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Once adequate bases had been secured, strategic air forces for the bombing of possible Axis installations in SPAIN, and, ultimately, in the rest of the Mediterranean area were to be built up. The rate at which this could be done was to be limited by the number of squadrons of suitable types which could be made available in the United States and in the United Kingdom. The R.A.F. was already heavily committed in other theaters of war, both in fighter and bomber strength, and it was clear from the outset, that United States air forces would have to be provided on a considerably larger scale than British.

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Throughout the planning stage, the scale of the initial assault, the speed of the subsequent build-up of the Allied Forces, and their essential maintenance needs were conditioned by shipping factors, such as the availability of assault craft and of shipping, the size and frequency of convoys, and the discharge capacity of the ports in North Africa. Such factors as these necessarily formed the framework round which the plan for the landing in NORTH AFRICA had to be built; and, from the outset, the most accurate assessment of logistical and transportation possibilities was a primary task of the planning staffs. Personnel, transport, and supplies for maintenance purposes had to be cut to or even below the barest essentials to retain the minimum necessary striking power and mobility for the assaulting forces.

Early in October, two new details of considerable importance were woven into the general plan. The first was a decision to employ a battalion of parachute infantry to be flown all the way from ENGLAND, to seize the airfields of RAFARAOUI and LA SENIA, South of ORAN. This entailed a flight of some twelve hours by the unarmed transport aircraft, which were then to be obliged to land only a short time after they had dropped their load of troops. The operation was to be carried out by the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry, in aircraft of the 60th Troop-Carrier Group.

Secondly there was woven into the general plan early in October a decision in favor of direct frontal attacks against the ports of ALGIERS and ORAN. In both cases the nearest main landings had to be a full day's march distant from the objective of the attack and it was feared that this delay might afford time for the blocking of these two vital ports, and the sabotaging of shipping and harbor installations. The Royal Navy, therefore, planned operations for forcing the entrance of both ports by two small warships, and at each undertook to break the boom, and to discharge military landing parties some 500 or 600 strong to secure the port intact.

PREPARATIONS

For the plans as finally approved, there were not in the United Kingdom sufficient forces, British or United States, available with the necessary amphibious training. Combined Operation Headquarters therefore arranged a program to afford in the short time available to the inexperienced formations with the assault ships and craft which could be spared, the best training possible. This training took place at the Combined Training Center in Western Scotland. A new United States Naval Base was rushed to completion in the same area, and several Regimental Combat Teams were put through a short course there. Furthermore, certain American combat teams were trained with Royal Naval Craft and crews and it was planned that these forces of the two lands were to operate together.

Amphibious training was inevitably handicapped by the necessity to overhaul and conserve the landing craft already in use, and to assemble and "work up" the large number of new craft which continued to arrive from the United States until the last moment. Some crews, especially those that were assigned to the craft that arrive last from the United States, had to be quite hurriedly collected and trained. At the same time, generally, training was pressed forward with energy by the ground force commanders.

An incident of the greatest importance took place late in October. Careful sounding of French military opinion in North Africa by Mr. Murphy had established that certain army and air force elements were favorably disposed toward the Allies, and would welcome the arrival of Allied Forces. To verify this, and to insure that the Allied plan could safely and with advantage be communicated to responsible French officers, a special mission of senior United States officers—a mission headed by Major General Mark W. Clark, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, and dispatched by air and submarine—was landed near ALGIERS on the night of October 22nd - 23rd.

General Mast, who was commanding French military forces in the ALGIERS area, headed the French delegation. He represented a faction headed by General Giraud. The Conference was conducted on a hypothetical basis: "If we do this, what can you do?" The French were certain that some action on the part of the Allied nations was pending, but were not aware of its imminence.

General Mast stated that, given four days' notice, he could guarantee that there would be little or no resistance from French military and air forces, that the probable initial resistance by the Navy (which he did not control) would terminate following successful landings, and that the seizure of ALGIERS and early and rapid movement into the TUNIS area was vital. He guaranteed free entry into BONE. He was arranging a meeting with General Giraud in Southern France and hoped, by October 28th, to obtain Giraud's agreement to participate on the Allied side.

Two delicate points in the negotiations had to do with the matter of British participation in North African affairs and with the question of command. General Clark explained that the United States would require air and naval support from Great Britain, and that later British troops must pass through American bridgeheads in order to engage Axis forces in the TUNIS area. General Clark stated that he could not commit himself on the question of command, beyond saying that it was the desire of the United Nations to turn over the control of NORTH AFRICA to French command as soon as the situation warranted this action. He agreed in principle that the Allies should furnish equipment to the French forces.

There resulted from this mission which was carried out by General Clark and his brother officers, under conditions of acute hazard, no actual changes in tentative plan. However, the outcome of the mission was extremely encouraging, and it was followed by an agreement on the part of General Giraud to give up his prepared French plans, and by a decision on his part to go to NORTH AFRICA to cooperate with the Allied Forces.

On the same night that General Clark and his party left NORTH AFRICA and were struggling with their small boats in the choppy sea off ALGIERS, the first convoy sailed from the United Kingdom. It was composed of slow ships, due to arrive at ALGIERS on November 11th. The final preparations for this eventful moment had gone forward strenuously but smoothly.

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involving a vast problem for the Movement and Port organizations. Every port in the West Coast of BRITAIN was used to capacity, and even then the large fleet of merchant shipping that was involved in carrying vehicles and stores had to be loaded in relays. This had made it necessary, as the ships were being prepared to sail, to start loading very early; and it had left the staffs a minimum of time to prepare loading tables, after the final plans had been approved.

The movement of many units to and from training schools in SCOTLAND, from IRELAND and the U.S. to GREAT BRITAIN, and finally from training centers to embarkation ports, had placed an exceedingly heavy strain on traffic through those ports. All this traffic had, however, been handled most efficiently by the British Movement organization.

The fast assault and personnel ships had embarked their passengers by October 16th. The Task Forces then sailed to carry out rehearsal exercises at various points on the Southwest of SCOTLAND. These exercises had been prepared by the Combined Operation Organization, in cooperation with A.F.R.C. and the Task Force Headquarters. They were necessarily limited in scope to rehearsing the night assault by Infantry and supporting troops, and in the exercises only a minimum of vehicles and stores were unloaded.

The assault ships finally sailed from the United Kingdom on October 26th, the Western Task Force from the United States on October 29th. The planning and organization, the hard work and training, the hopes and fears of three months of preparation, were committed to the test.

GIBRALTAR was the pivotal point of the whole operation. Never, in its long and stormy history at the gateway to the Mediterranean, had it played so vital a role. Preparations had early been made to establish there the Allied Force Command Post for the initial operations, and on November 5th I was able to assume full control. Admiral Cunningham's Headquarters were established in the same location, as was that of Coastal Command, R.A.F. Gibraltar, charged with the escort of the convoys during their final approach.

Submarines constituted the biggest menace to the whole enterprise. There were believed to be upwards of forty U-Boats then operating on the Atlantic trade routes, and the three great convoys, each spread out over thirty or forty square miles of sea, offered magnificent targets. Skillful routing, and vigilant escorts, both naval and air, were partly responsible for the highly satisfactory fact that all three convoys reached the AFRICAN coast unscathed. But another unforeseen incident largely contributed to this. Enemy aircraft had sighted and reported a small convoy from SIERRA LEONE, that was bound for the United Kingdom, and that was passing East and Northward of the invasion fleet. The "wolf pack" turned in pursuit and left the route to GIBRALTAR clear.

Another factor which gave rise to concern was the weather. Sixteen days before the operation, meteorological forecasts were favorable, but some days later a depression, originating over NEWFOUNDLAND, was traveling towards the BAY of BISCAY. The strong Southwesterly winds which resulted were not likely to affect North Coast landings, but at CASABLANCA it was blowing dead on shore. Mercifully it had subsided on November 1st, and, except for periodical rain storms of unprecedented violence, the weather became then fine and clear. It appeared certain on November 7th that the landings could take place on schedule.

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On the night of November 5th and the morning of the 6th, the convoy of the Eastern Task Force, with its escort, under the command of Vice Admiral Sir Harold M. Burrough, R.N., passed through the STRAITS. It was followed at 1700 hours on November 6th by the Center Task Force convoy, under the command of Commodore T. E. Troubridge, R.N.

It was clear from subsequent enemy air and submarine dispositions that he was deceived as to our intentions. Squadrons of dive-bombers and fighter aircraft were hastily sent to SARDINIA and SICILY, ready to pounce on the convoys during their supposed passage through "bomb-alley" to MALTA.

No attempt was made to attack the GRAN convoy, and it was not until late afternoon of November 7th that a force of JU-88's bombed the ALGIERS convoy; one of the escorting destroyers suffered slight damage and returned to GIBRALTAR. On the morning of that day, however, the United States Transport THOMAS STONE had been torpedoed by an enemy submarine and was disabled. A notably courageous decision was taken by her commander, Captain Olton R. Bennehoff, to send his escort and boats on to the assault while his ship was thus to be left for a time defenseless. She was eventually towed to ALGIERS by H.M.S. WISHART, and the tug ST. DAY.

As dusk fell on November 7th, the two Mediterranean convoys altered course to the Southward, each arriving at its appointed assembly area dead on time. And, after an uneventful crossing of the Atlantic, the Western Task Force was also, precisely at this time, approaching the MOROCCAN Coast.

From this point, it is necessary, in the interests of clarity, to follow the activities of each Task Force in turn until the conclusion of their primary missions.

WESTERN TASK FORCE

At two o'clock in the morning of November 8th, the transports carrying the Western Task Force, reached their anchorages about eight thousand yards off shore. "H" Hour had been fixed for 0400 hours, but delay in manning the landing craft caused it to be postponed until 0515.

Landings were made at three places: at FEDALA, thirteen miles to the Northeast of CASABLANCA, where the objective was to initiate operations for the capture of the latter important place from the East; in the harbor of SAFI, 130 miles to the Southwest of CASABLANCA, where the immediate aim was to land armor, and to prevent reinforcements at MARRAKECH from reaching CASABLANCA; and finally, at MENDIA, eighty miles to the Northeast of CASABLANCA, where the object was to seize the PORT LYAUTEY airfields and to protect the Northern flank of the entire operation.

All three landings achieved surprise, and by 1015 hours SAFI had been captured, following a successful rushing of the harbor by two destroyers. At FEDALA and PORT LYAUTEY, however, considerable opposition was met, both from aircraft and from shore batteries; the latter were silenced by naval gunfire, and by 1500 hours, FEDALA had fallen. Fighting at PORT LYAUTEY, on the other hand, continued to be fierce throughout the day, and at nightfall the airfield was still in French hands.

Meanwhile two desperate sorties had been made by the French fleet from CASABLANCA. In the first, three light cruisers and five destroyers

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