on a wide variety of quality goods. Finally, for the movie goers, USLOT maintains an extensive VHS movie library containing a wide range of movies, including a good number of the latest releases.

The Ruins at Dougga

The embassy maintains a Community Liaison Office (CLO) that assists new members in getting established and organizes a number of special events. The Community Liaison Office routinely organizes tours to the many fantastic historical and archeological sites throughout the country. One recent event took USLOT members to hear the Moscow Orchestra play in the moonlight at the 2000 year old Roman coliseum at El Jem. Carthage is a 20-minute drive from Tunis, and extensive ruins of the Roman cities of Dougga and Thuburbo Majus are only 90 minutes away. One popular trip is to fly to Tozeur in the south and to travel by dune buggy in exploring the Sahara Desert. Also, Tunisia is just a short flight from Europe and air fares are reasonable for vacations. U.S. military personnel and their families are entitled to an Environmental and Morale Leave between the 6th and 18th month of their two-year assignment. This translates into the cost of a round trip air fare to Frankfort, Germany for each family member which can be put toward any travel arrangement desired.

How well the needs of the family are met can play a big role in the success of one's SAO tour. The CLO runs a family sponsorship program to assist new arrivals. Housing is very comfortable and furnishings (carpeting, drapes, furniture, etc.) are provided for the duration of one's tour. The American Community Service School serves grades one through nine. Older children go abroad for schooling, and the expense is paid by the Department of Defense. The embassy maintains a health clinic with a nurse and U.S. doctor. While local hospitals are adequate, serious cases and those requiring specialized treatment are evacuated to Germany or the U.S. Employment opportunities for spouses are available at the embassy or other U.S. agencies. Although many of the jobs are at the clerical level, a wide variety of ever changing opportunities are available.



The El Jem Colliseum

USLOT members normally join the U.S. Government Employees Recreation Activity which maintains a swimming pool, tennis court, recreation center and most importantly, a small commissary that provides American food items not available on the local economy. With a "kiddie" pool next to the regular one, the swimming pool becomes a popular gathering spot in the summer. Don't forget the youth! There are Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. Some older children find employment at the embassy under the summer hire program.

In conclusion, Tunis is a great post for those used to making the best out of their geographical location. USLOT members leave remembering their assignment to Tunisia as one of the best and most rewarding.