

## Operation Torch, November 1942

Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa, represented a series of firsts for the Allied crusade against Nazi Germany and her Allies. It was the first amphibious landing undertaken by the US Army in the European theater. It was the first combat operation commanded by Dwight Eisenhower. And it was the first, and quite possibly the only, operation of the war in which the Allied commanders expected their opponents holding the beach to offer no resistance at all.

The landing beaches in Morocco and Algeria were held by Vichy French forces. These troops were loyal to Germany mostly due to a tenuous [shaky] agreement whereby the Nazis agreed to keep part of France free from German occupation provided the Vichy resisted an Allied invasion. The Allied leadership believed that when the Vichy French saw the Allied armadas approaching the landing beaches, they would immediately join forces with the invaders to liberate North Africa.

Allied commanders also had to contend with the native North African population. Their willingness to aid the Allied cause was questionable at best. The primary hope of the Allied command was that both the French and the native population would willingly and energetically aid the liberators. Barring that, they would have settled for simply allowing the American and British troops to move through Morocco and Algeria quickly so that they could smash Rommel's Afrika Korps on the anvil of General Bernard Montgomery's forces advancing westward from Egypt.

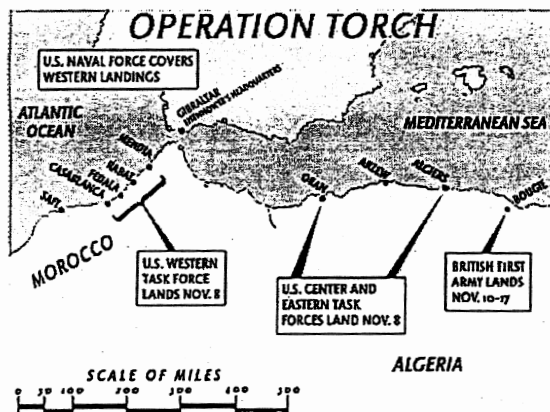
In an attempt to sway both the Vichy French and the North African natives to the Allied cause, thousands of leaflets were dropped over North Africa prior to the landings in November 1942. This leaflet was picked up in Oran, Algeria, by Oscar Rich, who landed there as a member of the 1st Quartermaster Battalion, 1st Infantry Division. The leaflet, printed in French on one side and Arabic on the other, reads in part:

*Message from the President of the United States:*

*We come to you to liberate you from your conquerors, whose only desire is to deprive you of your sovereign right to worship freely and your right to live your way of life in peace.*

*We come to you solely to defeat your enemies — we wish you no harm. We come to you with the assurance that we will leave as soon as the menace of Germany and Italy is dissipated. Help us and the day of universal peace will arrive.*

Unfortunately for the Allies, the Vichy French offered stiff resistance to the landings in some sectors:



### Operation Torch - Casablanca:

Scheduled to land on November 8, 1942, the Western Task Force approached Casablanca under the guidance of Major General George S. Patton and Rear Admiral Henry K. Hewitt. Consisting of the US 2nd Armored Division also known as "Hell on Wheels" (tanks) as well as the US 3rd and 9th Infantry Divisions, the task force carried 35,000 men. On the night of November 7, pro-Allies General Antoine Béthouart attempted a *coup d'etat* in Casablanca against the regime of French General Charles Noguès. This failed and Noguès was alerted to the impending invasion. Landing at Safi, Fedala, and Port Lyautey, the Americans were met with French opposition.

Allied ships returned fire on French coastal batteries and aircraft struck a variety of targets. After weather delays at Fedala, Patton's men succeeded in taking their objectives and began moving against Casablanca. Operational issues caused delays at Port-Lyautey, while French forces delayed the landings at Safi. On all fronts, the French were overcome and American forces tightened their grip on Casablanca. By November 10, the city was surrounded and seeing no alternative, the French surrendered to Patton.

### Operation Torch - Oran:

Departing Britain, the Center Task Force was led by Major General Lloyd Fredendall and Commodore Thomas Troubridge. Tasked with landing the 18,500 men of the US 1st Infantry Division and the US 1st Armored Division on two beaches west of Oran and one to the east, they encountered difficulty due to insufficient scouting. Overcoming shallow waters, the troops went ashore and encountered stubborn French resistance. Efforts to land troops directly in the harbor failed due to heavy French fire. Fighting for a full day, the French finally surrendered on November 9.

Fredendall's efforts were supported by the United State's first airborne operation of the war. Flying from Britain, the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion was assigned the mission of capturing the airfields at Tafraoui and La Senia. Due to navigational and endurance issues, the drop was scattered and the bulk of the aircraft forced to land in the desert. Despite these issues, both airfields were captured.

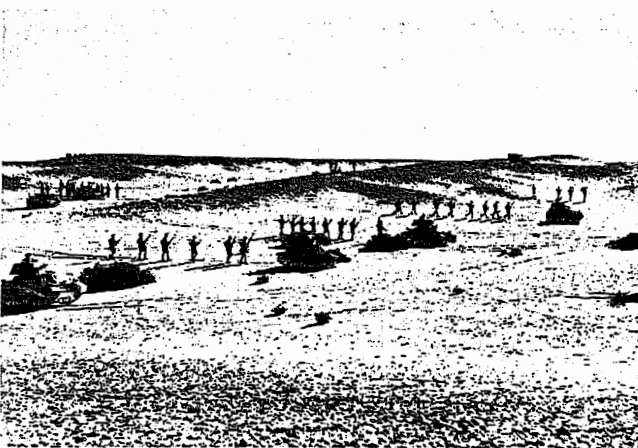
### Operation Torch - Algiers

The Eastern Task Force was led by Lieutenant General Kenneth Anderson and consisted of the US 34th Infantry Division, two brigades of the British 78th Infantry Division, and two British Commando units. In the hours prior to the landings, resistance teams under Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie and José Aboulker attempted a coup against General Alphonse Juin. Surrounding his house, they made him a prisoner. Murphy attempted to convince Juin to join the Allies and did the same when he learned that the overall French commander, Admiral François Darlan, was in the city.

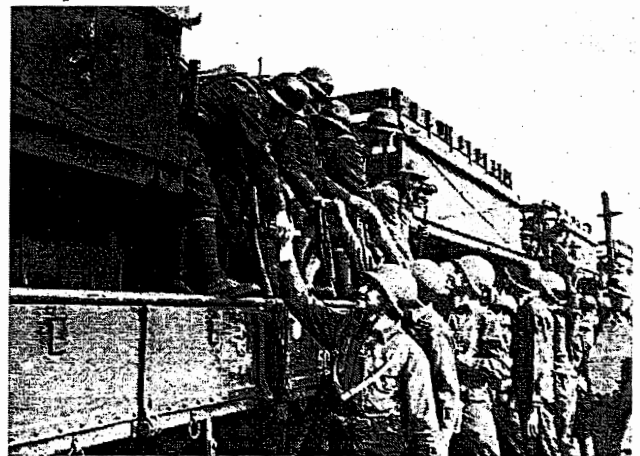
While neither was willing to switch sides, the landings began and met with little to no opposition. Leading the charge was Major General Charles W. Ryder's 34th Infantry Division as it was believed the French would be more receptive to the Americans. While efforts to land directly in the harbor failed, Allied forces quickly surrounded the city and Juin surrendered at 6:00 PM on November 8.

### Operation Torch - Aftermath

Operation Torch cost the Allies around 480 killed and 720 wounded. French losses totaled around 1,346 killed and 1,997 wounded. As a result of Operation Torch, Adolf Hitler ordered Operation Anton which saw German troops occupy Vichy France. In North Africa, the French *Armée d'Afrique* joined with the Allies as did several French warships. Building up their strength, Allied troops advanced east into Tunisia with the goal of trapping Axis forces as British General Bernard Montgomery's Eighth Army advanced from their victory at Second El Alamein. Anderson nearly succeeded in taking Tunis but was pushed back by determined enemy counterattacks. American forces encountered German troops for the first time in February when they were defeated at Kasserine Pass. Fighting through the spring, the Allies finally drove the Axis from North Africa in May 1943.



*Australian troops string out behind tanks in a practice advance over North African sands, on January 3, 1941. The supporting infantry is spread out thinly as a precaution against air raids.*



*French troops on their way to the fighting lines in Tunisia shake hands with American soldiers at the rail station in Oran, Algeria, North Africa, on December 2, 1942*