

U.S. NAVY OPERATIONS IN WORLD WAR II



OPERATION TORCH

THE AMERICAN AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT
ON FRENCH MOROCCO

1942



ALEXANDRA LOHSE AND JON MIDDAUGH



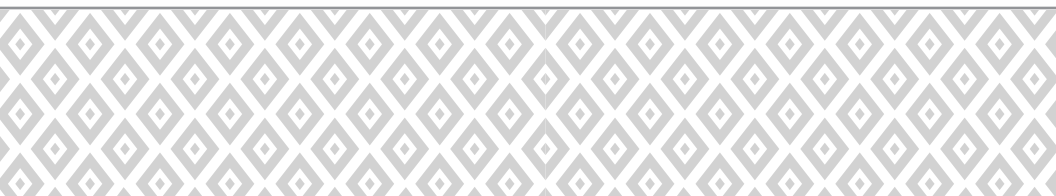
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*Naval History and Heritage Command, Department of the Navy
Washington, DC*



Published by

Naval History and Heritage Command
805 Kidder Breese Street SE
Washington Navy Yard, DC 20374-5060
www.history.navy.mil

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Vincent O'Hara, who graciously extended permission for the reproduction of six maps from his book *Torch: North Africa and the Allied Path to Victory*, published in 2015 by U.S. Naval Institute Press.

Cover art: *Convoy at Night* by Mitchell Jamieson, 1942, U.S. Navy Art Collection. Naval History and Heritage Command accession no. 88-193-AV.

Use of ISBN

This is the official U.S. Government edition of this publication and is herein identified to certify its authenticity. Use of 978-1-943604-29-6 is for this edition only. A Section 508-compliant PDF is catalogued under ISBN 978-1-943604-30-2.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Lohse, Alexandra, author. | Middaugh, Jon, author.

Title: Operation Torch: the American amphibious assault on French Morocco, 1942/Alexandra Lohse and Jon Middaugh, Naval History and Heritage Command, Department of the Navy.

Other titles: American amphibious assault on French Morocco, 1942

Description: Washington Navy Yard, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, [2018]

Identifiers: LCCN 2017054069 | ISBN 9781943604296

Subjects: LCSH: Operation Torch, 1942. | World War, 1939-1945—Campaigns—Africa, North.

Classification: LCC D766.82 .L65 2018 | DDC 940.54/234—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017054069>

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 7 November 1942, a great American fleet assembled off the Atlantic coast of French Morocco. Commanded by Rear Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt, Task Force (TF) 34 comprised 102 ships carrying the nearly 35,000 officers and enlisted men of Major General George Smith Patton, Jr.'s Western Task Force (WTF). The convoys had departed the United States beginning on 23 October. Zigzagging by day and steaming straight ahead by night, they had traveled more than 3,400 miles across the Atlantic undetected. As they approached the African coastline, commanders were relieved to emerge from stormy seas to fair weather and calmer waters. Under the cover of darkness, troop transports anchored in designated areas several miles off the three attack points of Safi, Fedala, and Mehdiā-Port Lyautey, and, as night turned to day, the American assault on North Africa commenced.

The Moroccan landings marked the largest American campaign to date in the Atlantic theater. Part of Operation Torch, the attacks were synchronized with Anglo-American amphibious assaults on Algeria's Mediterranean coastline. Altogether, some 350 warships and 500 transports had carried about 107,000 troops from the United States and the United Kingdom to occupy territory controlled by Vichy France and imperil Axis forces in the region. As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt put it in his brief address to the nation on D-Day, 8 November 1942:

In order to forestall an invasion of Africa by Germany and Italy, which, if successful, would constitute a direct threat to America across the comparatively narrow sea from western Africa, a powerful American force equipped with adequate weapons of modern warfare and under American command is today landing on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of the French colonies of Africa. The landing of this American army is being assisted by the British Navy and Air Forces, and it will in the immediate future be reinforced by a considerable number of divisions of the British Army. This combined Allied force, under American command, in conjunction with the British campaign in Egypt, is designed to prevent an occupation by the Axis armies of any part of northern or western Africa and to deny to the aggressor nation a starting point from which to launch an attack against the

Atlantic coast of the Americas. In addition, it provides an effective second front assistance to our heroic allies in Russia.¹

Torch was an ambitious amphibious invasion that foreshadowed other great naval operations carried out jointly and combined by the United States and the United Kingdom during World War II. The U.S. Navy, in particular, executed a pioneering achievement, transporting American troops and matériel over several thousand transatlantic miles to terminate in major assaults on enemy strongholds. Lessons learned in North Africa would shape American decision making and facilitate successful amphibious landings in the European theater throughout the rest of the war.



North African invasion convoy transiting the Atlantic. *National Archives 80-G-30383.*

2. STRATEGIC SETTING

Torch resulted from an uneasy compromise between the Allies' conflicting political and military objectives. Though pledged to a "Europe First" policy, the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union deadlocked on when and where to confront Germany—questions that tested their

¹ Charles Moran, ed. *The Landings in North Africa: November 1942* (Washington, DC: Publications Branch, Office of Naval Intelligence, United States Navy, 1944), 1.

alliance as their military situation grew increasingly precarious over the course of 1942. By that summer, the British had suffered a string of setbacks in Africa, culminating in a shocking defeat at Tobruk, where 33,000 troops surrendered to an Axis force half their size. On the Eastern Front, German armies pushed on toward Stalingrad and the Caucasus. Under duress, the Soviet Union urged the United States and Great Britain to open a second front in Europe. The Western Allies, however, viewed such a step as recklessly premature and refused to commit to an invasion of “Fortress Europe” in 1942.

At the same time, British and American strategic thinking about alternative military interventions diverged sharply. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his advisors had long considered various operations in North Africa. After the United States entered the war, they vigorously pursued a combined assault in the Mediterranean theater (initially codenamed *Gymnast*), partially to forestall a cross-channel invasion of the European continent. The British argued that intervention in North Africa would clear Axis powers from the region, improve Allied naval control of the Mediterranean, and set the stage for a subsequent invasion of southern Europe. By contrast, most American planners favored an aggressive buildup of military forces in the United Kingdom (Operation *Bolero*) in preparation for a 1943 invasion of continental Europe (Operation *Roundup*). Secretary of War Henry Lewis Stimson and Chief of Staff of the Army General George Catlett Marshall were among the vocal opponents of operations in North Africa, which they deemed an irresponsible diversion of forces and resources to a peripheral theater. President Roosevelt, on the other hand, favored early action to boost public morale and bolster Soviet faith in its Western Allies. In July, he overruled his military advisers and ordered them to come to an agreement for Anglo-American military action in 1942. The Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) issued Agreement No. 94 on 24 July, committing the Western Allies to an operation in North Africa in the fall.² Six days

² CCS constituted the supreme military staff for the Western Allies during World War II. It comprised the British Chiefs of Staff Committee and the American Joint Chiefs of Staff. Vincent O'Hara, *Torch: North Africa and the Allied Path to Victory* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2015), 33–35.

later, Roosevelt formally pledged his support to Operation Torch.³

3. FRENCH NORTH AFRICA IN 1942

Prior to the Allied invasion, the Vichy Regime under Marshal Philippe Pétain nominally controlled the French colonies in North Africa. Although ostensibly neutral, Pétain's government collaborated closely with Nazi Germany. His regime had some 125,000 soldiers stationed in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria as well as powerful coastal artillery, 200 tanks, 500 aircraft, 20 warships and patrol boats, and 11 submarines. Torch's detractors argued that such a formidable coastal defense, especially if reinforced by the Germans, was capable of bogging down the Western Allies at the wrong place and time. Its proponents believed that the defenses were no match for the combined Anglo-American military might. Moreover, optimistic British intelligence suggested that the French would offer minimal resistance.⁴ Yet even proponents of the invasion did not agree on how to execute the operation and contested the questions of when and where to invade up to the time of the actual crossing in late October.⁵

4. PLANNING TORCH

The decision for Torch forced American planners to switch abruptly from their preparations for an anticipated invasion of the European continent to an imminent invasion of French North Africa, a vastly different logistical challenge. President Roosevelt and General Marshall installed the relatively junior Lieutenant General Dwight David Eisenhower to command the operation. Planning sessions were already underway when the CCS formally confirmed him as Commander in Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force, on 13 August 1942.⁶ Alongside his staff in London, Eisenhower now faced the difficult challenge of reconciling the Allies' conflicting objectives. Astonishingly, Torch was planned, organized, and

³ Ibid., 43–45.

⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁶ Ibid., 47–48.

executed over the course of three months.⁷

Planners were deeply divided over the operation's center of gravity. The American staffs in Washington favored principal landings on the Atlantic coast followed by a gradual occupation of Morocco. They intended to funnel most forces through Casablanca before moving eastward. Their main objective was securing the Strait of Gibraltar and overland communications in case of hostile German, French, and possibly Spanish reactions. Pursuing significantly higher stakes, the British wanted to strike as far east as possible. They sought to deal a blow to the Axis powers by occupying Tunisia before German reinforcements could arrive. In the British estimations, Casablanca was strategically insignificant and tactically risky because of rough surf conditions and likely hostile local attitudes.⁸

5. TORCH LOGISTICS

In his attempt to reconcile dueling British and American conceptions of Torch, Eisenhower faced complex logistical, political, and military challenges. First among them were the unknown Anglo-American capabilities, particularly the capacity of naval shipping to support widely separate landings. Throughout the summer, Eisenhower had no firm numbers for escort vessels and landing craft. The size and shape of naval air support were also unknown. In his attempts to pin down any of the many variables, he repeatedly clashed with the U.S. Navy, which, in his words, "was loath to commit itself firmly to an estimate of the vessels it could provide for the expedition. It was a nerve-racking state of uncertainty in which we had to work and plan."⁹

A major amphibious operation in 1942 dangerously strained the capacity of the U.S. Navy as naval buildup through procurement and conversion had not kept pace with escalating demand. This was true in particular for Vice Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll's Atlantic Fleet, which

⁷ Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, *The United States Army in World War II. The War Department: Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940–1943* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1995), 453.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 417–19.

⁹ Vincent Jones, *Operation Torch: Anglo-American Invasion of North Africa* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), 35–36.

provided vessels and sailors for Torch. The quality and quantity of its ships were inferior when compared to the Pacific Fleet, which also contained most of the Navy's assault transports. The Atlantic Fleet, by comparison, comprised a mismatched collection of old ships like the World War I-era dreadnought *Texas* (BB-35) and newer, untested battleships like *Massachusetts* (BB-59). *Ranger* (CV-4), the largest aircraft carrier in the Atlantic fleet, was deemed unfit for the demanding environs of the Pacific. Ultimately, only six transports—*Leonard Wood* (AP-25), *Joseph T. Dickman* (AP-26), *Edward Rutledge* (AP-52), *John Penn* (AP-51), *William P. Biddle* (AP-15), *Harry Lee* (AP-17)—and four cargo vessels—*Algorab* (AK-25), *Arcturus* (AK-18), *Electra* (AK-21), *Procyon* (AK-19)—out of the 30 used for the operation had been commissioned for a year or more. This was due in part to the lengthy conversion process for merchant ships, which included alteration of transports for combat loading, that continued right until the Atlantic crossing. As of 1 August, several vessels were still en route from the Pacific.

Throughout the month of August, the question of naval capacity remained unanswered as Eisenhower drew up plans for an undetermined invasion force arriving at various North African landing sites. Eisenhower's first plan of 9 August entailed Atlantic and Mediterranean landings with the option of delaying the former. His second plan of 22 August eliminated the Casablanca landings, placing all landings inside the Mediterranean and making Oran the main point of assault.¹⁰ On 2 August, the Navy had reported that 7 November would be the earliest possible assault date based on the availability of attack transports. On 29 September, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to simultaneous landings at Oran, Algiers, and Casablanca. The British Chiefs of Staff Committee concurred on 2 October and also accepted Roosevelt's suggestion that the initial landing force be an American one, given strong French antipathy toward the British.¹¹ The WTF would travel from the United States to Casablanca. British ships and American troops stationed in the United Kingdom would comprise the Center Task Force, slated for assault at Oran. The Eastern Task

¹⁰ Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 420.

¹¹ O'Hara, *Torch*, 49–52.

Force, organized for the attack at Algiers, also included British units. On 8 September, Eisenhower estimated that forces and equipment would be ready for an attack on 8 November. Orders were issued on 8 October. At last, the “long debate” over scope, focus, and timing of Torch was settled.¹²

6. JOINT PLANNING AND PREPARATIONS AT HAMPTON ROADS

With negotiations still underway, Admiral Hewitt’s TF 34 began preparations for an operation yet to be defined. The task force’s organizational roots lay with the Marine Corps, which had formed an Emergency Striking Force composed of Marine Corps, Army, and Navy units to hone amphibious warfare techniques in the interwar years. It ultimately merged into the Navy-led Amphibious Force, Atlantic Fleet, commanded by Rear Admiral Hewitt. In anticipation of official directives, it began preparations for the North African landings at Hampton Roads, Virginia, in June 1942. Hewitt established the headquarters of the Amphibious Training Command, Atlantic Fleet, at Naval Operating Base Norfolk before moving to the Nansmond Hotel in nearby Ocean View. Hewitt and his team relied extensively on established Marine Corps operating procedures to plan a successful amphibious invasion. They also needed to jointly organize operations on assault beaches. Army units conducted embarkation and landing exercises on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.¹³ Meanwhile, at nearby Bloodsworth Island, fire-support ships practiced shore bombardment.

Exceptional even among Hewitt’s outstanding staff was Captain Robert R. M. Emmet, who successfully juggled several important commands during Torch, including troop and cargo transports.¹⁴ Emmet coordinated his preparations with Captain W.P.O. Clarke, who assumed command of the thousands of Navy and Coast Guard personnel assigned to crew the landing craft in late June. Clarke was not privy to the ongoing planning

¹² Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 424.

¹³ Patrick Evans Hylton, *Hampton Roads: The World War II Years* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005), 50–51.

¹⁴ Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II. Volume 2: Operations in North African Waters* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), 19–22.

Rear Admiral Kent Hewitt

A 1907 Annapolis graduate, Rear Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt had a demeanor and background well-suited for command of the Western Task Force. Blessed with humility and a sense of humor, he also was predisposed to credit others for their contributions and succeeded in quickly forming a team from Army and Navy components that, for the most part, had had little experience working together. Hewitt had taught mathematics at his *alma mater* prior to the U.S. entry in World War I, given lectures on amphibious operations to Army and Marine Corps audiences at the beginning of the 1930s, and returned to the Naval Academy in the mid-1930s to head its mathematics department. He understood the importance of emphasizing key concepts. Therefore, during the few months prior to the operation, he repeatedly preached to his Army and Navy colleagues the importance of their planning and preparing together as one team. He insisted on having a joint staff and joint schools taught by Marine Corps instructors. Although the two services would maintain some of their differing perspectives on how to execute the operation, Hewitt's vision allowed the majority of differences of opinion

for a North African invasion that would call for ship-to-shore landings. He initially directed shore-to-shore training suitable for the anticipated cross-channel invasion of France. When he learned about the impending invasion of North Africa in late August, he quickly adjusted training programs to prepare boat crews and coordinate efforts between Navy beach parties and Army shore parties. Landing craft crews trained in handling their craft at the Amphibious Force Training Center at Little Creek, Virginia, and at Solomons Island, Maryland, although the smooth waters there did not approximate the seasonal roughness and strong currents off Morocco's rocky beaches. Moreover, several transports were not commissioned in time to participate in even these token exercises.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the Army's Western Landing Force, under the command of Major General Manton S. Eddy, began training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Major General Patton took command on 24 August.¹⁶ Until the beginning of the expedition, he commanded from Washington, DC, nearly completely

¹⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22–23. Upon departing North America, the Western Landing Force would be named the Western Task Force.

to be ironed out beforehand.¹

From North America to North Africa, Admiral Hewitt had command of the joint task force until the troops safely reached the shore, at which point Major General George Patton and his subordinate commanders would take the reins.² For most of the voyage, Hewitt faced only minor maintenance problems and a patch of rough weather that prompted consecutive postponements of the final underway refueling prior to landing. However, on the night of 6–7 November, he was forced to make a particularly weighty decision. Weather reports that reached him from distant Army and Navy sources suggested that the Americans assaulting the coast of Morocco very possibly would encounter difficult surf on the first day of scheduled landings, 8 November. Truly choppy seas might prove disastrous, while postponement of the landings would risk forfeiting sur-

¹ Washington D.C., Navy Department Library, Papers of Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, Box 2, "Biographical Information;" Evelyn M. Cherpak, ed., *Memoirs of Admiral Kent Hewitt* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2004), 127–30, 137–40; Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 20–31.

² H. Kent Hewitt, "The Landing in Morocco, November 1942," *Proceedings*, vol. 78, no. 11 (November 1952).

independent of Admiral Hewitt at Hampton Roads.

The U.S. Navy and U.S. Army had rarely worked together in an amphibious landing of the scope and ambition of Torch. Ostensibly, joint planning and training was guided by the manual of the Joint Board of the Army and Navy, which called for frequent inter-service staff conferences and training sessions. In reality, disagreements were virtually inevitable as Navy and Army doctrines, principles, and experiences clashed. Such was the case, for instance, in the crucial matter of combat loading (first needed, first off). The Navy preferred to supply assault troops with a minimum of equipment for the initial landing. By contrast, the Army wanted to unload as much equipment as possible. Torch would strike an uneasy balance, and conflict over doctrine would play out in the planning and execution of subsequent joint operation of World War II.¹⁷

Communications was another area in which different Navy and Army approaches needed to be reconciled. The services therefore set up an amphibious signal school at Little Creek. The joint ship-to-shore commu-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

prise and would constitute a blow to morale. Hewitt opted to place his faith and confidence in the more promising predictions offered by his own staff aerologist. "Divine Providence was with me," Hewitt later recalled, as he made one of the most important decisions in his life.³

As the three attack groups of the Western Task Force separated and positioned themselves off the Moroccan coast on 7 November, Hewitt relinquished tactical control to their commanders. Rear Admiral Davidson, Captain Emmet, and Rear Admiral Kelly thus directed the particulars of the respective landings at Safi, Fedala and Mehdiya. Hewitt commanded *Augusta's* participation in the Naval Battle of Casablanca, but in post-operational assessments of Torch he concluded that the United States should adopt the British model of having a separate overall commander's ship that was free of responsibility for engaging its guns in a local fight. The most controversial decision Hewitt made occurred as the operation shifted primarily into its logistical phase following the initial successful landings. Despite concerns about German submarines in the vicinity, Hewitt directed several of his transports to off-load in the more exposed position of Fedala Roads rather than in the relatively secure port of Casablanca. A follow-on

³ Cherpak, *Memoirs*, 154–55; Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 49–50.

nication teams that trained together ultimately also completed the transatlantic crossing and the Torch landings together. To coordinate the top command for these pioneering communication nets, Hewitt's staff worked with the Bureau of Ships to convert a Type C2 cargo ship of the United States Maritime Commission into an Amphibious Force flagship. The heavy cruiser *Augusta* (CL-31) provided sufficient space for command operations and was fitted with appropriate radio capabilities to serve as Hewitt's flagship.¹⁸

The presence of a sizable French air force at Morocco made the question of WTF air support an important issue during planning. Here, too, scarcity of vessels, equipment and personnel posed serious challenges. *Ranger*, the Atlantic Fleet's only large carrier, was designated as flagship of Rear Admiral Ernest D. McWhorter, commander of the Torch Air Group, which also included four largely untested escort carriers of the *Sangamon*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29–31.

convoy of ships was due soon in Casablanca and he therefore wanted to avoid a large pile-up of vessels having to wait offshore while the first transports off-loaded. However, after German submarines sank five transports on the evenings of 11 and 12 November, Hewitt reversed his decision and opted to off-load in Casablanca.⁴

Rear Admiral Hewitt contributed directly to the Allies' seizure of the initiative in Europe through his preparation for, and execution of, the transatlantic amphibious assault. The Army and Navy, both green and still a bit parochial heading into Torch, nevertheless embraced the admiral's call for working as a team and further strengthened their coordination in subsequent landings in the Mediterranean and the English Channel. "The experience gained in North Africa," according to historian Vincent P. O'Hara, "was fundamental to this record of success."⁵ Hewitt, promoted to vice admiral on his return voyage from Torch, had helped impart an indelible stamp of jointness on future amphibious operations.

⁴ O'Hara, *Torch*, 226-31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 287-90.



(ACV-26) class. Together, they carried 28 Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers, 36 Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers, 108 F4F Wildcat fighter planes, and 76 U.S. Army Curtiss P-40 Warhawks. *Ranger's* Air Group 9, which reported onboard on 3 October, was the most experienced of the aviation units.¹⁹

Time pressures, uncertainty about staffing, resources, and force structure as well as shifting directives compounded the challenges inherent in joint operations. Patchy military intelligence, hastily assembled over the course of 1942, was another obstacle to both joint and naval planning. Hewitt's staff pieced together information from the Office of Strategic Services, different intelligence sources from each service, various weather bureaus, and others. Still, many questions remained unanswered and improvisation was a constant. For instance, the amphibious force staff had to improvise in choosing beaches for dangerous night landings

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30-33.

Captain Robert R. M. Emmet

Robert Rutherford Morris Emmet was a born leader, gifted strategist, and highly decorated naval officer before he assumed several critical commands during Operation Torch. Born in 1888 in New Rochelle, New York, he entered the U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Maryland, in July 1904 on appointment of President Theodore Roosevelt. After graduating in June 1908, Emmet served two years on U.S.S. *Connecticut* (BB-18) as a midshipman before being commissioned ensign in June 1910. Throughout the early years of World War I, he completed tours of duty on various vessels and in the Industrial Department of the New York Navy Yard. In April 1918, Lieutenant Emmet joined *Canonius* (No. 1696) as executive officer. The ship had been temporarily converted from the freighter *El Cid* to help lay the North Sea mine barrage. For this service Emmet was awarded the Navy Cross.⁶

In the interwar years, Emmet distinguished himself in a variety of roles. He reported as a student at the Naval War College in June 1927, and subsequently served as U.S. Naval Attaché to The Hague, Netherlands. He completed the Naval War College advanced course in May 1936 and proceeded to serve for two years on the staff of the college. In June 1938, Emmet assumed command of U.S.S. *Texas* until his promotion to chief of staff and aide to Commander Atlantic Squadron in May 1940. For a brief period, he assumed similar duties on the staff of Commander Patrol Force before assuming command of Transports, Atlantic Fleet, in March 1942.⁷

⁶ Awards Card Collection (Coll. 642), Box 65, "Emmet, Robert R. M.," NHHC Archives.

⁷ Officer Biographical Files, transferred from CHINFO, "Rear Admiral Robert R.M. Emmet, U.S. Navy, Retired," (29 April 1953), NHHC Archives.

without exhaustive geographic and hydrographic data.²⁰ And yet, even as perfection proved elusive, planners worked tirelessly to meet their fast-approaching deadlines.

7. COMMANDERS' CALL BEFORE CROSSING

On 23 October, Admiral Hewitt called a shore conference alongside Captain Emmet and Major General Patton to present the Final Operation and Attack Plan to about 150 naval and other service officers at Norfolk. By contrast, most officers of the Naval Task Force would not learn their

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 31–33.

While commanding the amphibious landing exercises for Amphibious Force Atlantic Fleet, Emmet again revealed himself as a dedicated and skilled officer. Admiral Hewitt entrusted him with the command of Transports, Western Naval Task Force, and of the Center Group Task Force, which included troop and cargo transports. Indeed, Emmet's exceptional understanding of amphibious assaults and his unwavering dedication to duty prompted Admiral Hewitt to add more responsibilities to his roster. Despite his poor health, Emmet also assumed command of Center Attack Group, the largest and most complex unit, headed for Casablanca. Emmet bore these sometimes conflicting burdens exceptionally well.⁸

On the night of 7 November, Captain Emmet directed all units of the Center Attack Group to their attack station in complete darkness. The following morning, he delayed H-Hour before finally giving the order to "Play Ball" at 0600. His vessels took shore batteries under fire while troops and equipment landed at Fedala. Emmet skillfully improvised and thereby managed to sustain difficult landings. For instance, in an attempt to aid the ground troops already ashore and speed up the invasion, Emmet instructed the transports to load vehicles and munitions to take ashore first. The equipment arrived ahead of the medical supplies, comfort provisions, and camp-making materials, which were scheduled to be transported at this time. This decision hastened the army's assault and ultimate capture of Casablanca and Fedala. For his outstanding performance during the invasion and for his expertise that shaped the amphibious operations under his direction, Emmet was awarded the Navy Distinguished Service Medal.⁹

⁸ Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 41.

⁹ Awards Card Collection (Coll. 642), Box 65, "Emmet, Robert R. M.": Officer Biographical Files, transferred from CHINFO, "Rear Admiral Robert R.M. Emmet, U.S. Navy, Retired," (29 April 1953), NHHC Archives.



objective and destination until after they sailed out the following day. Hewitt drew a picture of a joint operation, unprecedented in its scale and complexity. His Western Naval Task Force would land the 35,000 troops and 250 tanks of Patton's Western Task Force on Morocco's Atlantic coast on 8 November 1942. The invasion would unfold in coordinated actions at three separate debarkation points several hundred miles apart on the African coastline to disrupt the French lines of communication and secure critical transportation hubs. Captain Emmet's Task Group (TG) 34.9 would transport the 19,000 troops of Major General Jonathan W. Anderson's Sub Task Force Brushwood to Fedala, some 15 miles northeast of Casablanca. Rear Admiral Monroe Kelly's TG 34.8 would land the 9,000 troops of Brigadier General Lucian K. Truscott's Sub Task Force Goalpost

Augusta (CL-31)

Following three *Augustas* named for the city in Georgia, the fourth *Augusta* was named for the capital of Maine. Commissioned on 30 January 1931, this heavy cruiser of the *Northampton* class had a distinguished career as the Asiatic Fleet flagship before joining the Atlantic fleet in 1941. It served as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's flagship during his trip to Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, in August 1941 to meet with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Their discussions onboard *Augusta* provided the basis for the Atlantic Charter, a pivotal policy statement that defined Allied goals for the postwar order. After her return to Newport, Admiral Ernest King, Commander in Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet, retained *Augusta* as his flagship. His successor, Rear Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, shifted his flag from *Augusta* to *Constellation* (IX-20) in January 1942.¹⁰

In the summer of 1942, with preparations for Torch well underway, Rear Admiral

¹⁰ Robert J. Cressman, *Augusta IV* (CL-31), DANFS, available at www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/a/augusta-iv.html.

at Mehdia, 65 miles northeast of Casablanca. Finally, Rear Admiral Lyal A. Davidson's TG 34.10 would land the 6,500 troops and medium tanks of Major General Ernest Harmon's Sub Task Force Blackstone at Safi, a small port about 135 miles southwest of Casablanca. The principle objective was the harbor of Casablanca as base for further military and naval operations. The object of the secondary landings at Fedala and Safi was to facilitate capture of Casablanca from overland approaches.²¹ Captain Emmet reminded all that despite the complexities of the plans, the Navy's mission was straightforward: "to serve the troops—to die for them if necessary."²²

8. THE ATLANTIC CROSSING

Task Force 34 was too conspicuous for staging in one locale. Dispersed over several harbors on the East coast, it left the United States in smaller convoys to later converge in the Western Atlantic. The first of five scout submarines departed New London, Connecticut, on 19 October. Most

²¹ Moran, ed. *The Landings in North Africa* 6–7.

²² Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 41.

Hewitt chose *Augusta* to serve as his flagship. An operation of the complexity of Torch required sophisticated communications technology for the top command. Because of the intense time pressure, the new type of ship intended for this purpose, the amphibious force flagship, could not be readied in time. However, *Augusta* was fitted with appropriate radio capabilities and had comparable space.¹¹ Hewitt broke out his two-star flag as Commander, TF 34, on board *Augusta* on 23 October. That same day, Major General George S. Patton joined him on board the ship for the Atlantic crossing. When the fleet reached full formation, *Augusta*, screened by several destroyers, steamed behind *Massachusetts*, flagship of Rear Admiral Giffen's Covering Group.¹² Emerging from heavy seas, TF 34 approached the African coast on 6 November just as the weather began to moderate. At 0700 on 7 November, the flag signal "proceed on service assigned" broke out on *Augusta*, and the task forces began approaching their attack points. *Augusta* headed for Fedala and went to general quarters at 2200.¹³

¹¹ Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 29–30.

¹² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹³ Robert J. Cressman, *Augusta IV* (CL-31), DANFS, available at www.history.navy.mil/researchhistories/ship-histories/danfs/a/augusta-iv.html.

ships of the Northern (TG 34.8) and Southern Attack Groups (TG 34.10) departed Hampton Roads on a southeasterly course, seemingly Haiti-bound, on 23 October. Center Task Force (TG 34.9) followed on a



Crewmen of USS *Santee* (ACV-29) exercising on the carrier's flight deck en route to North Africa. *National Archives 80-G-469691*

On D-Day, it served as part of the screening defense force for the landing craft during Torch's largest landing. Troop carriers began unloading at 0400. During the initial landings, *Augusta* circled 14,000 yards offshore, unable to establish radio contact with her scout planes and suffering poor visibility from smoke and haze over the water. Supported by *Brooklyn*, she opened fire on the French shore batteries with her 8-inch guns at 0710. Their sights trained on the fortresses, *Augusta* and *Brooklyn* dodged the returning salvos. One barrage from the beach sailed across *Augusta's* deck, missing her by a few dozen yards. As the guns of Fedala fell silent at about 0820, scout planes reported a small defensive fleet moving out of Casablanca to defend Fedala. *Augusta* and *Brooklyn* received orders to engage.¹⁴ By 0843, *Augusta* and *Brooklyn* closed the distance between themselves and the French and opened fire, raining salvo after salvo on the enemy flotilla. The screening destroyers offered their own gunfire and wounded the French fleet. After firing a total of 22 salvos, the Americans forced the French sortie to retreat back to Casablanca at 0855.¹⁵

¹⁴ RG 38, "WWII Action Reports," Box 135, NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁵ "WWII Action Reports."

northeasterly course toward London on 24 October. The Covering Group (TG 34.1), including battleship *Massachusetts*, heavy cruisers *Tuscaloosa* (CA-37) and *Wichita* (CA-25), and four destroyers, departed Casco Bay, Maine, on 24 October. The Carrier Group with *Ranger*, four escort carriers, a light cruiser, and nine destroyers, departed from Bermuda on 25 October. Their diversionary course "resembled the track of a reeling drunk in the snow," as Rear Admiral McWhorter observed in his report at the time. They rendezvoused with the rest of the fleet some 450 miles south-southeast off Cape Race, Newfoundland, on 28 October 1942.²³ Parallel to these efforts, the Algerian invasion force, comprised of six advance convoys (KX) and four assault convoys (KMS and KMF), departed the United Kingdom between 2 October and 1 November.²⁴

The American fleet was a sight to behold. *Massachusetts*, flagship of Rear Admiral Robert Carlisle Giffen's Covering Group, steamed in the lead, followed by Rear Admiral Hewitt's *Augusta* and several destroyers.

²³ Ibid., 43–44. Also, O'Hara, *Torch*, 137.

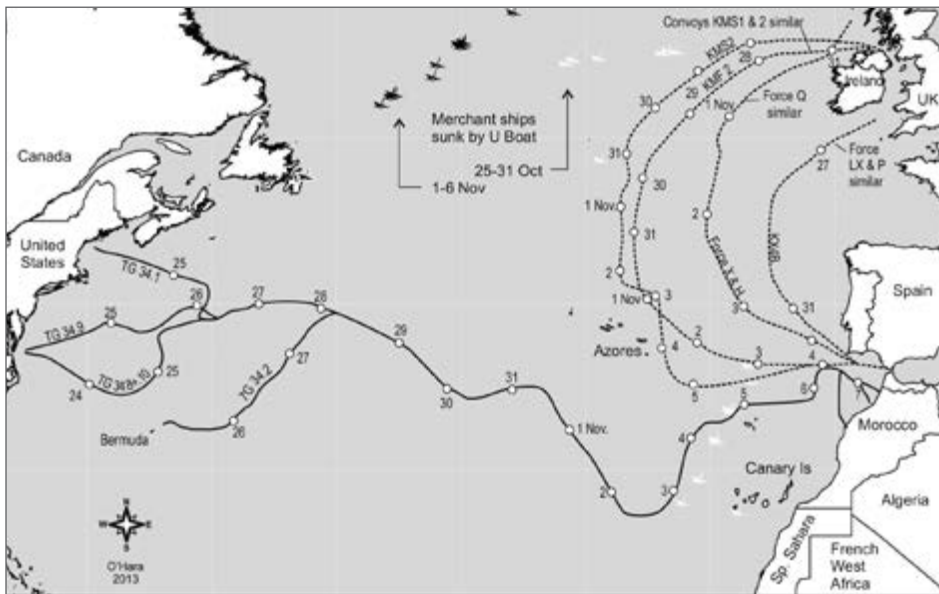
²⁴ O'Hara, *Torch*, 73–74.

The French resistance at Fedala was not over. At 1000, the French light cruiser *Primaguet* joined the destroyer operating outside of Casablanca as reinforcement. With the enemy on the move, *Augusta* and *Brooklyn* opened fire from their position at 1027. After the French ships retreated, *Augusta* and *Brooklyn* returned to their positions to defend Fedala's beaches. *Augusta* continued her watch over the landing fleets throughout D-Day and spent the next two days patrolling south and southwest of the transport area off Casablanca. At 1145 on 10 November, shortly after opening fire on an enemy destroyer, the cruiser barely escaped unexpected fire by *Jean Bart* before American carrier planes finally silenced the French battleship. On 20 November, *Augusta* finally departed the African coast three days after most of TF 34 had sailed.¹⁶

¹⁶ Robert J. Cressman, *Augusta IV (CL-31)*, DANFS, available at www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/a/augusta-iv.html.



Figure 1: Operation Torch Convoys





USS *Hambleton* (DD-455) escorting USS *Sangamon* (ACV-26) across the Atlantic to North African waters, early November 1942. *National Archives 80-G-K-419*

Brooklyn (CL-40) headed the main body of the convoy. Flanked by battleships *Texas* and *New York* (BB-34), 35 transports, cargo vessels, and tankers steamed in nine columns and five lines. The Air Group was accompanied by *Cleveland* (CL-55) and nine destroyers. More than 40 destroyers patrolled the waters while air patrol kept watch from above. Altogether, TF 34 covered some 600 square miles of ocean as it traversed the Atlantic.²⁵

Throughout the crossing, training and exercises continued onboard the ships. The personnel of the hastily expanded Atlantic Fleet were a mix of veterans, reservists, and draftees. Half of *Brooklyn's* 65 officers, for instance, were reservists, and half of the 1,500 sailors had never been to sea. None had participated in a naval engagement.²⁶ As they steamed toward Africa, officers and chief petty officers studied war plans, maps, and models. On some vessels, commanders organized extensive lectures and rehearsals for all hands.²⁷ The crew of *Massachusetts*, for instance,

²⁵ Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 44.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

stood at general quarters each day and then spent all day and evening drilling and exercising. However, there was little coordination between vessels, and on several ships there was very little preparatory activity.²⁸

TF 34's journey to a hostile coast so far from base entailed great risk. To avoid detection, the fleet followed a diversionary course by day and made time by steaming direct course at night. Destroyers moved in between the columns to catch any stragglers. Though there were several minor breakdowns, one aircraft crash, and two fleet slow-downs for refueling, the crossing was largely uneventful. There were no Axis submarine attacks or other hostile encounters.

After enjoying fair weather for much of its transatlantic journey, the convoy entered a storm on 3 November that lasted until 6 November. Bad weather raised the specter of rough surf at Morocco's coast, a threat that



Test-firing machine guns of Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat fighters aboard USS *Ranger* (CV-4), while en route from the United States to North African waters, early November 1942. *National Archives 80-G-30362*

²⁸ O'Hara, *Torch*, 142.



U.S. troops of the 3rd Infantry Division draw ammunition onboard USS *Joseph T. Dickman* (AP-26) on 7 November 1942, the day before the landings at Fedala, Morocco. *National Archives SC-255942*



Pilots of Fighting Squadron 41 (VF-41) singing in their ready room aboard USS *Ranger* (CV-4) before zero hour of the first day of the invasion of Morocco, 8 November 1942. *National Archives 80-G-30251*

could forestall the anticipated Atlantic landings. Rear Admiral Hewitt had to make the difficult call: proceed with the nighttime Atlantic landings as planned or disembark troops on the Mediterranean coast of Spanish Morocco from where they would march hundreds of miles south toward Casablanca. As the weather slowly moderated toward midnight of 6–7 November, Hewitt decided to commit to the original plan. At 0700 on the morning of 7 November, *Augusta* signaled “proceed on service assigned,” and over the course of the day, the attack groups split off. Southern Attack Group headed south toward Safi. Later, Covering Group, Air Group, as well as *Ranger*, *Cleveland*, and several destroyers broke off. At 1600, the Northern Attack Group headed for Mehdiya–Port Lyautey and the Center Attack Group steered toward Fedala Roads.²⁹ They approached their unloading areas under the cover of darkness and readied for the initial assault waves scheduled for 0400 on D-Day, 8 November 1942.³⁰

9. OPERATION TORCH LANDINGS: SAFI (OPERATION BLACKSTONE)

Commanded by Rear Admiral Lyal A. Davidson, TG 34.10 was charged with Torch’s southernmost landing at Safi. Its capture would secure Torch’s southern flank and enable the landing of medium tanks to reinforce the 3rd Infantry Division at Casablanca. The harbor of Safi was fortified with two coastal batteries. Batterie Railleuse consisted of four 130 mm guns about three miles northwest of Safi. The Batterie des Passes comprised two 75 mm guns situated just north of the city. Additionally, Grande Puisseance Filloux (GPF), an army battery consisting of three 155 mm guns, was located two miles south of the town.³¹

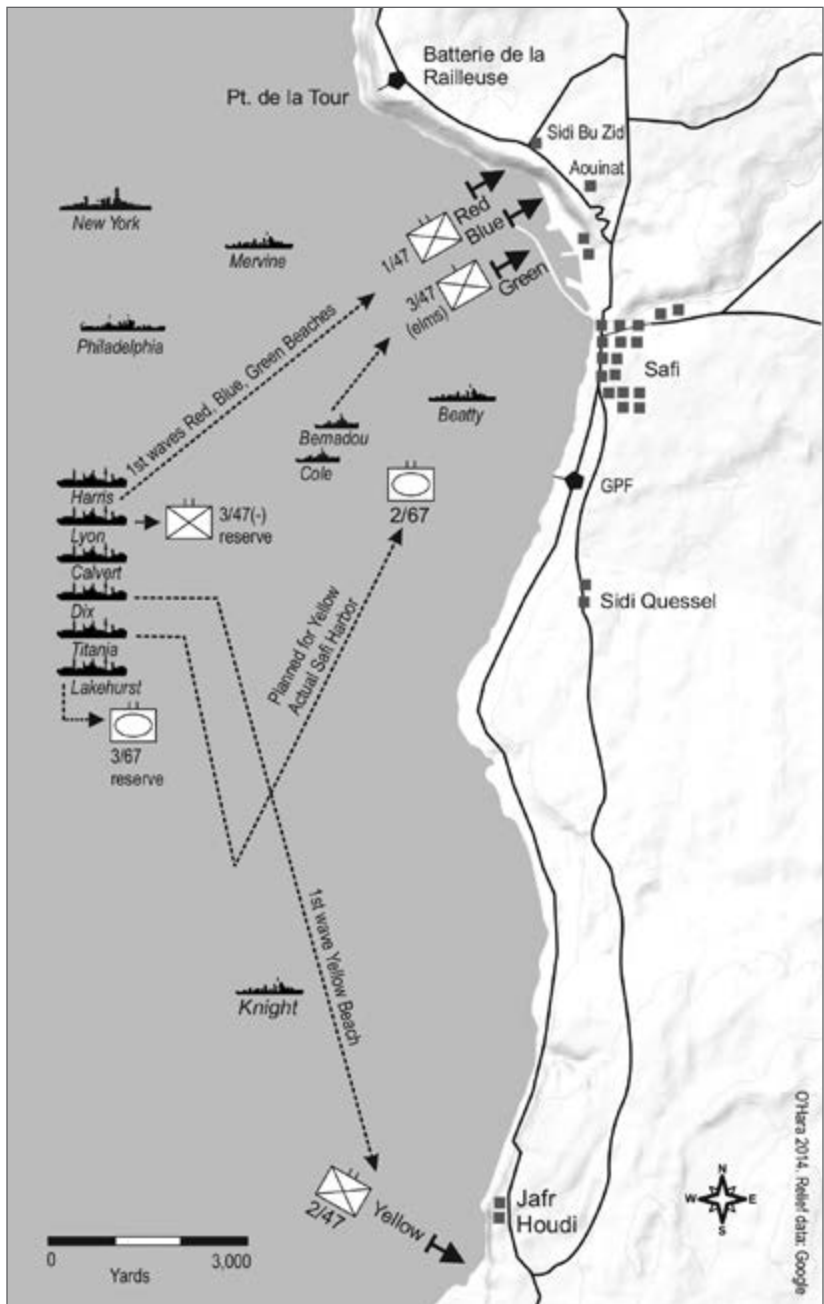
TG 34.10 comprised fire support by battleship *New York*, light cruiser *Philadelphia* (CL-41), and destroyers *Beatty* (DD-640), *Mervine* (DD-489), and *Knight* (DD-633). *Calvert* (AP-65), *Dorothea L. Dix* (AP-67), *Harris* (AP-8), *Lakehurst* (APM-9), *Lyon* (AP-71), and *Titania* (AK-55) served as transports. Destroyers *Cowie* (DD-632), *Doran* (DD-634), *Quick* (DD-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 137–41.

³⁰ Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 51.

³¹ Moran, *The Landings in North Africa*, 10.

Figure 2: The Safi Landings



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F4F-4 Wildcat taking off from USS *Ranger* (CV-4) on 8 November. *National Archives* 80-G-30244

490), *Cole* (DD-155), and *Bernadou* (DD-153) served as anti-submarine screen, and *Howard* (DMS-7), *Hamilton* (DD-141), *Monadnock* (ACM-10), and *Cherokee* (AT-66) as minesweepers. The naval force was charged with establishing the Army on shore by simultaneous assaults on harbor and beaches at H-Hour. They would support the capture of the port of Safi and the establishment of a beachhead of 10,000 yards inland, and support operations by naval gunfire and reconnaissance.³²

Safi was the least complex and the most successful of the Moroccan landings. U.S. Navy and Army forces effectively cooperated according to the invasion plans and suffered few losses. Commanded by Major General Ernest Harmon, Sub Task Force Blackstone comprised 6,300 men of the 47th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) of the 9th Infantry Division and Combat Command B of the 2nd Armored Division.³³ Plans called for

³² *Ibid.*, 46.

³³ O'Hara, *Torch*, 232.

***Bernadou* (DD-153)**

Safi provided the best location at which medium tanks could land to support an attack on Casablanca to the northeast. Because the port was relatively lightly defended, U.S. planners believed that two destroyers carrying nearly 400 assault troops could quickly breach Safi's defenses and secure the port area for follow-on forces. The lead destroyer, *Bernadou*, under the command of Lieutenant Commander R. E. Braddy, Jr., would transport 197 soldiers of Company K, 47th Infantry, and be followed by *Cole* and Company L.¹⁷ These assault soldiers made the Atlantic crossing onboard *Lyon*, and then were transferred to the two destroyers in the early afternoon of 7 November after the Southern Attack Group had split from Task Force 34 earlier in the morning and headed south-easterly to Safi.¹⁸

While the Western Task Force hoped to achieve surprise, French army and navy forces in and around Safi had already received an early-morning alert for a possible attack.¹⁹ Ensign John J. Bell, serving as a back-up element tasked with marking the entry into Safi's harbor, was waiting with an infrared beacon to guide in the two destroyers. French spotters had noted a ship approaching at just after 0400. Ten minutes later, *Bernadou* received a challenge from ashore, responded with the same letter, and continued toward Ensign Bell. Just after it entered into the harbor at 0428, however, "all hell broke

¹⁷ Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 40.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁹ O'Hara, *Torch*, 232-37.

Harris to transport the 1st Battalion Landing Team (BLT) of the 47th RCT to debarkation for Red, Blue, and Green beaches around town, and for the 2nd BLT to debark from *Dorothea L. Dix* to Yellow Beach south of Safi. *Lyon* carried the 3rd BLT for assault on the harbor.³⁴

The harbor assault began with destroyer-transport *Bernadou* leaving the disembarkation area at 0345 to ram the boom blocking the harbor entrance. *Cole* followed 15 minutes later, escorting the first assault waves. General Eisenhower had decided not to open fire until the French fired the first shot. French lookouts discovered *Bernadou* around 0400. At 0428, a French battery opened fire as the destroyer proceeded full speed into the harbor. Her commander beached her several minutes later to disembark

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 232-33.

loose.” French 75 mm guns and machine guns began firing at *Bernadou* while the Batterie Railleuse took aim at *Mervine*, which had positioned itself to provide fire support. In turn *New York* and *Philadelphia* (CL-41) directed their respective 14-inch and 6-inch guns at the French targets as American flares illuminated the harbor. *Bernadou* accelerated into the harbor as its .50 caliber machine guns and 20mm antiaircraft guns swept the approaching dock and port areas to her front and starboard. Her 3-inch deck guns scored direct hits on French 75mm pieces in an old Portuguese fort and at the Front de Mer, and soon French resistance began to weaken. Three small French vessels blocked the preferred landing spot at the quay, however, so *Bernadou* grounded on the western end of the harbor head. Company K’s soldiers descended the landing net and began engaging French legionnaires, who quickly retreated. *Cole*, after having to reorient itself following an initially inaccurate course toward the harbor, began unloading Company L at approximately 0545.

Bernadou and *Cole*’s foray was the most successful of direct Allied assaults into a harbor during Torch. Execution during darkness, Ensign Bell’s initiative, and *Bernadou*’s aggressive approach quickly overwhelmed the light French defense of the harbor. The overall American effort at Safi still suffered from slow loading of landing craft, poor communications, disoriented approaches toward the beaches in the dark, and other missteps inexperienced forces had demonstrated elsewhere in the Moroccan and Algerian landings. The extent of these shortcomings was relatively minor, however, and the early-morning capture of the harbor achieved its objective of bringing medium tanks into the fight.



the assault troops of Company K, 47th Infantry Regiment, the first American soldiers on the ground in French Morocco.³⁵ They made quick progress overrunning the waterline at Green Beach and moving on to their objectives. Meanwhile, *Cole* had slowly followed, initially undetected as American warships began firing on the shore batteries to divert attention from her arrival. Escorting the boat waves and landing craft (LCMs), *Cole* finally moored at 0545 and disembarked her raiders from Company L and accompanying light tanks.³⁶ *Lakehurst*, loaded with M4A1 medium tanks of the 3rd Battalion, 67th Armored Regiment, followed by early afternoon

³⁵ Barbara Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit: Allied Naval Operations in the Mediterranean 1942-1945* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 40–42.

³⁶ O’Hara, *Torch*, 240.



USS *Bernadou* (DD-153) beached at Safi, Morocco. *National Archives UA 462-01-01*

and began discharging cargo at 1610.³⁷

Meanwhile, transports *Harris*, *Dix*, *Lyon*, *Calvert*, and *Titania* debarked the rest of the 47th RCT on either side of Safi. The first waves succeeded in touching down on Red, Blue, and Green beaches before dawn according to plan, though later waves and landing craft slated for Yellow Beach did not come to shore for several hours. Battleship *New York*, light cruiser *Philadelphia*, and destroyers *Mervine*, *Beatty*, and *Knight* provided fire support, while limited air support came from *New York's* and *Philadelphia's* spotter planes. Escort carrier *Santee* (CVE-29), which had been operational for less than a month, provided primary air cover, launching 14 fighters, six torpedo planes, and four SBD dive bombers throughout the morning assault. The planes suffered several accidents, but entered few engagements as they patrolled over Safi, carrying out photographic reconnaissance and searching for French vessels and submarines. The French garrison commander at Safi surrendered at 1510, a mere 11 hours after the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 246.

Americans had landed. The landing of troops and equipment then proceeded somewhat behind schedule. By evening of D-Day, however, U.S. commanders had extended their beachhead line to 5,000 yards from the port and were eager to move on Casablanca.³⁸

The Americans quickly stifled localized French resistance in the area. At dawn on 9 November, they repulsed a French air raid, and by the afternoon, U.S. planes raided the airfield at Marrakech, destroying dozens of planes on the ground and disrupting convoys of French troops. While the unloading of equipment and supplies continued throughout the next two days at Safi, American tanks moved east. By 10 November 1942, Major General Harmon took an armored column north to join the battle for Casablanca.³⁹

The landings at Safi were the smallest and most successful of the three Moroccan landings, with few losses and the closest adherence to the plan. To be sure, weak French resistance and favorable geography worked in the Americans' favor. However, the invasion of Safi was a success not least because of effective inter-service cooperation and utilization of naval gunfire.⁴⁰ Good luck also played a role. As one officer later reflected,

Against no other inhabited civilized coast could an approach have been made to a point within 16 miles of the main base, in darkness, using radar of all types, whistles and light maneuvering signals, fathometers and radio telephone without bringing down instant and strenuous opposition.... Without any intention to detract in the slightest from the success that was achieved, I must stay seriously and emphatically that I do not believe that under identical conditions of organization and training this feature of the operation could be repeated once in ten tries.⁴¹

10. OPERATION TORCH LANDINGS: FEDALA (OPERATION BRUSHWOOD)

Captain Robert R.M. Emmet's TG 34.9 transported the nearly 20,000 men of Sub Task Force Brushwood to Fedala, a fishing town 15 miles northeast

³⁸ Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit*, 42–46.

³⁹ O'Hara, *Torch*, 248–49.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 250–51.

⁴¹ Moran, *The Landings in North Africa* 18–23.



U.S. troops in a landing craft just prior to landing in North Africa, 8 November 1942. Note flags worn on uniforms during this operation. *National Archives SC-149950*

of Casablanca. The area was fortified with four shore batteries. The Batterie Pont Blondin consisted of four 138.6 mm guns and was located about three miles northeast of the harbor of Fedala. The Batterie du Port consisted of two 100 mm guns, and the Batterie des Passes consisted of two 75 mm guns. Both were located on Cape Fedala. Finally, an army anti-aircraft battery of four 75 mm guns was located alongside the railroad tracks just south of Fedala.⁴²

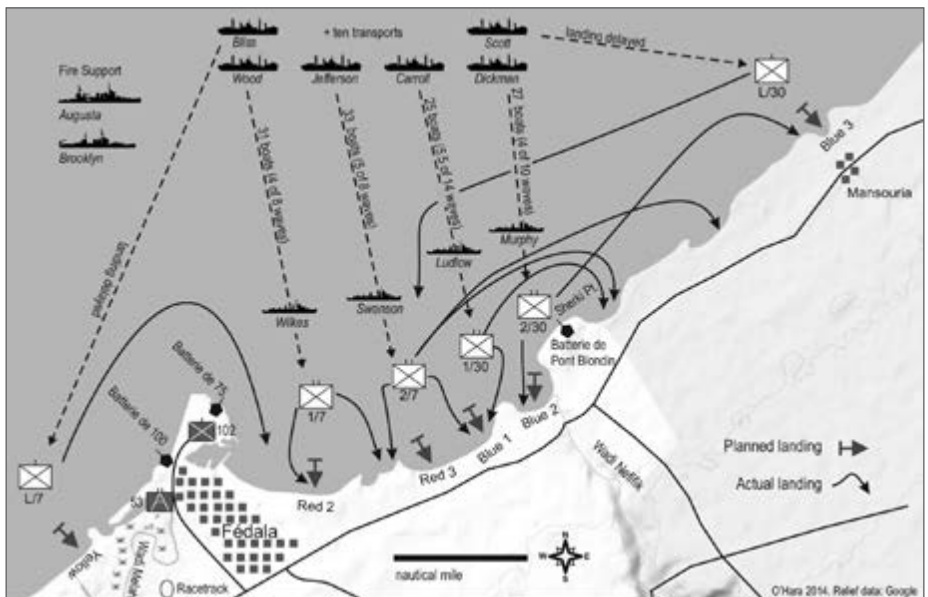
Fedala was the largest landing and part of the expedition to Casablanca, a city with a population of 260,000 and the principal French Atlantic naval base. Casablanca was the main American objective in Morocco. After taking Fedala, the invasion force was tasked with a rapid advance on Casablanca, where it would join up with forces from Mehdiya in the north and Safi in the south. The large naval force comprised fire support

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

by *Augusta*, *Brooklyn*, *Rowan* (DD-405), *Wilkes* (DD-441), *Swanson* (DD-443), and *Ludlow* (DD-438). The transports, including Army transports, were *Leonard Wood* (AP-25), *Ancon* (AP-66), *Arcturus* (AK-18), *William P. Biddle* (AP-15), *Tasker H. Bliss* (AP-42), *Charles Carroll* (AP-58), *Joseph T. Dickman* (AP-26), *Joseph Hewes* (AP-50), *Thomas Jefferson* (AP-60), *Oberon* (AK-56), *Procyon* (AK-19), *Edward Rutledge* (AP-52), *Hugh L. Scott* (AP-13), *Elizabeth C. Stanton* (AP-69), and *Thurston* (AP-77). Anti-submarine screen and minesweepers were *Woolsey* (DD-437), *Edison* (DD-439), *Bristol* (DD-453), *Boyle*, *Murphy* (DD-603), *Tillman* (DD-641), *Miantonomah* (CMc-5), *Hogan* (DD-178), *Palmer* (DD-161), *Stansburg* (DD-180), and *Auk* (AM-57).⁴³

The invasion force consisted of three regimental landing groups (RLG) from the 7th, 15th, and 30th Infantry Regiments of the 3rd Infantry Division; 1st Battalion of the 67th Armored Regiment; 82nd Reconnaissance Battalion of the 2nd Armored Division; the separate 756th Tank Battal-

Figure 3: The Fedala Landings



⁴³ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

ion; and units of the XII Air Support Command. Commanded by Major General Jonathan W. Anderson, Sub Task Force Brushwood was charged with silencing the coastal batteries to seize the town and port of Fedala, before turning south to envelop the heavily fortified area surrounding Casablanca. A battery of four guns was located at Table d'Aukasha, about five miles northeast of Casablanca. There were two batteries at El Hank, three miles southwest of Casablanca. One consisted of four 194 mm guns and the other of four 138.6 mm guns. Mounted on central pivots, they could be trained east and west. The French had fortified the harbor of Casablanca to provide air raid protection. Machine guns were mounted at several points throughout the harbor, and there were antiaircraft batteries, some equipped with searchlights, throughout.⁴⁴ The French fleet at Casablanca included cruisers, destroyers, patrol boats, and submarines, as well as the immobile battleship *Jean Bart*, whose 15-inch guns posed a particular threat to the invasion.⁴⁵

The American plan called for BLTs from the 7th and 30th Regiments to land on designated beaches along four miles of coastline around Fedala, silence coastal batteries, and secure the beachhead before the 15th Infantry Regiment came ashore.⁴⁶ H-Hour was set for 0400. *Leonard Wood* carried 1st BLT of the 7th Infantry bound for Red 2 Beach, where it would be followed 70 minutes later by parts of 3rd BLT. *Thomas Jefferson* carried 2nd BLT, slated for landing at Red 3 Beach. The 3rd Reconnaissance Troop would land at Yellow Beach to assault antiaircraft positions south of Fedala's coastal batteries and then assist with taking the guns themselves. They would be followed by the 3rd BLT's L Company. *Charles Carroll* transported the 1st BLT of the 30th Infantry Regiment slated for Blue 1 Beach, and *Joseph T. Dickman* transported the 2nd BLT headed for Blue 2 Beach. Company L of 3rd Battalion would land at Blue 3 Beach and the remainder of 30th Infantry Regiment's 3rd BLT would land on Red 3 Beach 90 minutes after H-Hour.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ O'Hara, *Torch*, 170–71.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; George F. Howe, *The United States Army in World War II. Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington, DC: United States Army Center of Military History, 1985), 121–24.



The first U.S. flag planted on the beachhead at Fedala, 9 November. *National Archives* SC-163463

An unexpected northeastern current and poor visibility caused confusion and disorientation among the transports, and realignment attempts delayed the first landing waves. Once underway, landing craft struggled with high surf and navigational errors that took many far from their assigned landing points. Sub Task Force Brushwood suffered a large loss of landing craft, as many scraped rocks in the shallow waters. The first wave alone lost 57 of its 119 boats. This undermined the complex plans for Brushwood as most landing teams compensated for missed targets by starting their assigned operation from their landing points or improvised new missions on the spot.⁴⁸

The French were alerted to the approaching invasion as early as 0210, when Pont Blondin reported unidentified speedboats. Cape Fedala reported engine noises at 0338 and lights flashing at sea at 0400. Shortly after 0500, French searchlights briefly illuminated landing craft on the beach. Although the French did not react, the landing craft support boats

⁴⁸ Charles R. Anderson, *The U.S. Army Campaigns in World War II: Algeria—French Morocco 1942* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1993), 15–17.

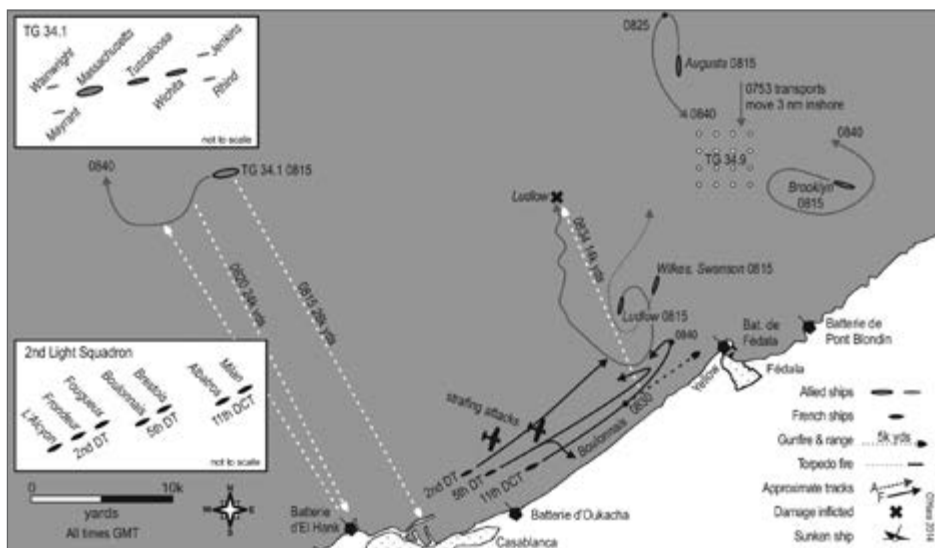


Major General George S. Patton, Jr., Commanding General, Western Task Force (left), and Rear Admiral H. Kent Hewitt, Commander Western Naval Task Force (center), share a light moment on board USS *Augusta* (CA-31), off Morocco during the Operation Torch landings, 8 or 9 November 1942. *National Archives 80-G-30116*



Shells from a French shore battery fall near USS *Augusta* (CA-31) during the action off Casablanca on 8 November. *National Archives 80-G-30414*

Figure 4: The Naval Battle of Casablanca



opened fire and extinguished the searchlights at about 0523. Shortly thereafter, shore batteries opened fire on control destroyers lingering off the beaches before shifting to transports and approaching landing craft.⁴⁹

The American ships immediately returned fire and initiated an extensive bombardment of Fedala. However, the French began strafing the beaches and initially were unopposed by American aircraft. Pont Blondin's guns had discharged 150 138 mm rounds by the time U.S. troops began assaulting the perimeter.⁵⁰ Despite the difficult start, some 3,500 troops of the 3rd Infantry Division were ashore before first daylight. Elements of the 7th Infantry Regiment's 1st BLT entered Fedala before dawn, capturing the Hotel Miramar, headquarters of the Axis Armistice Commission, by 0630. Several companies arrived at the French battery at the mouth of the Nefikh River and quickly overran it by 0730. A battery at Cape Fedala held out longer even under naval gunfire. Colonel William H. Wilbur, a member of General Patton's staff who was returning from Casablanca after delivering a cease-fire proposal, finally improvised a tank

⁴⁹ Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit*, 30–33.

⁵⁰ O'Hara, *Torch*, 183.

USS *Massachusetts* (BB-59)

The new battleship *Massachusetts*, commissioned just months before it deployed for Torch, provided a heavy punch for the Western Task Force's covering Task Group 34.1. Armed with nine 16-inch guns and under the command of Captain Francis E. M. Whiting, *Massachusetts* had the mission of helping to contain the French fleet in Casablanca so that it could not threaten the landing forces at nearby Fedala. During the assault, *Massachusetts*, along with heavy cruisers *Wichita* and *Tuscaloosa*, also was to neutralize large, stationary targets including coastal batteries and the French battleship *Jean Bart*. Moreover, the covering force had to be prepared to meet a sortie by another battleship and three light cruisers the French had stationed at Dakar.

Readying for battle, *Massachusetts*, *Wichita*, and *Tuscaloosa* launched their scout planes at 0610 on 8 November and commenced steaming a trapezoidal-shaped pattern on a southwest to northeast line approximately 20,000 to 28,000 yards from Casablanca. After hearing their scouts' calls for assistance, the big ships fired antiaircraft rounds at the pursuing French aircraft at about 0650. Ten minutes later, El Hank and *Jean Bart* engaged the battleship and heavy cruisers, with several shots straddling *Massachusetts*. The Americans quickly responded, with *Wichita* engaging the coastal battery, while *Massachusetts* and *Tuscaloosa* concentrated on *Jean Bart*. Firing five volleys of six to nine rounds each from its main guns, *Massachusetts* scored several hits, including one shell at 0720 that jammed and silenced—for 48 hours—its French counterpart's one operational turret. France's newest battleship had fired just seven rounds. However, the use of faulty World War I-era fuzes meant that *Massachusetts* had in effect delivered enormous non-exploding projectiles. Additionally, eight of the 11 French submarines sortied out of Casablanca's harbor. Meanwhile, El Hank and a nearby antiquated coastal

assault and by noon the battery surrendered.⁵¹

Landing and unloading continued throughout the day with most troops reaching Blue and Red beaches. Major General Patton came ashore at 1320. By 1700 on D-Day, 7,750 officers and men had landed, approximately 39 percent of troops at Fedala. Although transport crews spent all day unloading, enemy fire and high tide repeatedly disrupted their efforts. Only 16 percent of vehicles and little more than 1 percent of their supplies were ashore by evening, halting the army's inland move-

⁵¹ Anderson, *Algeria—French Morocco 1942*, 16–17; Howe, *Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 96, 128. Colonel Wilbur was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions on 8 November.

battery remained operational if quiet when the covering group ceased firing at 0833.²⁰

However, as the covering group headed on a westerly angle, French *contre-torpilleurs* and destroyers from the 2nd Light Squadron began a run up the coast out of Casablanca and in the direction of the transports supporting the Fedala landings less than 30 minutes away. A rising sun made the sortie north difficult for U.S. vessels to see and the Vichy destroyers also made effective use of smokescreens. American F4F-4 pilots spotted the French movement and Rear Admiral Hewitt directed planes and ships to intercept. *Milan* nevertheless was able to engage American landing craft at Yellow Beach before American fire prompted the 2nd Squadron to reverse course. Approximately 15 minutes later, at 0855, *Massachusetts* reoriented toward the American transports. During a series of maneuvers and duels between the Vichy and American elements, one 16-inch round from *Massachusetts* scored a catastrophic hit on *Fougueux* at 0940 and another crippled *Milan* just before 1000. Minutes later, *Massachusetts* was hit by a 194 mm shell fired from El Hank, but only minor damage and no casualties resulted. At a few minutes after the hour, the battleship maneuvered between several torpedoes—reportedly avoiding one by five yards—that the French submarine *Méduse* had fired. Hoping to deliver a devastating blow from a torpedo or one of El Hank's large guns to one or more of the American capital ships, French destroyers and light cruisers continued parlaying until nearly all the Vichy ships had been knocked out of action shortly before noon.²¹

²⁰ O'Hara, *Torch*, 195–218; Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 91–98; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 130–31. Morison refers to *contre-torpilleurs* as destroyer leaders.

²¹ O'Hara, *Torch*, 195–215.



ment considerably short of its objectives.⁵²

Throughout the morning of 8 November, meanwhile, aircraft carriers, battleships, submarines, coastal batteries, and land-based aviation assets all fought during the naval duel off Casablanca, one of the few such multifaceted engagements in World War II's Atlantic Theater. Responding to the French navy's first major sortie, U.S. naval aviators directed devastating firepower to help secure the Fedala landings at a critical time. U.S. ship gunnery also proved effective although uneconomical, thanks to faulty U.S. rounds, cunning French tactics, and the failure of *Massa-*

⁵² Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit*, 40.

***Ranger* (CV-4)**

Ranger, the Navy's first purpose-built aircraft carrier, had the lead role in the Western Task Force's naval aviation effort, which included four escort carriers as well. On deck, 54 F4F-4 Wildcats were distributed evenly in Fighting Squadron 9 (VF-9) and Fighting Squadron 41 (VF-41), while eighteen SBD Dauntless scout bombers made up Bombing Squadron 41 (VS-41). With Captain Calvin T. Durgin in command, *Ranger* had many responsibilities: neutralizing French aviation assets, attacking French surface ships, and providing cover to landing forces in the vicinity of Fedala and Casablanca.²²

These respective missions kept *Ranger's* crew fully engaged throughout 8 November. Beginning at 0615 and from some 30 miles northwest of Casablanca, eighteen of VF-9's F4F-4s took off and were soon engaging Vichy planes on the ground and in the air at the Rabat-Salé airport. At 0635, 17 SBDs launched with a mission of bombing submarine and surface ships in or near Casablanca's harbor. One of the *Ranger's* pilots' most

²² Robert J. Cressman, *USS Ranger: The Navy's First Flattop from Keel to Mast, 1934-46* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, Inc., 2004), 196-248.

chusetts' and other ships' radar systems in the middle of the action due to their own concussive fire. At times, the Center Group's communications were problematic, and so the command took steps to improve this facet in future operations. While the United States secured a decisive result within six hours, the French might have significantly set back the amphibious operations by prioritizing the attack on the American transports.

On 9 November 1942, 3rd Infantry Division consolidated its beachhead around Fedala and began moving on Casablanca, where French troops awaited their arrival. French artillery fire disrupted the American advance. Naval action began around 0900, when a French submarine attacked but missed *Ranger*. *Augusta* continued her fighting under threat from *Jean Bart*, which was disabled only around 1500. Meanwhile, Patton received news from Eisenhower that Algiers had fallen and Oran was about to be taken. Patton readied for a grand offensive for the morning of 11 November to take Casablanca, the last open objective of Torch, but the

critical contributions to the overall battle occurred just after 0820. A group of VF-9 and VF-41 Wildcats had already completed their primary attack on grounded French aircraft and then began “look[ing] for trouble” before having to return to the deck. With fuel starting to run low, the Wildcats spotted several Vichy destroyers heading northward to the American transports at Fedala. “Pouring in the lead from all six guns,” the pilots completed devastating strafing attacks that killed or wounded many of the French vessels’ officers and crew members. The naval aviators’ action, along with effective fire from U.S. surface ships, helped turn back the French threat to the transports and landing parties. By the end of the day, *Ranger’s* three aviation squadrons’ 22 separate flights, involving 203 aircraft, had neutralized their opponents’ land-based aircraft threat and contributed to the destruction of much of the French surface fleet in and around Casablanca. Over the course of three days they had also supported landings in multiple locations and ended with 496 combat sorties.²³

²³ Cressman, *USS Ranger*, 222–48; NHHHC, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, “Ranger (CV-4),” www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/r/ranger-ix.html.



city surrendered before the operation commenced.⁵³ At the time, there were 15 transport and cargo vessels anchored off Fedala. While the Americans continued to unload cargo, a German submarine, *U-173*, entered the area and torpedoed the troopship *Joseph Hewes* (AP-50), the destroyer *Hambleton* (DD-455), and the oiler *Winooski* (AO-38). Determined damage-control efforts saved the latter two, but *Joseph Hewes* went down with 90 percent of its cargo as *U-173* fled the area.⁵⁴

On 12 November, Hewitt held a shore conference to discuss ongoing unloading of cargo at Fedala, which proceeded sluggishly and rendered vessels vulnerable to attacks. However, believing Casablanca Harbor too obstructed by sunken and damaged vessels, Hewitt ultimately decided to press on and continue offloading at Fedala. By evening, the Germans returned and torpedoed and sank troopships *Hugh L. Scott*, *Tasker H. Bliss*, and *Edward Rutledge*. The surviving troopships maneuvered out of Fedala

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 224–25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 226–27; Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 169–70.



The incomplete French battleship *Jean Bart* at Casablanca on 16 November 1942, showing damage from 16-inch shells and 1,000-pound bombs inflicted in action with U.S. Navy forces on 8 November. *National Archives 80-G-31605*



French destroyer *Milan* beached off Casablanca, 16 November 1942. She had been badly damaged during the Battle of Casablanca on 8 November, and has her forward superstructure largely burned out. *National Archives 80-G-31610*

and onto Casablanca, where unloading commenced until 17 November when TG 34.9 and most of TF 34 departed for the United States. It had facilitated the capture of a strongly defended major port, an astonishing feat despite shortcomings and errors.

11. OPERATION TORCH LANDINGS: MEHDIA-PORT LYAUTEY (OPERATION GOALPOST)

Rear Admiral Monroe Kelly's TG 34.8 carried more than 9,000 men of the 60th Infantry Regiment (9th Infantry Division), the 1st Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment, and parts of the XII Air Support Command to the beaches off Mehdia, a small town some 65 miles northeast of Casablanca. Commanded by Brigadier General Lucien K. Truscott, Sub Task Force Goalpost was charged with capturing the fortress at the mouth of Sebou River (Wadi Sebou). Their ultimate objective was access to the only all-weather airfield in Morocco, situated six miles up in a horseshoe bend of the shallow river. By the end of D-Day, 77 P-40s of the 33rd Fighter Group were slated to occupy the airfield in order to support a subsequent attack on Casablanca. The geographic peculiarities called for a complex operational plan that saw two battalion landing teams advancing from the south toward the airfield while a third moved north toward Port Lyautey.

TG 34.8 comprised the transports *Algorab* (AK-25), *Henry T. Allen* (AP-30), *Susan B. Anthony* (AP-72), *Anne Arundel* (AP-76), *George Clymer* (AP-57), *Electra* (AK-21), *Florence Nightingale* (AP-70), and *John Penn* (AP-51). Fire support was provided by battleship *Texas*, light cruiser *Savannah* (CL-42), and destroyers *Roe* (DD-418), *Kearney* (DD-432), and *Ericsson* (DD-440). Destroyers *Livermore* (DD-429), *Eberle* (DD-430), and *Parker* (DD-604) served as anti-submarine screen, and *Raven* (AM-55) and *Osprey* (AM-56) as minesweepers. Naval forces were charged with landing the troops at designated beaches at H-Hour 0400; landing equipment ashore; providing fire support for Army units ashore; screening and supporting the transport area; and maintaining anti-surface, submarine, and air patrols.⁵⁵

The three BLTs were assigned to multiple beaches (Red, Red 1, Green,

⁵⁵ Moran, ed. *The Landings in North Africa*, 42.

Anne Arundel, and *Algorab* transported the personnel of XII Air Support Command and other support personnel.⁵⁶

Mehdia proved to be the most difficult of all nine Torch landings, and the operation did not proceed according to plan. Errors in communications and formation building, and failures to locate proper disembarkation points set off a chain of serious delays that resulted in a mixed record for the U.S. Navy. Also, stiff French resistance and failure on the part of the American services to adequately coordinate led to a precarious position for General Truscott's troops by nightfall. *Allen*, *Anthony*, and *Clymer* began debarkation at about 0400, lowering landing craft into the heavy swell. While vehicles were boomed on board, troops had to climb down wildly swinging nets into the LCVPs (landing craft, vehicle and personnel), a dangerous maneuver that proceeded slowly.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, an unexpected convoy of French merchant vessels threaded through the American formation, further delaying the landings.⁵⁸

The 1st Battalion's first three waves landed at Blue and Yellow beaches between 0500 and 0525, each arriving several miles off their target location. The first three waves of the 2nd Battalion landed at Green Beach without great problems, but were quickly met by strafing from enemy planes. The 3rd Battalion's landing at Red Beach was less successful, occurring very late at 0630 and a long way from their target position.⁵⁹ They, too, were quickly met with a French strafing attack.⁶⁰

The men of the 3rd Battalion scrambled inland, lugging weapons and equipment five miles to their assigned position. Meanwhile, the 1st Battalion did not arrive at its intended starting point until about 1000, and, on its way to Port Lyautey, it skirmished with a French battalion. The 2nd Battalion's surprise assault on the river fortress was undermined by naval gunfire from *Savannah* against a French shore battery nearby. The Sebou riverbank was fortified with two batteries. Batterie Ponsot consisted of two 138.6 mm guns and commanded all sea approaches to the Sebou River. Batterie des Passes

⁵⁶ O'Hara, *Torch*, 146–50.

⁵⁷ Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit*, 23–24.

⁵⁸ O'Hara, *Torch*, 151.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 151–53.

⁶⁰ Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit*, 26.

Admiral Joseph James “Jocko” Clark

Captain Joseph James “Jocko” Clark, one thirty-second Cherokee, but “immersed in that culture” thanks to his upbringing in the Indian Territory that became the state of Oklahoma in 1907, graduated from Annapolis a decade later.²⁴ Attaining the designation of naval aviator in 1925, Clark had much experience in the Navy’s development of carrier operations up through the beginning of World War II. He was able to participate in Operation Torch thanks to his exhortations to quickly convert the former Standard Oil tanker *Markay* into the escort carrier *Suwannee* (ACV-27). Newport News’s shipbuilders, appreciating Clark’s eagerness to get into the fight, were able to commission *Suwannee* two weeks ahead of its original schedule and just in time to join the five-carrier Air Cover Group TF 34.2 departing Bermuda on 25 October. With no initial land-based aviation assets available until *Chenango*’s Army P-40s could use the Port Lyautey airfield, these carriers provided the Western Task Force’s only initial air power.

When the Western Task Force’s three attack groups split into their respective formations on 7 November, *Suwannee* and *Ranger* remained with the center to support the assault on Fedala and Casablanca. On the morning of 8 November, Clark directed

²⁴ Clark Reynolds, *On the Warpath in the Pacific: Admiral Jocko Clark and the Fast Carriers* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2005), 5–6.

consisted of two 75 mm guns and was located on the river’s edge below the fortress.⁶¹ Inter-service coordination broke down several times as different naval units insisted on utilizing naval gunfire, while army units preferred their own artillery. Infantry attacks were held up at several points when inexperienced troops froze under friendly naval gunfire and artillery.⁶²

French planes made it first in the air, but they met with fierce American anti-aircraft fire that downed several fighters. *Sangamon* launched nine TBF-1 Avenger torpedo bombers, nine SBD-3 Dauntless dive bombers, and twelve F4F-4 Wildcats throughout the day, downing various French aircraft. Although several American aircraft were damaged, none were shot down. By 1000, French air activity largely ceased.⁶³

On the ground, French resistance was strong throughout the day, causing much confusion and delaying the American advances. Aided by

⁶¹ Moran, *The Landings in North Africa*, 8.

⁶² O’Hara, *Torch*, 157.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 155–56.

Suwannee's SBD bombers and TBF torpedo bombers against the French battleship *Jean Bart* and several submarines. In addition to providing protection to the Center Group's landing parties, *Suwannee's* F4F-4 Wildcat fighters destroyed several French planes on the ground at Port Lyautey. The next day, her pilots intercepted French tank and truck reinforcements heading to Casablanca. On 11 November, one of *Suwannee's* planes sank a French submarine that was returning to Casablanca after the cease-fire.²⁵ Her own losses for the operation included three F4F-4s and two TBFs out of the original complement of 38 planes.²⁶

Captain Clark's aggressive efforts to take his carrier into battle and its subsequent impact during the operation prompted the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet, Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, to award him a Letter of Commendation "for high efficiency, outstanding performance and skillful handling of *Suwannee*."²⁷ In the first major assault on the Atlantic coast, carriers played an important role as they had already done and would continue to do in the Pacific. Captain Clark would build on the experience gained in *Torch* and continue to demonstrate his aggressive spirit later in the war.

²⁵ Clark, J. J. and Clark Reynolds, *Carrier Admiral* (New York: David McKay, 1967), 96-102.

²⁶ Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 89-90.

²⁷ Clark and Reynolds, *Carrier Admiral*, 102-103.



coastal artillery and machine-gun fire, French planes strafed the beaches and bombed transports.⁶⁴ Supported by artillery, French and Moroccan battalions mounted successful counterattacks, capturing some 200 Americans and holding up the U.S. advance on the fortress.⁶⁵ By nightfall of D-Day, most of Brigadier General Truscott's troops were ashore, but much of the heavy equipment had not been unloaded, rendering them vulnerable to French counterattacks. They held a precarious position miles from the airfield and without control of the river. Bracing for enemy counterattacks with only seven tanks and *Savannah's* 6-inch guns, Truscott sent reserves to reinforce the men in the fortress area.⁶⁶

On 9 November 1942, Truscott's Sub Task Force made small advances toward the airfield, but ultimately stalled under French fire. The heavy surf that day further delayed unloading of much-needed heavy equip-

⁶⁴ Brooks Tomblin, *With the Utmost Spirit*, 27-29.

⁶⁵ O'Hara, *Torch*, 158.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

***Dallas* (DD-199)**

Several geographical boundaries complicated plans for capturing Port Lyautey's air-drome, Morocco's only all-weather landing field, which could provide air support for the attack on Casablanca 65 miles to the southwest. A direct assault upon the beaches would require landing and recovering boats in difficult surf conditions. Once ashore, troops then would have to negotiate lagoons, dunes, and ridges before funneling through a limited number of egresses. The Wadi Sebou afforded an alternate route to the airfield, but would entail a six-mile long riverine approach that required passing a French 75 mm artillery battery. The commander of the landing forces, Brigadier General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., ultimately opted both for the beach landings and a special assault up the river by a World War I-era four-stack destroyer, *Dallas* (DD 199), carry-

ment. During the early morning hours, several boats swamped or broke up in the surf. Under duress, Truscott requested more supplies in the afternoon, but these landings, too, were discontinued when landing craft



USS *Dallas* (DD-199) in the Wadi Sebou, off Port Lyautey Airfield, Morocco, on 11 November 1942, the day after she made her way up the river to land U.S. troops at the airfield. *National Archives 80-G-37245*

ing a specially trained 75-man raider force.²⁸

French resistance frustrated the initial efforts. As the 8 November assault on the beaches began, an Army lieutenant colonel led a net-cutting party of two naval officers and 14 sailors, who had disembarked from transport *George Clymer* and boarded a scout boat. Their mission was to cut a metal boom blocking *Dallas's* passage between two jetties marking the entrance to the Wadi Sebou. However, heavy machine-gun fire from the shore five to ten minutes before 0600 forced the small contingent to retreat to their scout boat. At around noon, Rear Admiral Monroe Kelly ordered *Dallas* to ram the obstacle. After two unsuccessful tries and while receiving heavy fire from a French 75

²⁸ Morrison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 115–17; O'Hara, *Torch*, 146–69.

were stranded on the beach and several soldiers and crews drowned.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, French reinforcements arrived and advanced to Green Beach by 0900. Around the same time, the 1st Battalion renewed its advance, but bogged down outside of Port Lyautey. On the central front, the 2nd Battalion remained deadlocked. The 3rd Battalion succeeded in placing troops and artillery north and east of the airfield, but also stalled under fire from Port Lyautey.⁶⁸

On 10 November 1942, the Americans finally achieved a breakthrough. Under the cover of night, a boat from *Clymer* carried 16 men up the river to cut the boom blocking the river. Battling high surf and machine-gun fire that wounded half the men, they nonetheless succeeded in cutting the main cable at 0230, finally enabling *Dallas* (DD-199) to move up the river. After some delays due to poor visibility, the destroyer passed the fortress through a gauntlet of artillery fire. The ship arrived at the airfield's eastern side at 0737 and deployed its raiders in rubber rafts. Alongside I Company, they took the airbase by 0800, and, at 1030, the first P-40 landed at the newly captured airfield.⁶⁹ After claiming the fort and closing the ring around the airport, American victory was assured.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 161–63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 164–65.

mm battery, however, *Dallas* raised smoke and likewise retreated. The boom remained intact through the rest of that and the following day.

Success finally came early on 10 November. A secondary net-cutting group, which had formed back in Norfolk and was led by Lieutenant Mark W. Starkweather, USNR, suffered numerous wounds from machine-gun fire, but severed the boom at approximately 0230. As sufficient daylight emerged, *Dallas* passed through the jetties. At about 0530, its controls were handed to René Malevergne, a merchant mariner recently escaped from imprisonment for opposing the Vichy French regime in Morocco and very familiar with the river. Malevergne expertly guided *Dallas* around scuttled French steamers and over shoal waters in the Wadi Sebou. At various points, it just barely avoided becoming stuck or being hit by French 75 mm rounds. After approximately 0730, no further progress was possible in the shallow mud, but by this point *Dallas* was close enough to launch rubber boats and the raiding party quickly secured the airfield. By 1030, Army



The first Army P-40 Warhawk fighter to take off from USS *Chenango* (CVE-28) and fly to shore for combat operations in Morocco, about 10 November 1942. *National Archives 80-G-30512*

At 0400 on 11 November 1942, a cease-fire went into effect followed by a formal ceremony at the fortress at 0800.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 165–67.

P-40s, launched from *Chenango*, began to land, although bomb craters damaged several and initially limited the strip's utility.²⁹

The capture of Port Lyautey's airfield took two days longer than expected. In addition to a tougher-than-anticipated French defensive effort, the American landing forces requested very limited fire support from the Navy. Nevertheless, the overall mission succeeded and *Dallas's* crew displayed ingenuity and toughness under fire. The ship received a Presidential Unit Citation and Malvergne, who guided follow-on ships up the river, became the first foreign civilian to be awarded the Navy Cross.³⁰

²⁹ Morrison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 129–33; Roul Tunley, "A Frenchman Returns," *Sea Power*, vol. V, no. 1 (January 1945), 13–14; O'Hara, *Torch*, 163–65.

³⁰ Naval History and Heritage Command, Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships (DANFS), "Dallas II," www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/d/dallas-ii.html, accessed 2 May 2017.



Following the end of hostilities, TG 34.8 remained at the Port Lyautey area for several days to unload supplies and equipment, and to begin salvaging scuttled ships and landing craft. High surf, poor visibility, and submarine alarms continued to impede these efforts, and the loss of landing craft continued. Overall, TG 34.8 lost 70 of 161 deployed boats to surf and hostile action. Throughout Goalpost, both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy committed serious errors in the execution of landings and ground advances. These were exacerbated by the inexperience of most troops and sailors and by a lack of inter-service cooperation, especially in effectively utilizing naval gunfire support. Because of its geography, weather, and heavy French resistance, Mehdia constituted the most complex landing; however, the Americans persevered and secured their objective.⁷¹

12. THE MEDITERRANEAN LANDINGS: SUMMARY OF CENTER AND EASTERN TASK FORCES

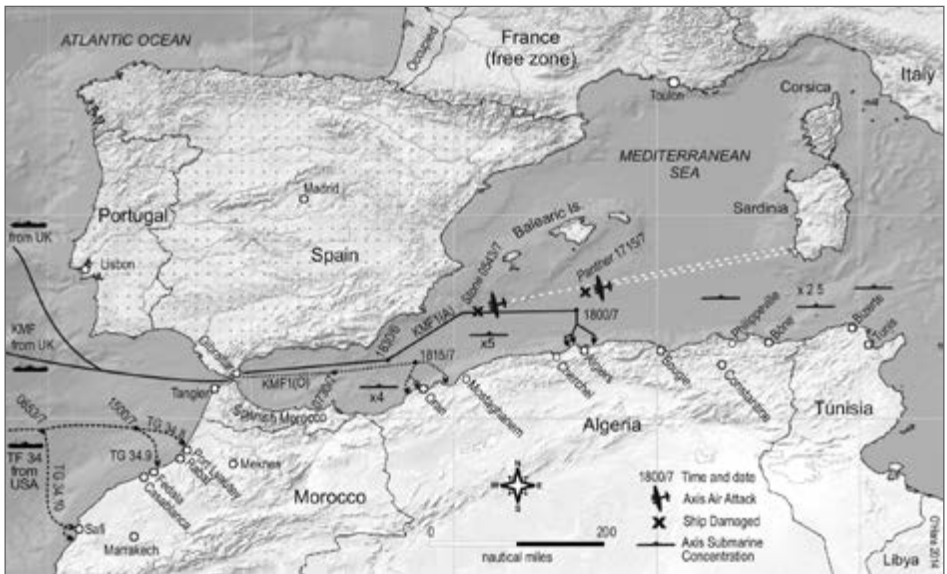
The American landings at the Atlantic coast of French Morocco were synchronized with Allied invasions in the Mediterranean at Oran and Algiers. Commodore Thomas Troubridge commanded the all-British Center Naval Task Force, charged with landings at three beaches off Oran,

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

western Algeria's largest city and major port. His convoy had sailed from Loch Ewe, Scotland, on 22 October, carrying Major General Lloyd R. Frendall's central landing force, which included the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and Combat Command B of the U.S. 1st Armored Division. They were charged with the capture of Oran, as well as the naval base of Mers el-Kebir three miles west and the naval air base at Arzew to the east.⁷²

The operation was undermined by bad weather and communications and navigation problems that caused delays and confusion in the initial landing waves. The French fleet and troops on the ground fought stubbornly through 9 November, when heavy fire from British battleships forced their surrender. Amphibious operations at Oran were also synchronized with the first major airborne assault by the 2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, which flew from Great Britain over Spain to capture the airfields near Oran. Despite many problems, Center Task Force ultimately achieved its objectives.⁷³

Figure 6: Overview: Operation Torch Landings



⁷² Brooks Tomblin, *With Utmost Spirit*, 55.

⁷³ O'Hara, *Torch*, 108-136.



U.S. troops from the Center or Eastern Task Force go over the rail of their transport to climb down into assault craft for the Algerian invasion, 8 November 1942. *National Archives SC-165316*

Commanded by Rear Admiral Sir Harold M. Burroughs, RN, the Eastern Naval Task Force was charged with landings at Algiers, the largest city of Algeria, with a population of 260,000. They had sailed from Tail of the Clyde, Scotland, on October 26 to stage an invasion of the city, port, and surrounding airfields.⁷⁴ The initial invasion force was composed of British and American formations, but was commanded by U.S. Major General Charles W. Ryder of the 34th Infantry Division. Planners hoped that giving the operation an American, rather than British, appearance might dissuade French resistance. British Lieutenant General Kenneth Anderson would then command the subsequent drive into Tunisia. The assault on Algiers was the riskiest landing of Operation Torch because of its close vicinity to Axis bases. Indeed, it was the only invasion in which

⁷⁴ Brooks Tomblin, *With Utmost Spirit*, 55.

Thomas Stone (AP-59)

Just prior to the operation's beginning, the overall commander for Torch, Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower, had written to General George C. Marshall, "I fear nothing except bad weather and possibly large losses to submarines."³¹ The Western Task Force had the good fortune of avoiding submarines during its crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, but the Center and Eastern Task Forces had to move through the much more constrained sea lanes of the western and central Mediterranean. The Eastern Task Force had a mix of British and American transports, and among the latter in the Algeria-bound Transport Division 11 was *Thomas Stone* (AP-59), which had sailed from New York to Ireland and then to the Clyde, Scotland, during the preparatory phase. Compared with most other transports, its crew had had more practice at landing soldiers. In the event of a contested landing, this experience might make a big difference for the 1,400 men from the 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry, onboard the ship.³²

After passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, Transport Division 11 and the Eastern Task Force convoys hoped to conceal their ultimate destination by taking the route normally taken toward Malta. Destroyer screens and air patrols, meanwhile, helped keep the German and Italian submarine threat at bay. However, at approximately 0545 on 7

³¹ Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn*, 67.

³² O'Hara, *Torch*, 58-59.

Axis forces repulsed some of the assault force. Inexperience and particularly poor interservice ship-to-shore coordination resulted in the Eastern Task Force suffering a great loss of transport assets. Still, the city of Algiers surrendered at 1800 on D-Day, in part because of assistance from French Jewish resistance fighters.⁷⁵

Altogether the Allies suffered a relatively moderate number of casualties during the Western, Center, and Eastern Task Forces' assaults into North Africa. More time for training likely would have reduced this amount, but stiffer enemy resistance, especially from the French land and air force elements, could have added significantly to the toll. Including the loss of transports on 12 November, the U.S. Navy lost 472 killed in action and another 17 who died as a result of their wounds. The U.S. Army,

⁷⁵ O'Hara, *Torch*, 106-107; Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 200-203

November, as *Thomas Stone* and her convoy passed 30 miles from Cape Palos, Spain, a German Heinkel He-111 torpedo bomber from Sardinia attacked. A torpedo struck *Thomas Stone* portside, killing nine men and damaging the propeller shaft and rudder. As the rest of the convoy moved onward for the landings the next morning, the British corvette *Spey* remained to guard the crippled transport.³³

Still determined to take part in the action scheduled for the next day, the commander of 2nd Battalion, 39th Infantry, received approval to load nearly 800 of his men into two LCMs and 22 LCPs during darkness on the night of 7 November. With *Spey* as escort, the flotilla would attempt to reach Algiers some 155 miles to the southeast. The long distance and rough seas pushed many boats beyond their limits, however, and the scattered crews eventually had to pile into *Spey*. They arrived off their intended landing zone at 2030 on 8 November and disembarked the following morning at the now-secure main passenger port in Algiers. Meanwhile, a British destroyer and tug worked together to tow *Thomas Stone* into the port of Algiers mid-morning on 11 November. The commander of the Eastern Task Force, Rear Admiral Sir H. M. Burrough, RN, told Captain O. R. Bennehoff, "The determination you have shown to take part in this operation, whatever the obstacles, is an example to us all."³⁴

³³ Morison believed that the torpedo came from a submarine. See *Operations in North African Waters*, 194–95.

³⁴ O'Hara, *Torch*, 78–79; Morison, *Operations in North African Waters*, 209–10. The two British ships that completed most of the towing were the destroyer H.M.S. *Velox* and the tug H.M. *St. Day*.



meanwhile, reported 526 killed in action, 837 wounded in action, and 41 missing during the assaults from 8 to 11 November.⁷⁶

13. ANALYSIS

The invasion of North Africa accomplished much for the Allies. Perhaps most important, American and British forces finally had seized the offensive after three years of German and Italian forces dictating the tempo of events. Now forced to fight on both its western and eastern flank, the German-Italian *Panzer-Armee Afrika* faced an additional burden of having its tenuous logistical train across the Mediterranean subjected to fur-

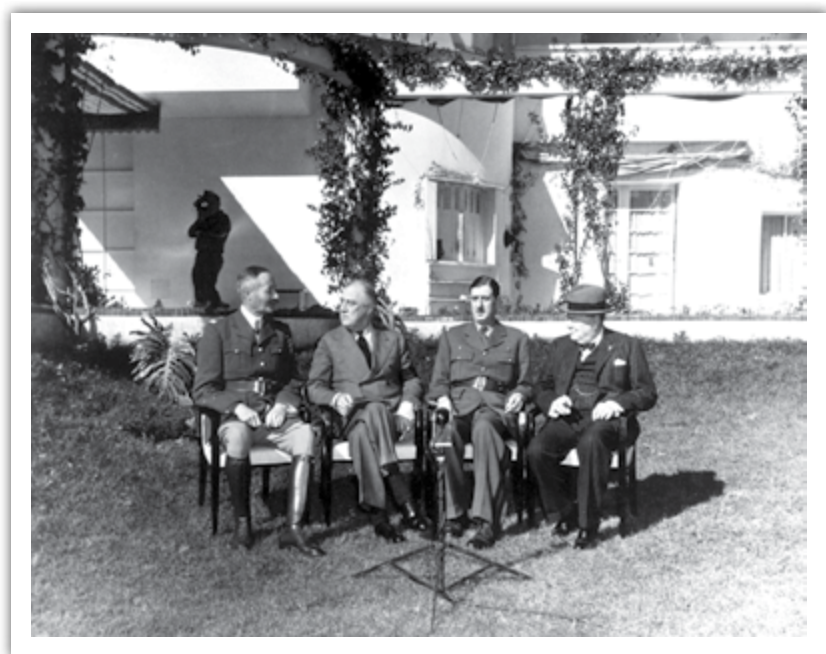
⁷⁶ Naval History and Heritage Command website, "World War II Casualties," www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/w/world-war-ii-casualties.html, accessed 22 September 2017; Howe, *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*, 173; O'Hara, *Torch*, 136, 231, 250.



USS *George Clymer* (AP-51) unloading stores, ammunition and equipment at Casablanca soon after the U.S. landings in North Africa, November 1942. *National Archives 80-G-30458*

ther attack. Bases in northwest Africa, meanwhile, could contribute to the prosecution of the anti-submarine campaign in the eastern Atlantic. The movement of some 100,000 soldiers from the United States and United Kingdom through hostile waters and on to contested shores demonstrated successful, if far from perfect, collaboration between the British and American staffs. Taken in combination with the Americans' promising campaign in the Solomon Islands and the Soviets' apparent ability to hold in the Eastern Front, the Allies were positioned significantly better in late 1942 than they had been in the early spring. As if to drive home this point, President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and the Combined Chiefs met at Casablanca itself in January 1943 to determine the next steps for further rolling back the Axis.

Despite these many positives, Torch also fell short of expectations. Tunis did not fall quickly to British and American forces. Their presence in North Africa and threatened assault of southern Europe also failed to draw away large numbers of Germans from the Eastern Front, a key strategic rationale given for the operation. At the tactical level, the assault



The Casablanca Conference, 24 January 1943: Allied leaders meet with French officers at the presidential villa at Casablanca. Present are (left to right): French General Henri H. Giraud; President Franklin D. Roosevelt; French General Charles de Gaulle; and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. *National Archives 80-G-38546*

upon Moroccan beaches revealed serious problems with the logistical, communication, and command-and-control approaches the Navy and Army employed for this major amphibious operation. The sailors and soldiers were also fortunate to face Vichy French defenders who fought with limited tenacity. To their credit, however, the American leaders acknowledged these various shortcomings and their good fortune. Almost immediately, they set to using this experience in preparation for tougher tests in the near future.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ALEXANDRA LOHSE earned her Ph.D. in history in 2015 from American University in Washington, DC. As a historian for the Research and Writing Section of the Naval History and Heritage Command, she researched modern naval technology and acquisition. She currently serves as applied research scholar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

JON MIDDAUGH joined the Research and Writing Section of the Naval History and Heritage Command in 2016. Previously, he served as a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History. He holds a Ph.D. in world history from Washington State University and is a graduate of the U.S. Army War College.



ISBN 978-1-943604-29-6



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