

---

# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

© Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table 2020 All Rights Reserved.

---

Tuesday, 25 October 2022

36:03 Volume 36 Number 3

Published by WWII History Round Table

Written by Drs. Connie Harris & Chris Simer

[www.mn-ww2roundtable.org](http://www.mn-ww2roundtable.org)

---

## Welcome to the second October session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight is a commemoration of *OPERATION TORCH* with speaker Kevin M. Hymel, author of *Patton's Way*. He will be followed by a Veteran of 34th Division who saw action in North Africa and other Veteran Oral Histories.

At the Arcadia Conference, held in Washington D.C., the conferees agreed upon a unified Anglo-American strategy for the war. Before the conference ended in January 1942, they decided there would be an invasion of French territory in Northwest Africa, *OPERATION TORCH*, originally called *OPERATION GYMANAST*. As the war's first major allied amphibious operation, on 8 November 1942, it proved militarily and logistically challenging and was 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.

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 Gen. George C. Marshall, US Army Chief of Staff, and Adm. 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.

Attacking the French proved to be the most sensitive aspect of the plan. Abandoned by the British at Dunkirk, who urged them to "fight on," France surrendered to the Third Reich in 1940 and the French Republic, its capital in Vichy, was effectively neutralized. Paris and northern France became a German occupation zone. Adm. François Darlan assured Great Britain that France's significant naval power was also neutralized. Despite

Darlan's assurances, the British bombed the French fleet at Mers el-Kébir near Oran on 3 July 1940, killing 1200 French sailors, generating bitter anti-British sentiment inside France. The British 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. In contrast, the US recognized Vichy as the legitimate government of France and maintained diplomatic relations with it. Thus, the planned invasion of French territory in *TORCH* had major political implications.

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, in practice, German protectorates. The political ambiguity of the legal status of these colonies was the plot twist in the film *Casablanca*, starring Humphrey Bogart as American ex-patriate 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 forces at Algiers, Oran, and in Casablanca. Overall operational command given to Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower to make it appear as an American operation and offset anti-British feeling among of the French. *TORCH* had the first American combat airborne drop – by the 509<sup>th</sup> 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 primary targets were captured within three days.

Maj. Gen. George Patton commanded the Western Task Force, landing at three beaches near Casablanca in French Morocco. This was his first combat experience in World War II. The British thought Patton's effort unnecessary and it was too far from the Tunisian battlefields where they wanted American assistance. American logisticians wanted the port of Casablanca since it was 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](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

closest to the United States. The British yielded to the American plans and Patton came ashore, beginning his war at the Fedala beach.

Vichy French naval forces sortied from Casablanca to engage the task force and were heavily damaged. German U-boats attacked the fleet sinking four transports. Eisenhower, seeking a quick end to French resistance, sent Maj. Gen. Mark Clark to negotiate with the Vichy authorities, reaching a cease fire agreement on 11 November, and by 13 November the Allies agreed that Vichy France (Admiral Darlan) controlled the French colonies and French military units began fighting alongside Allied units. Eisenhower's declaration of Darlan's authority caused consternation in the US State Department and FDR had to publicly clarify that the US only recognized Darlan as in charge of Algeria and French Morocco. In either case, Vichy France proved to be an irrelevant political force.

OPERATION TORCH's forces engaged the Germans and provided the desired assistance to the British Eighth Army in Tunisia, but the original goal of relieving pressure on the Soviet Union was not met. The green American troops got their first battle "seasoning" and lessons were learned for future joint operations. Following the landings, Hitler ordered a military occupation of all of France although Vichy France continued its separate existence until 1944.

**FURTHER READINGS:**

Kevin M. Hymel, *Patton's Way: An American General's Combat Leadership* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2021).  
 Stephen Moore, *Patton's Payback: The Battle of El Guettar and General Patton's Rise to Glory in North Africa* (New York: Random House, Caliphon, 2022).  
 Vincent P. O'Hara, *TORCH: North Africa and the Allied Path of Victory* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015)  
 Rick Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn: the War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York: Holt, 2002).  
 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).

**Announcements:**

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table – 15 Nov. 2022 – *Louisiana Tigers* – [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)
- St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table – 27 Oct. 2022 – *Gray Cloud Island Veterans* – 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)
- Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble - TBD - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)

- Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345 - 320-616-6050 - <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum - 612-713-2523 - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org)
- 8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesdays at 1130 - <https://www.8thmn.org>.
- Friends of Ft. Snelling - [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)
- World Without Genocide - 651-695-7621 - <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
- Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show – TBA - 320-564-6644 - <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
- Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie – TBA - 952-746-6100 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org)
- Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - [www.afmsp.org](http://www.afmsp.org)
- Selim Center for Lifelong Learning, UST, <https://www.stthomas.edu/selimcenter/>
- Western Naval Historical Association [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net)
- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com)
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org)

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

**Round Table Schedule 2022–2023**

- 2022**  
 8 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Bretton Woods  
 13 Dec. Corps of Engineers
- 2023**  
 10 Jan. Hitler & Stalin Collaborate  
 14 Feb. Marshall and Stimson  
 14 Mar. Navies of World War II  
 28 Mar. Patton & Victory in North Africa  
 11 Apr. New Guinea – Buna  
 9 May 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force in Europe

**The Round Table is a 501.c.3 non-profit. We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2RT.**

Patton in No. Africa, Nov. 42	Admiral Darlan, 1940	MG Mark Clark and LTG Dwight Eisenhower, Nov. 1942