
The Round Tablette

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Welcome to the first October meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table's 31st year. Tonight we have two speakers, Vincent O'Hara, author of *Torch: North Africa and the Allied Path to Victory*, and Tim Brady, author of *His Father's Son: The Life of General Ted Roosevelt Jr.*

OPERATION TORCH, the British and American amphibious landings of Northwest Africa that began on 8 November 1942, was the first combined Allied offensive of the war. Viewed in many contradictory ways (brilliant or poorly thought out, the first liberation of French territory or aggression against a neutral), it blurred the lines between friend, neutrals, and enemies and tested the integrity of the western alliance.

The unified Anglo-American strategy for World War II was set at the Arcadia Conference, that ended in January 1942 in Washington D.C. Conferees decided there would be an invasion of French territory in Northwest Africa, (originally called OPERATION GYMANAST), which became OPERATION TORCH. It was militarily and logistically challenging since it was the first major allied amphibious operation of the war.

Throughout 1942, the British and Americans faced several political problems. First was the Soviet demand for a 'second front' to relieve the Nazi pressure on Soviet forces. The second problem was justifying the policy of defeating Germany first, and then Japan in defiance of US popular opinion that sought revenge for Pearl Harbor. A victory over the Nazis would aid in mollifying US opinion.

Though both General George C. Marshall, US Army Chief of Staff, and Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, still preferred a direct attack on Nazi occupied Europe, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered them to go ahead with TORCH. The invasion plans were ready by July of 1942.

The most sensitive aspect of the plan was attacking the French in the first place. Abandoned by the British at Dunkirk, who urged them to "fight on," France had surrendered and made

peace with the Third Reich in 1940. Thus France was neutralized; Admiral Darlan assured Great Britain that France's significant naval power was also neutralized. This presented a conundrum for the US and Britain in 1942. Despite Darlan's assurances, the British had bombed the French fleet at Mers el-Kébir near Oran, killing 1200 French sailors and generating bitter anti-British sentiment inside France. Further the British had attacked French territories in Dakar in September 1940, Gabon in November 1940, and occupied Syria in June 1941. In these ways the British acted as the aggressor against the technically neutral Vichy. The US had recognized Vichy as the legitimate government of France, and had diplomatic relations with it. Thus, the planned invasion of French territory in TORCH had major political implications.

Admiral François Darlan, the senior Vichy French military commander, coincidentally happened to be in Algiers at the time of the Allied invasion. A French patriot first, he was only secondarily a Vichy operative, and pursued his own agenda in dealing with the Allies. Maj. Gen. Charles de Gaulle, the blustering, self-proclaimed leader of all non-Vichy French forces played no meaningful role in OPERATION TORCH.

The French colonies of Morocco and Algeria, nominally controlled by Vichy France, were practically German protectorates. The political ambiguity of the legal status of these colonies may be recalled in the film *Casablanca*, starring Humphrey Bogart as American expatriate Rick. The police prefect played by Claude Rains was both obsequious to German officers but also independent enough to thwart them, and the whole plot revolved around Casablanca being outside of direct German control.

The Allied invasion of North Africa consisted of three invasion points at Algiers, Oran, and in French Morocco. Overall command was given to Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower and was portrayed as an American operation. This was to offset anti-British feeling among of the French. TORCH had the first airborne drop by the 509th parachute regiment and there was no preliminary bombardment along the coast. There was short but intense fighting between the French and Allied forces. In some areas the

If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Allies lost men and ships to fighting French forces. The capture of primary targets was finished in three days.

Who was actually in charge of these overseas French territories was an issue of concern to the US. After the conquest, at the end of November, Eisenhower declared Admiral Darlan as the independent authority over Algiers and Morocco. This caused consternation in the US. FDR publiclly clarified that the US only recognized Darlan as the one in charge of Algeria and French Morocco. In either case, Vichy France was now an irrelevant political force.

TORCH's original goal of relieving pressure on the Soviet Union was not met, but it did provide the Americans entry into the European theater. It provided "seasoning" for the green American troops and had lessons for future joint operations. Following the landings, Hitler ordered a military occupation of all of France, even though Vichy would continue until 1944. The French returned to the Allied side (the "Free French Forces"). TORCH was the first allied operation that produced significant French casualties (over 3,000), with many more to come through bombardment and invasion.

FURTHER READINGS:

- Vincent P. O'Hara, *TORCH: North Africa and the Allied Path of Victory* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015).
- Tim Brady, *His Father's Son: The Life of General Ted Roosevelt Jr.* (New York: New American Library, 2017).
- Vincent P. O'Hara, *Struggle for the Middle Sea* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009).
- Brian Lane Herder & Darren Tan, *Operation Torch 1942: The Invasion of French North Africa* (Oxford, U.K.: Osprey Publishing, 2017).
- Norman Gelb, *Desperate Venture: The Story of Operation Torch, the Allied Invasion of North Africa* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1992).
- Wortman, Marc. "Plot to Assassinate Darlan" <http://www.thedailybeast.com/12-amateur-spies-paved-the-way-to-war-against-the-nazis>
- <http://www.thedailybeast.com/the-spy-who-helped-free-france-from-the-nazis>
- <http://www.thedailybeast.com/did-the-allies-plot-to-assassinate-frances-wartime-leader>

Announcements:

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 17 Oct. 2017 – *the 179th NY VI's War* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
- St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 25 Oct. 2017 – *Oliver Winchester* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
- Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 7 Apr. 2018 - info@tccwrt.com
- Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum - www.mnangmuseum.org 612-713-2523
- Friends of Ft. Snelling, www.fortsnelling.org

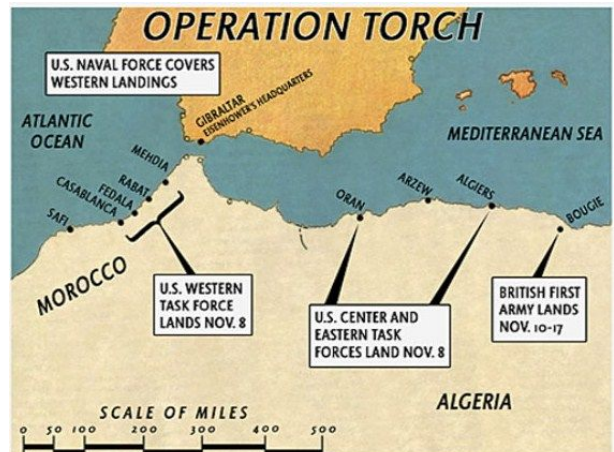
See our programs on YouTube at <http://youtube.com/ww2hrt>

- World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
- Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 16 June 2018. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
- Airshow - Eden Prairie - 14-15 July 2018 www.wotn.org 952-746-6100
- Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Wright, *Terror Years* [9/11->] - 25 Oct. - sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com
- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - crazyjerry45@hotmail.com - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - www.cafm-n.org 651-455-6942

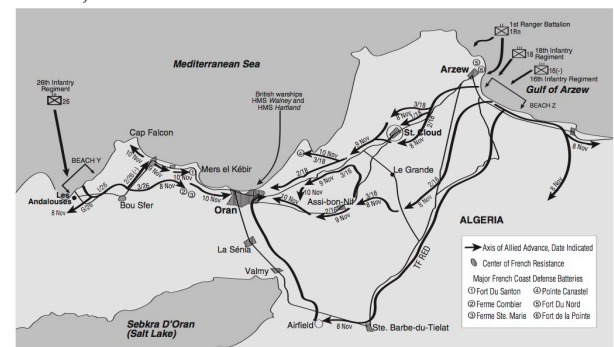
We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or coldpatton@yahoo.com

Round Table Schedule 2017-2018

- 2017**
- 26 Oct. Palawan: POWs of Japan
- 9 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Origins Grand Alliance
- 14 Dec. Battle of the Bulge
- 2018**
- 11 Jan. Eastern Front: Stalingrad
- 8 Feb. Berlin Airlift
- 8 Mar. American Airpower in World War II
- 22 Mar. OSS Woman v. Imperial Japan
- 12 Apr. Lucian Truscott: Greatest Field CO
- 10 May Marshall Plan: Saving Victory



Adm. Darlan, LTG Eisenhower, Adm. Andrew Cunningham, RN, Gen. Henri Giraud at march past in honor of fallen allied soldiers, Dec. 42.



Lyпка, "A Soldier Remembers," (Chicago: FIDF, 2007.)