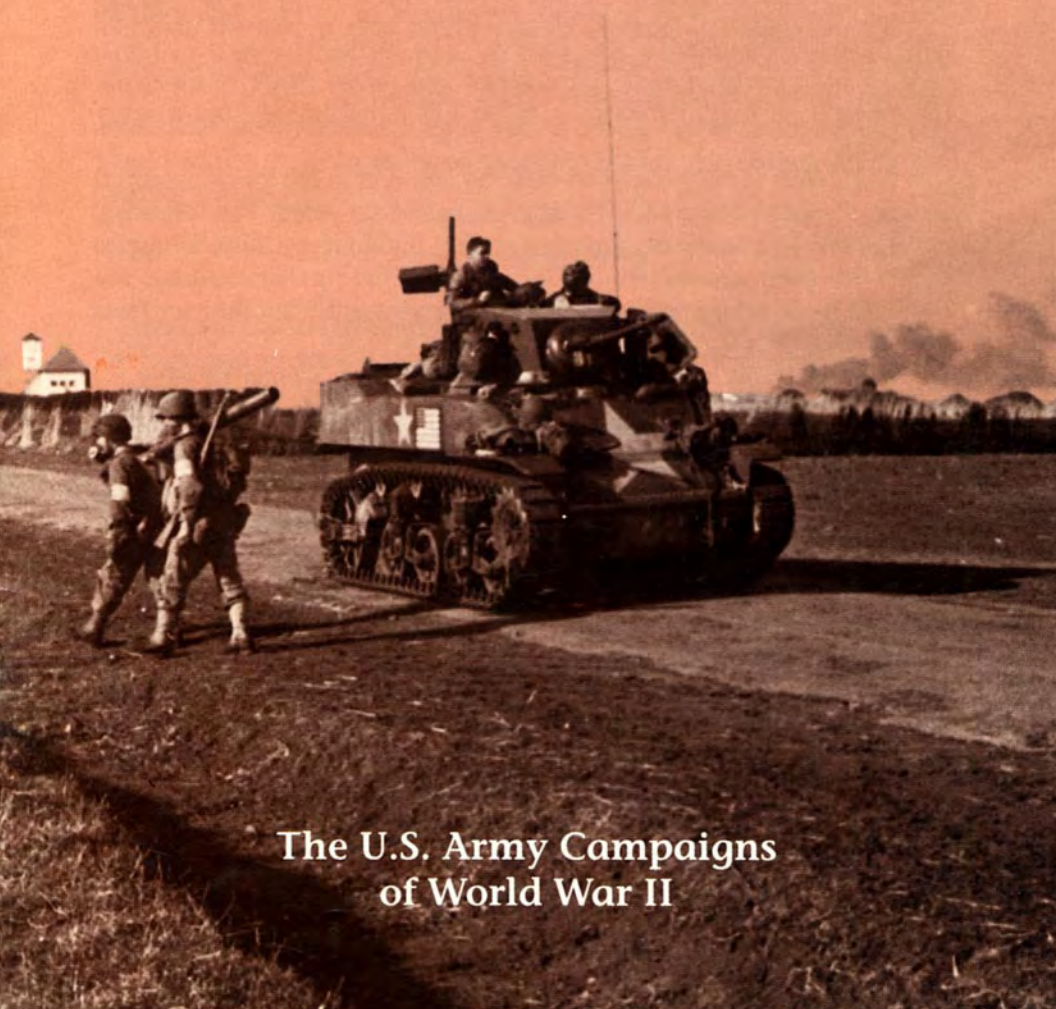


# ALGERIA— FRENCH MOROCCO



The U.S. Army Campaigns  
of World War II


# Introduction

World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism. During the next several years, the U.S. Army will participate in the nation's 50th anniversary commemoration of World War II. The commemoration will include the publication of various materials to help educate Americans about that war. The works produced will provide great opportunities to learn about and renew pride in an Army that fought so magnificently in what has been called "the mighty endeavor."

World War II was waged on land, on sea, and in the air over several diverse theaters of operation for approximately six years. The following essay is one of a series of campaign studies highlighting those struggles that, with their accompanying suggestions for further reading, are designed to introduce you to one of the Army's significant military feats from that war.

This brochure was prepared in the U.S. Army Center of Military History by Charles A. Anderson. I hope this absorbing account of that period will enhance your appreciation of American achievements during World War II.



M. P. W. Stone  
Secretary of the Army

# Algeria–French Morocco

8 November 1942–11 November 1942

Events bringing the United States Army to North Africa had begun more than a year before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. For both the Axis and the Allies, the Mediterranean Sea area was one of uncertain priority. On the Axis side, the location of Italy made obvious Rome's interest in the region. But the stronger German partner pursued interests hundreds of miles north. A similar division of emphasis characterized the Allies. To the British the Mediterranean Sea was the vital link between the home islands and long-held Asian possessions as well as Middle Eastern oil fields. To the Americans, however, the area had never been one of vital national interest and was not seen as the best route to Berlin. But the fall of France in June 1940 had also brought a new dimension to the region. The surrender of Paris left 120,000 French troops in West and North Africa and much of the French fleet in Atlantic and Mediterranean ports. Both the Axis and Allies saw overseas French forces as the decisive advantage that would allow them to achieve their contradictory objectives in the Mediterranean.

## *Strategic Setting*

Despite the great advantage which control of the African–Middle Eastern region would give to either of the forces contending for Europe, the huge armies that eventually fought for the area were deployed as a result of events only partially foreseen and decisions reluctantly made. Ever since he unleashed his armies on Poland on 1 September 1939, Adolf Hitler had been anxious to neutralize and possibly occupy Great Britain, much too anxious as events showed. When the air raids of 1940 did not bring a British surrender, Hitler sought to isolate areas of British interest in the Mediterranean from the home islands by closing the Strait of Gibraltar. But the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco frustrated the project by placing a high price on his cooperation. In the meantime, independent actions by Italy forced Berlin to give more attention to the Mediterranean. Italian offensives against British forces in Egypt and Greece bogged down and had to be hastily reinforced by German units. Not until April 1941—after nearly six months of effort that distracted Hitler's generals from planning the



*U.S. Navy task force carrying General Patton's Western Task Force approaches the coast of French Morocco. (National Archives)*

invasion of the Soviet Union—was Greece firmly under Axis control and momentum restored to the drive into Egypt.

By the summer of 1941 the series of Italian failures, German rescue missions, and British reactions had created a confused arrangement of deployments in and around the Mediterranean satisfactory to neither side. Axis forces held Greece and the island of Crete as well as Sicily, the stepping-stone to Tunisia. In North Africa General Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and his *Afrika Korps*, allied with an Italian army of questionable ability, had pushed the British into Egypt to a point only sixty miles from Alexandria. Allied prospects were in a tenuous state. The bottleneck at Gibraltar was open, but passage depended on running a gauntlet of German submarines. Britain still held the island of Malta, though it was under frequent air attack, and the British Eighth Army was still a viable force in Egypt, though it had been on the defensive for some time. Both the Axis and Allies had invested heavily in the Mediterranean area, and to justify their presence both

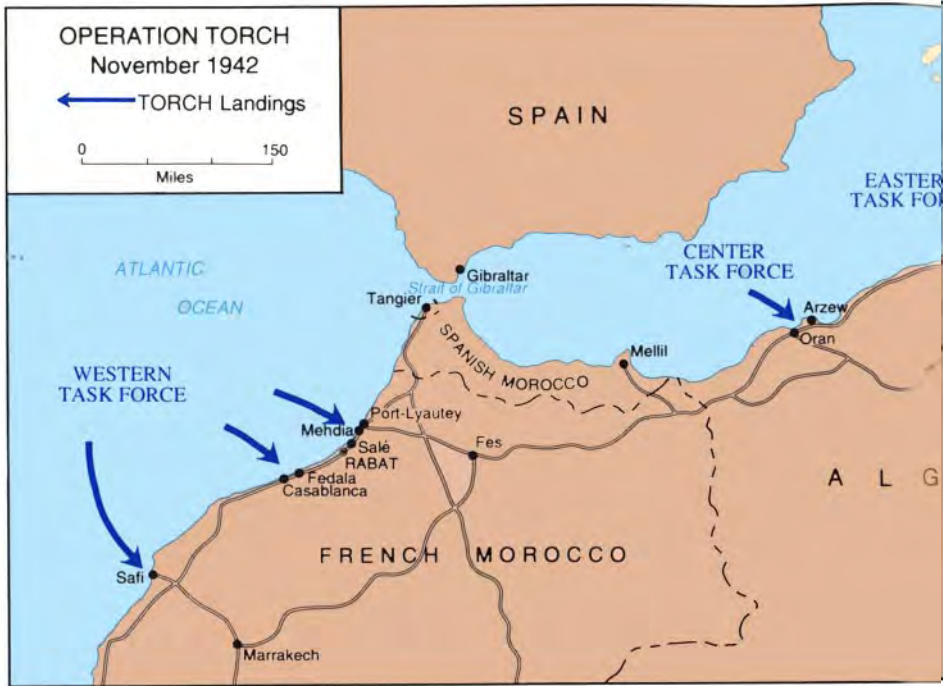
would have to continue efforts there. Both would also have to deal with the question hanging over the entire theater: would overseas French forces fight with the Axis or Allies?

The issue of Allied action in the Mediterranean challenged the American-British partnership that underlay the Western Alliance. While the Allies agreed on the strategic priority of their war effort—Europe would be liberated before Asia—they deadlocked on a method of achievement. American members of the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) wanted to strike at Nazi Germany with an amphibious assault from England in 1942 or 1943, thereby forcing the Germans to divert units from the east and easing pressure on the Soviet Union. But believing the American proposal premature, British CCS members favored an Allied thrust into either Norway, where a linkup with Soviet armies could be effected, or northwest Africa in conjunction with a Red Army advance to the west in Europe.

The friendship and trust which had developed between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill finally broke the impasse at the Combined Chiefs. The President agreed to send American troops to North Africa in late 1942, and the Prime Minister agreed to support a major cross-Channel attack in 1943 or 1944. Their differences resolved, American and British CCS members in London began planning the entrance of the United States Army into the Mediterranean area, an operation named TORCH.

## *Operations*

With the Allies committed to TORCH, the Combined Chiefs took up the question of leadership. After receiving the views of both sides, President Roosevelt selected Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower to be Commander in Chief, Allied Force. Prime Minister Churchill quickly approved. The TORCH planning staff was filled out in accordance with the principle of international counterparts: a section chief of one nationality would have a deputy of the other. Selection of task force and support commanders would have to await final decision on landing sites. TORCH planners studied the terrain of northwest African coasts and surveyed forces available. Amid another extended CCS debate, Roosevelt and Churchill intervened in favor of simultaneous landings at three points: Casablanca, 190 miles south of Gibraltar on the Atlantic coast; Oran, 280 miles east of Gibraltar; and Algiers, 220 miles farther east. But French animosity toward the British dating from the aftermath of the fall of France in June 1940



influenced the choice of landing forces. Because the British had sunk a number of French ships in North African ports to keep them out of German control, and in the process killed many French sailors, the French command in Africa would not cooperate with a British invasion force. Thus, the Combined Chiefs had to maintain as much as possible an American character to the operation, at least in its early stages.

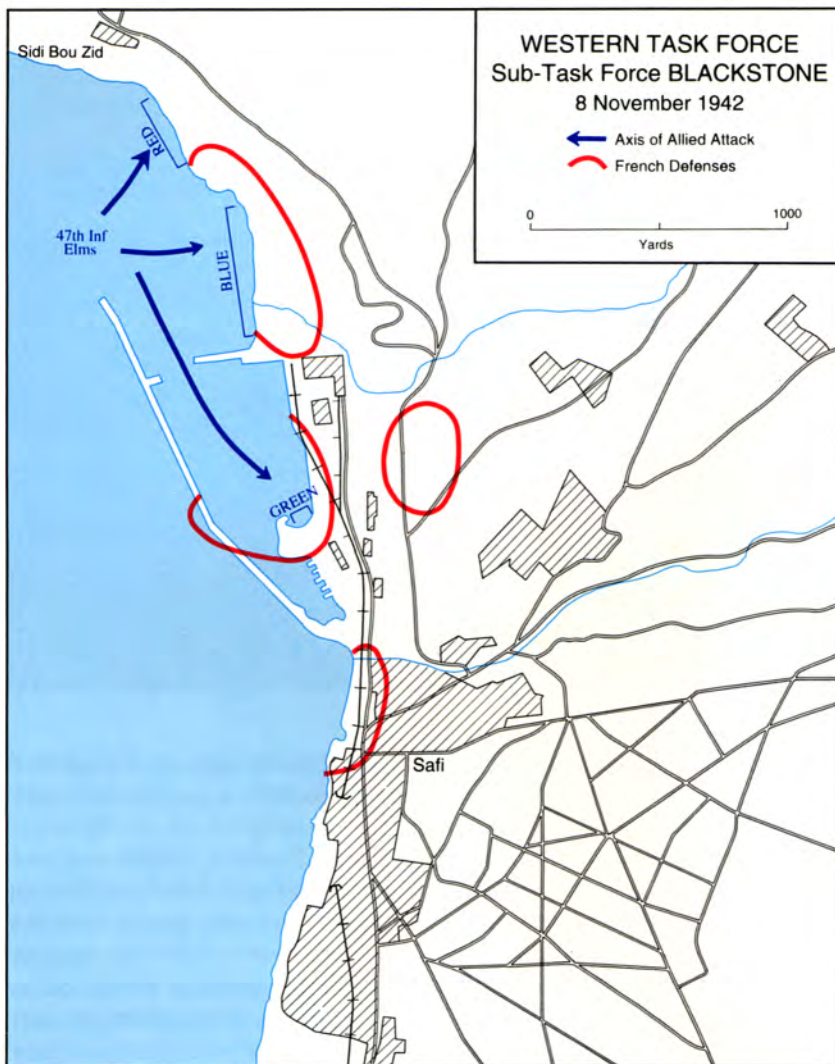
Now the command list for TORCH could be completed. Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., would lead Western Task Force into Casablanca; Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall would lead Center Task Force into Oran; and British Lt. Gen. Kenneth A. N. Anderson would lead Eastern Task Force into Algiers. But in deference to French feelings, American Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder was selected to lead the initial landing force at Algiers. Naval support would be coordinated through the Royal Navy. Land-based air support would come from two commands, one British and one American, the latter under Brig. Gen. James H. Doolittle. General Eisenhower hoped to make these three landings in late October, but as planning advanced, D-day was set for 8 November.





After studying maps and intelligence reports, General Patton and TORCH planners formulated a concept of operations for Western Task Force. Rather than assaulting Casablanca directly, where an estimated fifty thousand French troops might resist, Patton decided to come ashore at three detached sites. Preceded by several battalion landing teams (BLTs, task-organized mixtures of infantry and armor), Patton's armored force would land at Safi, 140 miles south of the city and the best port for tank-bearing boats. Other landing teams would come ashore at Mehdiya, 80 miles north of Casablanca, their principal mission the capture of two airfields in the area. Most of Patton's infantry would land at Fedala, 12 miles north of Casablanca. Moving inland, the troops would swing around to the east side of Casablanca and, in conjunction with the armored force from the south, air support from the north, and naval gunfire offshore, advance westward on the city.

To accomplish its mission, Western Task Force would have 2 infantry divisions, 1 armored division, 2 separate tank battalions, and sufficient support units to maintain the total force of 34,871 officers and enlisted men. Naval support would come from an American task force of 1 aircraft carrier, 4 escort carriers, 3 battleships, 7 cruisers,



and 38 destroyers, in addition to troop and cargo transports and auxiliaries, under Rear Adm. H. Kent Hewitt. The Navy would also provide air support during the landing phase until fields ashore could be secured for Twelfth Air Force squadrons.

To take Safi, Patton selected Maj. Gen. Ernest N. Harmon, commanding general of 2d Armored Division. Harmon's Sub-Task Force BLACKSTONE consisted of the 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division;



two reinforced battalions of the 67th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division; elements of the 70th Tank Battalion (Separate); and several artillery batteries. With support units, BLACKSTONE totaled 6,428 officers and men.

The naval convoy bringing BLACKSTONE to Safi halted eight miles offshore half an hour before midnight on 7 November 1942. Debarkation of troops and equipment continued in silence, for the landing was not preceded by a softening-up bombardment. General Eisenhower had decided that if French forces were going to oppose TORCH they would have to fire the first shot. As the boats turned toward shore, the French made known their intentions by firing on the transports. U.S. Navy ships immediately returned fire.

The first waves of landing craft plowed through dark swells toward beaches code-named from north to south RED, BLUE, GREEN, and YELLOW. As naval gunfire pounded French batteries, the first American troops to land in French Morocco—Company K, 47th Infantry—came ashore at 0445 at GREEN Beach. Forty-five minutes later over 600 men from all beaches returned sniper and machine-gun fire and began capturing French and Moroccan troops and key points. By daylight, American troops controlled all port facilities, the post office, telecommunications station, petroleum storage tanks, all roads leading into town, and the civil police force. Reinforced by continuing waves of landing craft, American troops extended their beachhead inland against little more than sniper fire. Sunrise made possible more accurate naval gunfire, and by 1045 all French batteries were out of action. Most resistance to BLACKSTONE infantry advancing through town came from a walled barracks, headquarters to the garrison of fewer than 1,000 men. American troops surrounded and isolated the barracks, then moved on to clear the rest of the town. As artillery was off-loaded, it too was trained on the barracks. But because Eisenhower and Patton hoped to gain without a costly battle the surrender of troops who could later fight Axis armies, they issued no attack order.

Offshore, debarkation of heavy equipment and tanks fell behind schedule. Darkness and heavy seas caused accidents and delays. In the worst incident, a gasoline fire broke out in a lighter while a truck was being lowered into it, forcing sailors and soldiers to turn to fire fighting and illuminating the transport and nearby ships for hostile gunners ashore. Many vehicles reaching the beach had drowned engines and faulty batteries. Not until the town was secured could a deep-draft vehicle transport, called a seatrain, tie up at the dock and off-load tanks faster and in start-up condition.

The landing of troops did not go much better. Although all battalion landing teams were to be ashore before sunrise, only about half the troops met that schedule, and the last off the transports did not hit the beach until noon. Despite the problems experienced by the Americans, the French garrison commander understood clearly that he was outnumbered and outgunned. At 1530 he surrendered. Eleven hours after stepping onto French Morocco, the Americans controlled Safi.

The next morning French leaders made clear that the surrender at Safi did not apply to other areas. At dawn several French planes flew through a thick fog over the town and landing area. However, only one managed to drop a bomb which landed unintentionally on an ammunition storage building. That afternoon U.S. Navy planes raided the airfield at Marrakech, destroying on the ground over forty planes and strafing two convoys of French troops bound for Safi. Moving east of town, American tanks and artillery overran a machine-gun position and took a bridge while losing one tank to mines. On the morning of 10 November, after an artillery duel, Harmon decided the French could be held in position by a small force. He formed most of his tanks and artillery on the road, and at 0900 the armored column raced north to join the ring closing around Casablanca.

Two hundred twenty miles up the Moroccan coast another Navy convoy debarked three landing teams to take Mehdia-Port-Lyautey and secure the northern flank of the Western Task Force. Maj. Gen. Lucian K. Truscott's Sub-Task Force GOALPOST consisted of the 60th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division; the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, 2d Armored Division; elements of the 70th Tank Battalion (Separate); and seven coast artillery batteries. With support units, GOALPOST totaled 9,079 officers and men. Its main objectives were airfields at Port-Lyautey and at Sale, 25 miles south, near Rabat. To reach them the troops would first have to take the coastal village of Mehdia and the town of Port-Lyautey five miles inland on the Sebou River.

The GOALPOST operational plan was more complex than that for BLACKSTONE because of local geographic peculiarities. While the coastline was smooth, the Sebou River meandered sharply in an "S" shape to form two peninsulas. The Port-Lyautey airfield lay in the larger peninsula. An advance straight inland from Mehdia was the most direct route to the airfield, but the troops would have to move through a narrow marsh between the river and a lagoon, and under the guns of a fortress. From bluffs between the towns artillery dominated all points. General Truscott thus decided to land his troops at five beaches along ten miles of shoreline. Two battalion landing teams, going ashore south of the river, would advance on separate axes to the

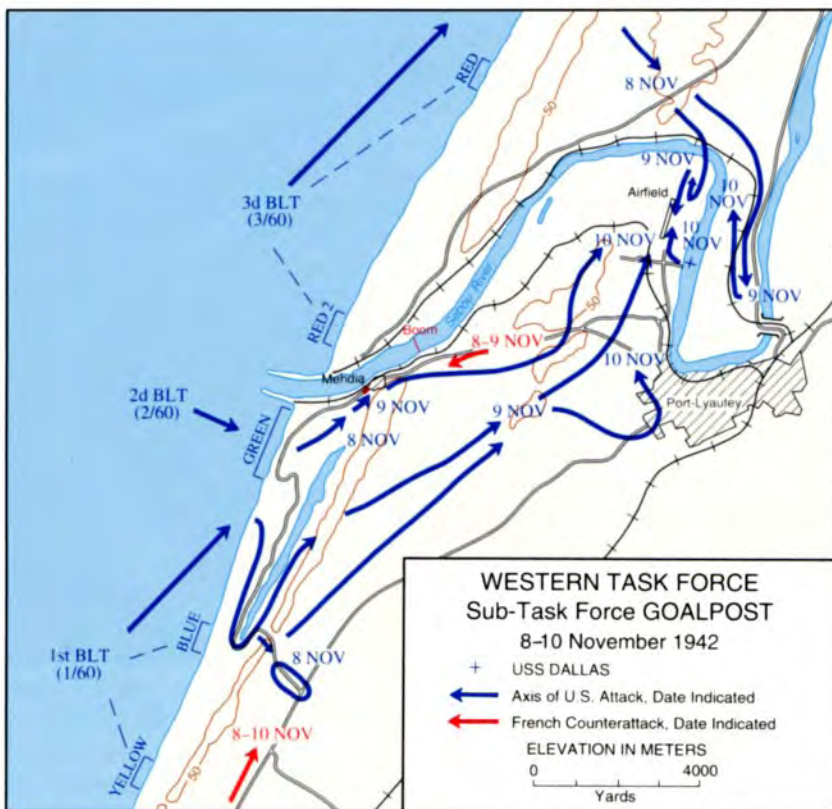


*Port-Lyautey airdrome, shielded by the meandering Sebou River. (National Archives)*

airfield, while a third would move from the north down the other peninsula toward Port-Lyautey. If all went as planned, the airfield and towns would be under American control by sundown on D-day.

Even before H-hour, set for 0400, 8 November 1942, a long succession of problems began. Approaching the coast the previous night, Navy transports lost formation. H-hour was then delayed to allow boat crews to improvise assault waves. Heavy seas further slowed debarkation. As at Sari, all landing teams were to go ashore in darkness, but only the first three waves of the 2d Battalion Landing Team had landed before dawn. Later waves were not only late but off course. The 1st and 3d Battalion Landing Teams missed their assigned beaches by 2,800 yards and 5 miles, respectively.

French opposition, much stronger than at Safi, caused more confusion and delays. At dawn French planes strafed the beaches and bombed transports. A strong coast artillery concentration at a fortress near Mehdiya rained a heavy volume of fire on transports offshore. To the south the 1st Battalion Landing Team struggled in the sand for



over five hours to regain its beach, to round the lagoon, and to start toward the airfield only to be pinned down by machine-gun fire the rest of the day. To the rear French reinforcements from Rabat were firing on landing team outposts. In the middle the 2d Battalion Landing Team stopped to await naval gunfire support, was then hit hard by a French counterattack, and was pushed back almost to the beach with heavy losses. While the Navy was firing on the Mehdia fortress, troops ashore did not yet have enough artillery to quiet the French batteries, whose fire kept tank lighters from landing and forced transports to move out of range, thus lengthening the route to shore. By nightfall on D-day the Americans occupied precarious positions miles from the airfield they so desperately needed.

The second day's action brought both success and frustration to the men of GOALPOST. On the south the 1st Battalion Landing Team

and several light tanks twice blocked larger French infantry-armor columns. While naval gunfire dispersed the enemy, the troops made good progress toward the airfield. But tragedy stopped the advance: unidentified artillery and U.S. naval aircraft dropped ordnance on the 1st Team. In the middle the 2d Team could do no more than hold position only a mile inland against a French unit reinforced the previous night. To the north the 3d Battalion Landing Team succeeded in placing troops and artillery north and east of the airfield but stalled under fire from Port-Lyautey.

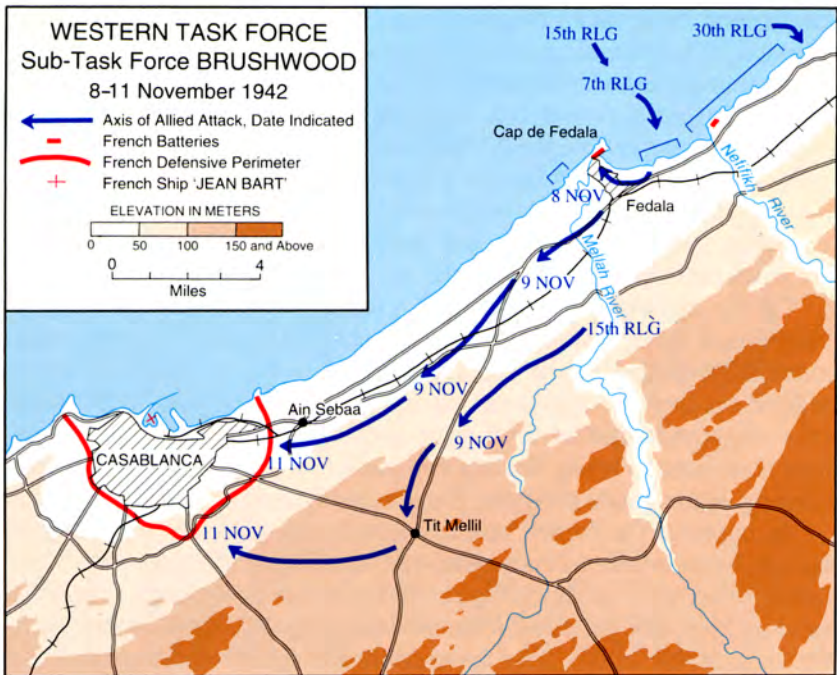
On the night of 9–10 November a tactical innovation involving the Navy raised American spirits. On the Sebou River the destroyer-transport *Dallas* pushed aside a barricade and sneaked upstream with a raider detachment to spearhead the assault on the airfield. As the night wore on, some colonial units gave up the fight, but Foreign Legion units continued to resist. Several companies of the 1st and 3d Battalion Landing Teams made progress, though slow, toward the airfield.

In bypassing a French machine-gun position, three companies of the 1st Team became disoriented and unintentionally provided some comic relief to a difficult night. At 0430 the companies reached a building they thought housed the airfield garrison. Intent on maintaining surprise, the troops crept up to doors and windows, weapons at the ready. Bursting in, the embarrassed Americans discovered they had captured a French cafe. Some 75 patrons put down wine glasses and surrendered. Patrols rounded up about 100 more prisoners in the area.

At daylight on 10 November the 1st Team mounted a new drive, this time with tanks, and by 1045 reached the west side of the airfield. On the river the *Dallas* passed a gauntlet of artillery fire and debarked the raiders on the east side of the airfield. American troops now occupied three sides of their objective.

Serious opposition still came from the Mehdiya fortress. Although naval gunfire had silenced the larger batteries earlier, machine-gun and rifle fire continued. Navy dive bombers were called in, and after only one bombing run the garrison quit. After claiming the fort and gathering prisoners, the 2d Battalion Landing Team moved on to close the ring around the airport. By nightfall the American victory was assured, and the local French commander requested a parlay with General Truscott. At 0400 on 11 November a cease-fire went into effect, the terms of which brought all GOALPOST objectives under American control.

Seventy miles south of Mehdiya the largest Navy convoy in Western Task Force debarked the 3d Infantry Division and an armored landing team to take the coastal village of Fedala and then move on Casablanca. Maj. Gen. Jonathan W. Anderson's Sub-Task Force



BRUSHWOOD consisted of three regimental landing groups (RLG), based on the 7th, 15th, and 30th Infantry Regiments, 3d Infantry Division. Other combat elements included the 1st Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, and the 82d Reconnaissance Battalion, both of the 2d Armored Division, and the 756th Tank Battalion (Separate). Each regimental landing group consisted of three battalion landing teams, each with engineer, artillery, air liaison, and other support detachments. The 1st and 2d Regimental Landing Groups were each reinforced by a platoon of light tanks. With support units, BRUSHWOOD totaled 19,364 officers and men.

The objectives of the landing were to silence all coastal batteries, seize the town and port of Fedala as well as all roads and rail lines serving them, and then turn south to envelop Casablanca from the landward side. To reach these objectives, individual battalion landing teams were to come ashore over four beaches along a four-mile arc of coastline bounded by two rivers, the Nefikih on the east and the Mellah on the west. Known points of opposition included five coastal and anti-aircraft batteries ranging from 75-mm. to 138.6-mm. in caliber. Garrison forces totaled 2,500 troops at Fedala and 4,325 at



Casablanca, only twelve miles to the south. Fifty fighters and thirty bombers could enter the battle from airfields in the area. Casablanca was of particular concern to the U.S. Navy covering force off Fedala since it harbored French naval units including cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and the uncompleted battleship *Jean Bart*, whose operational 15-inch guns could easily reach both transports and landing beaches to the north.

As happened to GOALPOST, BRUSHWOOD's problems began even before H-hour, set for 0400 on 8 November. Hours earlier, Navy officers had discovered that an unknown current had carried transports up to seven miles out of position. The attempt to realign ships in the darkness forced a postponement of H-hour. With landing craft finally in the water, fewer than half reached assembly points on time; turning toward shore, many straggled behind organized waves. High surf and navigational errors led a high proportion of boats far from assigned beaches. Many crashed against rocky bluffs, drowning troops and destroying equipment. Of the three subtask forces landing on Moroccan shores, BRUSHWOOD suffered the highest loss of landing craft: 57 of 119 boats in the first wave alone, and more in later waves. Since all boats were scheduled to make repeated ship-to-shore runs, these losses delayed off-loading, denied troops ashore needed equipment and weapons, and ended any chance for a quick conquest of Casablanca.

The first troops ashore were from 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry (1-7 Battalion Landing Team), reaching Beach RED 2 at 0500. All other teams landed in daylight. At first light—about 0545—coastal batteries and machine guns began firing on transports offshore and landing craft plowing through the surf. U.S. Navy cruisers and destroyers immediately returned the fire. Most landing teams encountered more trouble from high surf and inexperienced boat crews than enemy fire. Some, such as 2-7 Battalion Landing Team, were strewn over two beaches, while others stepped ashore miles from assigned beaches. Rather than take time to realign, most landing teams pursued assigned missions from where they landed or devised new missions based on their new situations.

With the troops ashore, the pace of operations quickened. The companies of 1-7 Team moved inland toward Fedala and quickly captured a surprised contingent of the 6th Senegalese Infantry Regiment and ten Germans fleeing their hotel. By 0600 the town was in American hands. Silencing coastal batteries proved more difficult than capturing the town. Naval gunfire appeared to knock out the larger batteries, located at the mouths of the two rivers, in the first half hour of daylight. But when individual guns resumed intermittent fire, further action became necessary. Against the French battery at the mouth of the Nefifikh River



*Troops and tank of the 7th Infantry, 3d Infantry Division, inland of Fedala. (National Archives)*

on the east end of the landing site the Americans turned misfortune to great advantage. Part of 2-7 Team had been carried three miles from its assigned beach to a point east of the Nefifikh; to the west of the river, the 2-30 Battalion Landing Team landed as planned. When the two battalion commanders on the scene discovered they had troops on both sides of a French battery, they quickly moved against the battery from opposite sides and overran the gunpits by 0730.

On the west end of the landing site a hostile battery atop Cap de Fedala held out much longer. As if to mock American naval superiority, a number of French guns kept firing on the landing beaches between salvos from offshore. Each renewed request for naval fire support delayed the assault on the cape. For over five hours the frustrating duel continued. Only a ground assault could win a final decision against the hostile guns, but the troops needed more than rifle fire.

Late in the morning a fortuitous meeting of personality and circumstance occurred to break the impasse at the cape. Col. William H. Wilbur had come ashore with the leading waves on a one-man mission direct from General Patton. Leaving the troops on the beach, the colonel commandeered a vehicle and ordered the driver to head south.

Braving both language barrier and trigger-happy sentries, Wilbur covered the sixteen-mile distance to Casablanca in total darkness and delivered a letter to the French command suggesting a cease-fire. Returning to American lines hours later, the colonel came upon the stalemate at Cap de Fedala. In an extraordinary demonstration of improvisation and leadership, Colonel Wilbur combined Company A, 1-7 Battalion Landing Team, with four tanks of the 756th Tank Battalion and mounted an assault on the cape at 1140. Twenty minutes later the battery surrendered, and Western Task Force had a Medal of Honor recipient.

Aboard the USS *Augusta*, General Patton impatiently awaited a launch to the beach. He had planned to be ashore by 0800 but was delayed when a major naval battle developed. About 0700 a French cruiser, seven destroyers, and two submarines had sortied out of the harbor at Casablanca, and French aircraft drove American spotting planes away from the landing beaches. A few minutes later the *Jean Bart* began firing on the *Augusta* and the *Brooklyn*. U.S. Navy planes soon drove off most enemy aircraft, but the naval battle raged. For over four hours American cruisers and destroyers swerved and darted in tight patterns to avoid torpedoes and bracketing salvos while returning fire. By 1130 the French ships were driven off, and Patton's landing craft could be lowered over the side. Finally, at 1320, the general stepped ashore, distinctive white-handled pistols at his waist, and prepared his headquarters for the push south.

While the naval action offshore and the two battles against coastal batteries at the ends of the landing site continued, several battalion landing teams pushed inland in the middle. The rest of the 7th and 30th Regimental Landing Groups came ashore late in the morning of D-day, and the 15th Regimental Landing Group landed that afternoon. The D-day objective was a beachhead eleven miles wide and five miles deep. By nightfall the troops had pushed far enough inland but were still three miles short of the desired position to the south. The next morning General Anderson deployed his troops in a four-battalion front and began moving south along the coast to assembly areas for the attack on Casablanca, scheduled for the third day ashore. The American command hoped the French would not mount an all-out defense of the city, for with a population of over two hundred thousand, Casablanca was more than ten times larger than any other urban area encountered by Western Task Force. If the French chose to defend every sizable building and narrow street, casualties would be high and the battle long.

During their move south the Americans made good progress



against sporadic fire and strafing aircraft. But soon the unloading problems of the previous day began to retard operations. By 1700 on D-day 39 percent of the troops had landed, but only 16 percent of vehicles and 1.1 percent of supplies were ashore. Moreover, when Anderson started south he had no land-based air support, and most of his tanks were still on the transports. Short of trucks to cover the growing distance between troops and supplies, Anderson halted his assault battalions in the afternoon six miles short of the Casablanca defensive perimeter. The disappointment of the troops at the order was compounded by a sense of tragedy when a small plane they shot down turned out to be not a French attacker, but a friendly artillery spotter.

Viewing the beaches that same morning, General Patton pro-



*Arriving at Fedala to negotiate an armistice, 11 November 1942. General Auguste Paul Nogues, left, is met by Col. Hobart R. Gay, representing General Patton. (National Archives)*

nounced the supply situation “a mess.” By liberal application of the frenzied activity and rapid-fire orders that would later make him famous, as well as pointed observations directed at those lacking in initiative, Patton got things moving forward from the beaches. He also requested a heavier flow of supplies and equipment from the transports despite continued fire from coastal guns. At 1430 the tanks of the 67th Armored Regiment finally began unloading at Fedala. By 1700 on the second day, 55 percent of BRUSHWOOD troops, 31 percent of vehicles, and 3.3 percent of its supplies were ashore. The silencing of coastal batteries the same day assured continued acceleration in the arrival of vehicles and supplies. Transports could now anchor closer to the beach and use all port facilities at Fedala.



General Anderson's troops resumed the advance on Casablanca at midnight, 9-10 November, with the 7th Group on the right along the coast, and the 15th Group inland. The two lead battalions of the 7th Group easily advanced over two miles until they ran into an artillery barrage near the village of Ain Sebaa. On the left, the 15th Group made no progress at all but not because of enemy fire. When reconnaissance troops reported a French position of unknown size near Tit Mellil, officers on the scene decided not to move against it in darkness. At daylight the delayed advance got off to an inauspicious start when the 10th Field Artillery Battalion somehow found itself ahead of the infantry and was fired on and pushed back 1,000 yards by counter-battery fire and infantry rushes. Then French warships found a gap in the naval gunfire support plan and bombarded 7th Group until driven back to port by the *Augusta* and four destroyers.

By midmorning it was clear that 10 November would be the bloodiest day for BRUSHWOOD. Troops of the 7th Group doggedly pushed on toward Casablanca, overran several machine-gun positions,





and reached the outskirts of the city, where they were stopped by intense artillery and small-arms fire. Inland, the 15th Group corrected its infantry-artillery coordination and in a day-long battle enveloped Tit Mellil and wrapped around the landward side of Casablanca. By 1700 Anderson's battalions had fought their way to the French defenses on the east and south of Casablanca; as soon as General Harmon's tanks arrived from Safi the city would be surrounded. But the gains of the day had been won at a cost of 36 killed and 113 wounded.

While the fighting continued, messages sizzled between French command posts and Marshal Henri Philippe Petain in Vichy, the temporary French capital in Europe. When neither Patton nor Eisenhower received an answer to the cease-fire proposal Colonel Wilbur had carried to Casablanca, Patton sent another with his chief of staff, Col. Hobart R. Gay. Until the French command responded, Patton had no choice but to prepare to attack the heavily defended city on 11 November.

In his command bunker at Gibraltar General Eisenhower kept a close watch on the widely separated landings and movements ashore comprising Operation TORCH. While two reinforced U.S. Army divisions fought along the Atlantic coast, other large units moved against objectives hundreds of miles away in the Mediterranean Sea. On the same day that Western Task Force troops ran across beaches near Casablanca, Center Task Force landed one reinforced division at Oran, and Eastern Task Force put ashore two regimental division and one battalion landing teams at Algiers. In the Mediterranean, the U.S. Army had to deal with a condition absent from the situation on the Atlantic coast: large-scale British participation. As Center and Eastern Task Force operations unfolded, they forced the Allies to learn to cooperate.

Charged with taking the Algerian city of Oran, Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall's Center Task Force consisted of the 1st Infantry Division with the 1st Ranger Battalion attached and Combat Command B of the 1st Armored Division. Fredendall's troops were to land at three beaches along a fifty-mile stretch of coastline: Beaches X

and Y lay west of Oran, Beach Z east. Once ashore the troops would take roads, villages, and two airfields in the area, converge ten miles inland of Oran, and move on the city from three sides. All naval and air support would come from a British task force of 61 escort vessels, including 1 battleship, 3 aircraft carriers, 3 cruisers, and 13 destroyers, as well as 43 transports. A city of 200,000, Oran had formidable defenses including 13 coast artillery batteries, 16,700 troops, about 100 planes, and several destroyers in the harbor. The battle for Oran could develop into a costlier campaign than that for Casablanca.

H-hour for Center Task Force was 0100, 8 November 1942, but a variety of problems delayed most units. At Beach X, twenty-eight miles west of Oran, the schedule was set back when five cargo ships unknowingly entered the landing zone. British escorts boarded one surprised intruder, then confined the others so close to shore that they ran aground. As in the Western Task Force experience, upon lowering boats transport crews found that an unexpected current had pushed them farther out to sea than planned. During the lengthened run to the beach one boat engine caught fire, ending the chance for surprise. Despite these problems, all assault troops reached shore, though late and at varying distances from assigned beaches. Similar problems continued after assault troops hit the beaches. Deep-draft tank lighters became hung up on a sandbar 360 feet offshore. Engineer troops worked three hours laying a ponton bridge which failed to reach shore. Unloaded boats had to be pushed off the beach by bulldozers, a chore which damaged propellers and rudders and put ten of thirteen lighters out of service. Fortunately no French gunners took advantage of these mishaps.

Once ashore the troops quickly assembled a column of twenty tanks with support vehicles and started toward the village of Lourmel, ten miles inland. One armored car blocked the road, but a few shots won the cooperation of its crew. By noon Lourmel was in American hands, and Beach X had served its purpose of receiving a sizable armored force.

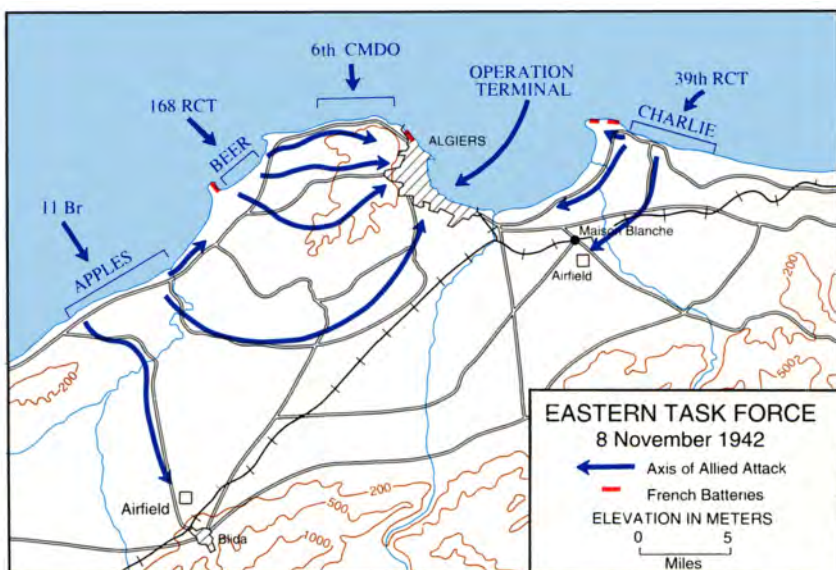
At Beach Y, fifteen miles west of Oran, Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt's 26th Regimental Combat Team experienced similar problems and found a new one. Ladder rungs on one of the British transports were two feet apart, slowing the troops' descent into landing boats. Approaching the beach, landing craft crews discovered a sandbar, but when a way around it was found, the 26th Team was spared a ponton bridge-building delay. With most of the troops ashore, the French warship *La Surprise* appeared about 0645, trying to live up to its name, but was promptly sunk. At 0800 advancing troops met and destroyed three French armored cars. An hour later a coastal battery

hit a transport offshore, threatening the arrival of support weapons ashore, but British naval gunfire distracted the battery the rest of the day. Roosevelt's troops pushed inland to clear roads and take two villages by midmorning, when they were stopped by fire from a hill mass five miles behind the beaches.

Late in Center Task Force planning the British had added another landing. Operation RESERVIST called for 400 men to assault Oran harbor itself to prevent sabotage and, possibly, accept the surrender of the city from surprised officials. But even before the troops reached shore, RESERVIST became the biggest disappointment of all TORCH landings. The troops, from the 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Division, boarded two British cutters. Entering the harbor, the two cutters were soon found by searchlights and by devastating fire from shore batteries and French destroyers. One cutter tried to ram a destroyer and in a crunching sideswipe received pointblank fire which killed or wounded nearly half of the American troops and British crew. Both cutters were reduced to burning, sinking hulks with survivors scrambling for launches. Only 47 American troops eventually landed.

Another Allied failure was only slightly less significant. To assist assaults on the two airfields, the U.S. 2d Battalion, 509th Parachute Regiment, an airborne force, was flown from England on 7 November. En route, bad weather and faulty communications caused varying numbers of planes to land at Gibraltar, French Morocco, Spanish Morocco, and several points along the Algerian coast. Some of the troops arriving in Algeria became prisoners of civil police, while the rest were too disorganized to contribute to the battle for Oran. However, they were able to participate in the battle for Tunisia later in the month.

Beach Z, twenty miles east of Oran, received most of General Fredendall's troops. The 16th and 18th Regimental Combat Teams of Maj. Gen. Terry Allen's 1st Infantry Division, the attached 1st Ranger Battalion, and most of Combat Command B under Brig. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver transferred from transports to landing craft, happily free of the many problems that delayed landings everywhere else. Led by Lt. Col. William O. Darby's Rangers, the 7,092 men of the 18th Team put ashore unopposed between the villages of Arzew and St. Leu and quickly moved inland on objectives. The Rangers infiltrated behind two coastal batteries and took both after a brief firefight. Infantry followed and after another brief fight took the town of Arzew, a barracks, and thirteen seaplanes. But the string of easy victories abruptly ended. Moving west toward Oran, the 18th Team met intense fire at the village of St. Cloud. Two American assaults fizzled, and a



set battle continued the rest of D-day.

On the east the 5,608 troops of the 16th Team got off to an even faster start, taking two villages ahead of schedule. By early afternoon it had overcome an Algerian unit and set a defensive line eight miles inland. The beachhead clear, General Oliver's tanks roared ashore, found a road, and headed directly for Tafaraoui airfield, twenty-five miles inland. Coordinating with armored infantry, the tankers quickly overran the airfield and took 300 prisoners. By 1630 Twelfth Air Force Spitfires from Gibraltar were landing, although they had to fight their way through French planes. As night fell on D-day, the Americans were well established at three beachheads and held one of two airfields. Despite the RESERVIST and airborne setbacks, General Fredendall was in good position to complete the seizure of Oran.

On 9 November the French mounted more determined opposition to General Allen's troops. A strong infantry attack hit the 16th Team at the eastern end of Beach Z, while a lesser assault slowed the 26th Team between Beach Y and Oran. Both thrusts were turned back by midafternoon with less difficulty than expected. A more serious threat developed near Tafaraoui airfield, where French tanks met Oliver's armor. A platoon of tank destroyers proved of decisive advantage to the Americans; the French withdrew, leaving fourteen ruined tanks. Shortly after this action, at La Senia airfield, the French flew away most of their planes

and left a nominal defense. American elements took the airfield with no losses. The Center Task Force now held both airfields.

As the day wore on, French resistance concentrated at three points around Oran: St. Cloud to the east, Valmy to the south, and Misserrhin to the southwest. With American casualties mounting, Fredendall and Allen devised an expedient. Leaving some forces to hold the French in place, the 18th Team and an armored column bypassed St. Cloud and Misserrhin after nightfall, a risky move for troops in their first campaign but well executed. That night Fredendall drew up a plan for an attack on Oran from three sides. At first light on 10 November French defenses were in disarray but still firing artillery missions from some sectors. At 1015 an armored column punched through the south side of Oran and made for the French commander's headquarters and the port. A cease-fire took place at 1215, and within a few hours French units in the Oran area surrendered.

Meanwhile, 220 miles east of Oran, Eastern Task Force had dropped anchor off Algiers in the last hours of 7 November. Of the three TORCH task forces, Eastern included the largest British proportion. Not only were naval and air support British; so were 23,000 of the total 33,000 troops. The 10,000 U.S. Army troops landing at Algiers would consist of Col. Benjamin F. Caffey, Jr.'s 39th Regimental Combat Team from the 9th Infantry Division; and Col. John W. O'Daniel's 168th Regimental Combat Team and Lt. Col. Edwin T. Swenson's 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, both from the 34th Infantry Division. These American units and all British Army units in the initial landing were under command of U.S. Maj. Gen. Charles W. Ryder. Naval support included a Royal Navy flotilla of 3 aircraft carriers, 4 cruisers, 1 anti-aircraft vessel, 7 destroyers, and 15 transports. Enemy strength was estimated at 15,000 troops with only obsolete tanks, 91 fighters and bombers at two airfields, 12 coastal batteries, and a few destroyers in the harbor.

Both the geography and concept of operations at Algiers closely resembled those of Oran. The city lay in an arc of beaches and bluffs gradually rising to low hills ten miles inland. Allied troops were to land at three points along a fifty-mile stretch of coast: Beaches APPLES and BEER lay west of the city, Beach CHARLIE east. After clearing the beaches, the troops would take all roads, villages, and two airfields; then converge behind Algiers; and move on the city from three sides.

Landings in the Algiers area met mixed success. The British 11th Infantry Brigade Group came across Beach APPLES on time and without mishap, the smoothest of all TORCH landings. By 0700 the unit

had moved twelve miles inland and taken its objective, Blida airfield. But at Beach BEER a variety of problems—high surf, boat crew inexperience, absent beach guides, engine failures—scattered the 168th Team over fifteen miles of coastline and delayed the British 6th Commando over five hours. Fortunately, landings at APPLES and BEER were unopposed. At Beach CHARLIE, however, coastal batteries fired on transports as the landing craft neared shore. Naval gunfire responded, but then high surf scattered 39th Regimental Combat Team boats, smashing some against coastal rocks. Leaving the boats, most troops found, instead of gradually rising ground, a vertical bluff with stairs cut for sightseers. Overcoming all these difficulties, the troops of the 39th Team moved eight miles inland and took the airfield at Maison Blanche by 0830. But for the rest of the day a fierce battle raged with a French marine artillery battery. Royal Navy surface and air units eventually prevailed, though Axis bombers managed to damage a transport and destroyer.

As at Oran, the British insisted on an antisabotage mission into the heart of the objective area. Operation TERMINAL called for Colonel Swenson's 3d Battalion, 135th Infantry, to enter Algiers harbor on two Royal Navy destroyers, debark, and secure port facilities for future Allied operations. As the two ships moved toward the bay at 0140 on D-day, TERMINAL began to resemble the RESERVIST disaster at Oran. The first ship soon drew a searchlight beam, then hostile fire which drove it back to sea in flames with thirty-five casualties. Ignoring its sister ship's fate, the other vessel ran through the intense fire, tied up along a breakwater, and debarked Swenson and half of his battalion. By 0800 the troops had secured several objectives and seemed on the verge of success when the ship, waiting for their return, came under fire. A few men made it aboard as the ship pushed off, but the rest of the unit was surrounded. When Swenson was forced to surrender his force seven hours after entering the city, TERMINAL ended in failure, though with fewer casualties than RESERVIST at Oran.

Algiers presented the Allies with more than military objectives. As headquarters for French forces in all of North Africa, the city incorporated a political character which Allied commanders did not find at other landing sites. Since the fall of France this political aspect had become especially tangled, with the French military deeply fragmented and local commanders promoting various responses to TORCH. For Allied commanders on the ground Algiers was a political maze in which a turn toward one French unit might result in a champagne reception while a turn in a different direction might land one in a deadly firelight. This confusion manifested with frustrating clarity for





*Negotiations at Algiers, 13 November 1942. Left to right, General Eisenhower, Admiral Darlan, Maj. Gen. Mark W. Clark, and Mr. Robert Murphy of the U.S. State Department. (National Archives)*

the 168th Regimental Combat Team on its seven-mile advance from Beach BEER to Algiers. On the morning of D-day Colonel O'Daniel's men were met by French troops openly assisting the advance. But around noon the pro-American French commander was replaced by a pro-Nazi officer, and the 168th found itself receiving intense fire from soldiers of the same French units.

Amid confused action in the field, negotiations for a cease-fire continued. On D-day a representative of President Roosevelt had delivered a message to Marshal Petain in Vichy requesting cooperation with all Allied landings. Under close Nazi supervision, Petain had to refuse but authorized Admiral Jean Francois Darlan, commander of all French forces, to act as he saw fit. Darlan let the invasion continue until further resistance was hopeless, then allowed his deputy at Algiers to meet General Ryder. Algiers was the first of the three TORCH objectives to put a cease-fire into effect, at 2000 on 8 November. Unfortunately, the

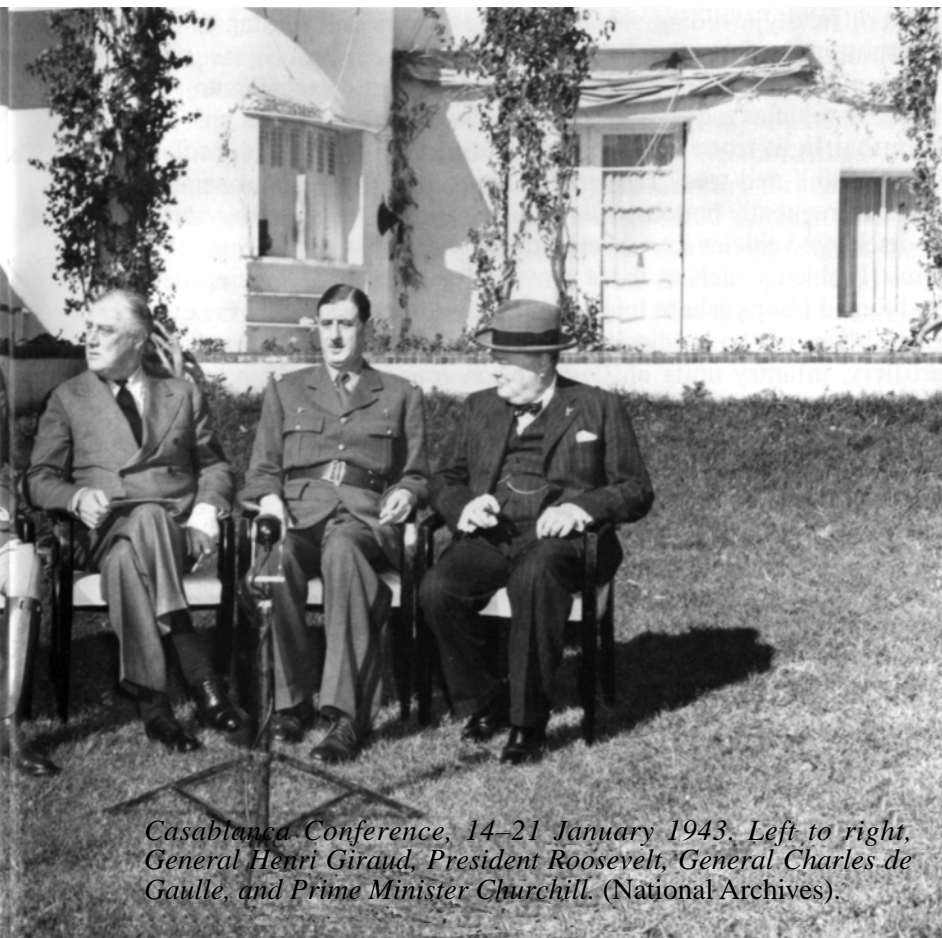
agreement there did not apply to other areas. French headquarters in Oran agreed to a separate cease-fire only at 1215 on 10 November. At Casablanca, however, the French did not send out a cease-fire order until 1910 on the 10th, and sniper fire continued for days after. The successful end to TORCH brought much relief to Washington and London but left American and British commanders suspicious about the potential of the French as battlefield allies.

### *Analysis*

Operation TORCH gave the Allies substantial beachheads in North Africa at rather modest cost, considering the size of forces committed. One hundred twenty-five thousand soldiers, sailors, and airmen participated in the operation, 82,600 of them U.S. Army personnel. Ninety-six percent of the 1,469 casualties were American, with the Army losing 526 killed, 837 wounded, and 41 missing. Casualties varied considerably among the three task forces. Eastern Task Force lost the fewest Americans killed in action, 108, Western Task Force, with four times as many American troops, lost 142 killed; Center Task Force lost almost twice as many killed, 276. But without the British-sponsored RESERVIST disaster at Oran, the Center Task Force killed-in-action total would have been in the same range as that of the other task forces.

On the Moroccan and Algerian coasts the United States Army executed operations for which its history offered no preparation: large-scale amphibious landings under hostile fire. While those operations ended in victory, any evaluation of U.S. Army performance must allow for the generally inept resistance offered by French and colonial forces. Only isolated artillery batteries and infantry units proved formidable; a better-equipped and more determined opponent could have





*Casablanca Conference, 14–21 January 1943. Left to right, General Henri Giraud, President Roosevelt, General Charles de Gaulle, and Prime Minister Churchill. (National Archives).*

easily capitalized on the many Allied landing problems. Obviously, the U.S. Army and its Allies would have to overcome these problems before undertaking more ambitious amphibious operations.

Most of the Army's problems during TORCH occurred in the ship-to-shore phase of landings, when amphibious forces are most vulnerable. The whole idea of night landings had to be reexamined. While the transfer of troops and equipment from transports to landing boats could be accomplished with only moderate difficulty in darkness, the shuttling of boats between transports and beaches after their first trip ashore became a source of delays. Boats returning to transports had

great difficulty avoiding subsequent boat waves and finding the right transport in the darkness.

A more serious problem concerned transport of vehicles to shore. Because vehicles required deeper-draft landing craft than troops, sandbars that light troop-carrying boats overrode became obstacles to heavier tank and truck lighters. Even on beaches without sandbars, lighters frequently bottomed some distance from the shoreline and had to discharge vehicles into several feet of water, disabling electrical systems. Problems such as these provoked a spiral of unloading delays and forced troops ashore into a tactical disadvantage during the crucial early hours of the landings. Reaching shore sooner than tanks and artillery, infantry units on D-day often found themselves attacking French coastal batteries and armored units with little more than rifles and hand grenades. Most other problems relating to navigation and handling of hazardous items such as gasoline could be corrected with training and experience. But one phenomenon affecting movement to shore remained beyond human reach: the weather.

Operational fires (large-caliber supporting fire) proved generally satisfactory to all landings. The assignment of an aircraft carrier to each landing site gave the task forces a great advantage: Allied aircraft could prevent reinforcement of enemy garrisons, but the French could not prevent Allied buildups ashore. Only at Safi and Algiers did lone sorties of French aircraft inflict damage, and both were quickly driven off.

Naval gunfire provided essential support in neutralizing coastal batteries. In coordinating with friendly troop movements ashore, however, problems arose. Most landings took place near urban areas, which placed troops in civil-military minefields. Since Allied leaders looked forward to eventual French cooperation against the Axis, gunnery officers aboard ships and field commanders ashore had to exercise great care to avoid civilian housing as well as port facilities and oil supplies they hoped to use. With surface units ten or more miles offshore, naval gunfire margins of error could not be ignored. Such considerations forced Army units to operate without some of the large-caliber support that could have shortened the duration—and reduced the casualty total—of some battles.

For advancing units ashore, a more immediate tactical problem with naval gunfire occasionally arose. In the Fedala area a conflict in calls for support almost caused the tragedy of American fire landing among American troops. As troops of the 7th Regimental Landing Group neared an objective they requested continuation of naval gunfire. At the same time, 30th Regimental Landing Group officers asked

the ships to hold fire for the moment, since their troops were nearing the impact zone. Safety concerns dictated a halt of fire support missions but at the cost of delay in the advance ashore.

The Center and Eastern Task Force landings highlighted several operational differences between the two leading Western Allies. Most striking was the British preference for antisabotage thrusts directly into objective areas, a tactic Americans considered suicidal. The failure of Operations RESERVIST and TERMINAL confirmed fears of those American planners who were wary of some British operational concepts, a suspicion dating from World War I. On the American side, much work remained to be done before airborne operations could exercise decisive influence on the battlefield.

Despite the problems it exposed, Operation TORCH gave the U.S. Army a hopeful sign for the future: American troops would soon close the experience gap with their British comrades and enable the Allies to field well-coordinated forces of overwhelming power.

# ALGERIA–FRENCH MOROCCO 1942

## Further Readings

The Algeria–French Morocco Campaign is well documented in broader studies of either Operation TORCH or the European Theater of Operations, as well as the accounts of key participants. General Eisenhower recounts the challenges of international command in his *Crusade in Europe* (1948). Harry C. Butcher, a naval officer serving with Eisenhower, gives another view from headquarters in his *My Three Years with Eisenhower* (1946). The views of armor commanders are to be found in George S. Patton, Jr., *War As I Knew It* (1947), and Ernest N. Harmon, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier* (1970). The most exhaustive treatment of the campaign remains George F. Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (1957), a volume in the series United States Army in World War II.

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Cover: *Troops and tank of 7th Infantry, 3d Division, inland of Fedala.*  
(National Archives)