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R.A.F. NARRATIVE

(FIRST DRAFT)

THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

NOVEMBER 1942 - MAY 1943

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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH (1)

AIR MINISTRY.

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NARRATOR'S PREFACE

The North African Campaign is of particular interest to students of military history. It was the first Anglo-American operation in the Second World War. Its greatest achievement was that in the short space of nine months the forces of the United States and Great Britain learned to fight as one as their later operations demonstrate.

From the historical point of view the campaign has been a difficult one. Besides the purely air matters, so many factors call for mention in order that the contribution the air forces made to ultimate victory may be accurately evaluated. In the early days of an operation there is not perhaps the time nor the personnel available to record the events as they occur, but a summary of events, or an hour to hour log of events as they happened would have been invaluable in the assault stages of this operation.

The records consulted in this study, apart from purely R.A.F. records in the Air Historical Branch, have varied from War Cabinet papers, Chiefs of Staff Committee papers and the files of the Allied Force Headquarters (mainly those of Commander-in-Chief) to naval patrol logs of an individual submarine. A great deal of information has been gleaned from personal telegrams and semi-official correspondence. The penultimate chapter dealing with the German Air Force (unfortunately little appears to be extant, or has not been found about the Italian Air Force) has been based on information supplied by A.H.B.6, whose facts are derived from German Air Force Records.

A short introduction containing the gist of the narrative will be found at the beginning of the volume. Included as appendices are valuable studies of aspects of the North African Campaign which, had they been included in the text, would have made the narrative unduly heavy. Special mention may be made of the Maintenance and Supply Monograph, the Fly out of aircraft to North Africa and the Photographic Organisation in North African Campaign.

A.H.B.1.  
Air Ministry.

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1940, when the fall of France was imminent, General Weygand had consulted General Nogues, who was then commanding the French Forces in Africa, as to the possibility of continuing the war against Germany from Africa. Nogues is said to have replied that he had just sufficient troops to repel an Italian attack on the Mareth line, what modern equipment he had was concentrated near Bizerte, and that there was no industry in the three countries of North Africa. Weygand, therefore had decided that it was impossible to continue the war on African soil.

In September 1940, General Weygand, after a short period at Vichy as Minister for National Defence, was sent to North Africa. While there he was approached by the British authorities with the proposal that if at any time the French Government decided to renew the struggle against the Axis forces they could count on substantial assistance from the United Kingdom.

General Weygand's replies to these overtures had been non committal but sufficiently encouraging for the Prime Minister to order preparations to be made for a force to be held in readiness to be sent to the assistance of the French should the occasion arise; and when the Americans entered the war plans were concerted for the employment of an Anglo-American force for this same purpose.

In April 1942, the Russians were in full retreat and clamouring for the opening of a second front in Europe to relieve their hard pressed forces, but the Allies were not prepared to risk the failure of a premature offensive in France, and sought a less desperate method of affording help to the Russians.

After much discussion the solution was found. A landing by Anglo-American forces on the North African coast promised many advantages. If Gibraltar should be lost as the result of an Axis incursion into Spain, the French ports in North Africa would be available as bases for Allied shipping and the blockade of Hitler's Europe could still be maintained successfully. If the French forces in North Africa could be persuaded to join the Allies in an advance from Tunisia, the Axis forces in the Libyan Desert would be caught between two fires. An added attraction was that the French Naval Forces at Toulon, Dakar, Oran and Alexandria would join the British and Allied Naval Units already in the Mediterranean.

Time pressed, the decision to launch operation Torch was made at the end of July and by early November the expedition was safely embarked and on its way to the scene of action.

The Anglo-American landings around Algiers were accomplished successfully, due to the efficient co-operation of well disposed Frenchmen who had been informed previously as to the Allies intention. At Oran more serious resistance was encountered but soon overcome. At Casablanca, landings by an all American contingent were opposed strongly, and a minor naval battle was fought in the waters outside the port, which resulted in the complete defeat of the French warships. At Port Lyautey too, serious resistance had to be overcome, and the fighting was only ended by the express orders of General Nogues issued in the name of Marshal Petain.

After an agreement had been reached with the French, the Allies were confronted with two major tasks; to advance as quickly as possible to the east from Algiers in the hope

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of securing Tunis and Bizerta and to make such dispositions in French Morocco as would ensure the defeat of any Axis attempt to invade through Spanish territory. The greater part of the American resources were at first devoted to this latter purpose.

The advance into Tunisia was undertaken by a small British force with inadequate transport using the port of Bone as its chief source of supply. Meanwhile the Axis had brought troops and aircraft into Tunis and Bizerte without opposition from the French, who by this time had been given orders to resist the Allies by the Vichy Government. Some of the French forces in Tunisia under General Edmond Barre had come over to the Allies and were forming a buffer between the Axis troops and the gathering British American forces. On 18 November British paratroops which had been dropped at Souk El Arba had come in contact with the Germans, and at about the same time United States paratroops which had occupied Gafsa airfield were confronted by Italian patrols. At the end of the month the advance had reached Djedeida, only twelve miles from Tunis, but this position could not be maintained, and eventually a front was established in the vicinity of Medjez El Bab.

Both British and American shipborne aircraft had played an important part in the landings on the North African and French Moroccan coasts. But as soon as airfields ashore had been secured land based aircraft were flown in from Gibraltar. To Maison Blanche airfield near Algiers came aircraft of the British Eastern Air Command, and to Tafaraoui near Oran those of the United States Twelfth Air Force. At Algiers fighter cover over the port was provided from noon on "D" day. At Oran fighters took part in the land battles which were still continuing.

On the 11th fighters from Maison Blanche had attempted to give cover over the port of Bone, but as they were operating at their extreme range they were not very effective. On the next day one squadron began to operate from the airfield of Djidjelli, but owing to the non-arrival of the petrol expected by sea, only a limited number of sorties could be made, with the result that Bone was heavily and effectively bombed by Axis aircraft.

Air support for the Army was afforded by British fighter squadrons based on Souk El Arba, but this airfield was a long way from the scene of action and communications between the controller of air operations and the Army's advanced headquarters were very inefficient. Other fighters were diverted to the defence of the ports but as there were no Radar facilities great difficulty was experienced in defending them by night or in bad weather. A small force of British light bombers made spasmodic raids into enemy held territory, while American heavies, at first based on Maison Blanche and later on Tafaraoui, bombed strategic targets from time to time.

The Allied airfields were frequently attacked by Axis aircraft, the airfields were small and wide dispersion of aircraft was impossible, so that a great number of Allied aircraft were lost on the ground and much damage was done to ground installations.

In early December the Army had planned to launch an offensive to capture Tunis, but the weather deteriorated and the ground became a quagmire, so much so that by the 25 December the offensive had been postponed indefinitely. The General Officer commanding the First Army had expressed

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himself as being extremely dissatisfied with the support afforded him by the Royal Air Force. He complained that his forward troops were being continually under attack by German dive bombers, and apparently failed to realize the fact that the Germans were operating from all weather airfields situated close behind the front line, whereas the British airfield was far away and liable to become unserviceable after the fall of rain. He considered that the Air Officer commanding the Eastern Air Command had established his headquarters too far away from his own and for that reason any real co-operation between the two commanders was impossible. The Air Officer commanding might have justified his position by pointing out that he was equally responsible for the air defence of ports and shipping, and that only by remaining in Algiers could he maintain relations with the Naval Commander-in-Chief and the air-sea war; and as to the control of aircraft in support of the Army, he had already appointed a Group Commander for that very purpose. This dispute was debated at a conference held in Algiers, at which most of the commanders were present and it was agreed that the Air Officer Commanding should remain where he was.

The Commanding General of the Allied Force (General Eisenhower) had meanwhile been preoccupied with important political matters. Originally it had been intended that General Giraud, should assume control in North Africa after the landings, in fact he had been brought out of France by the Allies for that purpose. But all previous calculations had been upset by the unexpected presence of Admiral Darlan in Algiers at the time of the landings. The Admiral was the Chief of the French Navy, a powerful minister in the Vichy Government and a virulent opponent of the British. Nevertheless, General Eisenhower was forced into the position of having to acknowledge Darlan as the legal representative of the French Government, the French heads of departments would recognise none other.

In carrying on the government of the country Darlan was obliged to keep the same men in office. As these had originally been appointed by Vichy and with German approval patriotic Frenchmen made strong objection but here again there seemed no alternative.

The news of Darlan's appointment raised a storm of protest from both London and Washington, but General Eisenhower explained to the President that there was no other way in which a solution could be found, and the President perforce had to agree to the arrangement as a "temporary expedient".

Admiral Darlan was assassinated in Algiers on 24 December 1942, and General Henri Giraud was elected High Commissioner by the French Imperial Council, he also assumed command of the French naval, military and air forces in the North African territory.

At the beginning of the year 1943, the British Eighth Army was advancing on Tripoli, the Anglo-American force in Northwest Africa had failed to capture the ports of Tunis and Bizerte and their adjacent airfields, the enemy had built up his ground and air forces more rapidly than the Allies and the battlefront had become stabilised in Northern Tunisia. In January the front held by the enemy in Tunisia extended in a line from the northern coast, east of Cape Serrat, in a southerly direction west of Mateur, west of Tebouba, east of Medjez El Bab, west of Pont du Fahs, west of Kairouan, ending near Gabes. Opposing them on this line were the British in the north, the French in the middle and the Americans in the south.



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As the weather and the prevailing mud precluded any offensive by the First Army, it was decided to launch an attack by the American troops in the south, with the object of seizing the port of Sfax, and thereby cutting the Axis line of communication to Rommel's retreating forces. But before this could be mounted, the enemy attacked the badly equipped French Forces at Fondouk and broke through into the Ousseltia Valley. The situation was restored by the action of British and American troops.

British fighter squadrons by this time had been regrouped in the forward area and occupied airfields at Souk El Arba, Djidjelli, Bone and Philippeville, while a small force of bombers was located on airfields at Setif and Canrobert. The American Twelfth Air Force had been allotted airfields in the southern sector, and as the Spanish threat had not materialized, were beginning to move aircraft from French Morocco into airfields in the Thelepte - Tebessa areas. Number Twelve Air Support Command was in support of the American Second Corps operating on the southern front, and were able to take part in the restoration of the situation after the retreat of the French from Fondouk.

On 14 February the enemy launched an attack with the object of preventing the junction of the Eighth Army with the Anglo-American forces in Tunisia. Armoured formations broke through at Faïd and penetrated through the Kasserine Pass and to Thala. The American forces were overwhelmed and their air forces were forced to abandon the valuable airfields in the Thelepte and Sbeitla areas. After having achieved their object Rommel's armoured formations hurried back to meet the Eighth Army on the Mareth Line.

In January 1943 a conference had been held at Casablanca, which both the British Prime Minister and the American President had attended. There it had been decided that when the Eighth Army arrived in the Tunisian zone of operations, an Army Group Headquarters was to be established to co-ordinate the action of the two armies. General the Honourable Sir Harold Alexander assumed this appointment on 20 February. Similarly it had been decided to place all the air forces engaged under one control, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder was appointed to command the Mediterranean Air Command with effect from 17 February; and suitable changes were also made in the Naval Command in the Mediterranean.

The Air forces in North Africa were completely regrouped as a result of the formation of the Mediterranean Air Command. Thus the Northwest African Tactical Air Force was composed of British and American units and staffs and was devoted to the task of support of the armies in the field. The Northwest African Strategic Air Force was chiefly engaged in strategic bombing, and the Northwest African Coastal Air force specialised in the conduct of the air-sea war. Yet all these air forces could be diverted from their normal roles to alternative employment if the situation demanded.

The Eighth Army had planned to start the main attack on the Mareth Line on 20 March 1943. Before this General Alexander had decided to employ the Second United States Corps situated on the extreme right of the line in a limited operation with the object of drawing the enemy's attention from the Mareth Line and provoking a counter attack. An advance was to be made towards Gafsa and if this proved successful continued onwards towards Maknassy.

The attack started on the night 16/17 March, Maknassy

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was taken on the 22nd, and American infantry moving southward found El Guettar had been evacuated by the enemy and were able to take up a position fifteen miles to the east of El Guettar along the Gafsa road. Here the enemy attacked with tanks and infantry and further progress became impossible until the Eighth Army had advanced north of Akarit.

The Twelfth Air Support Command supported the American troops in the advance acting under the direction of the newly appointed Air Officer Commanding the Northwest Tactical Air Force, who had preached the doctrine of the offensive everywhere. The greater part of the Allied Air Force at this time were engaged on the destruction of the enemy air force in the air and on the landing grounds.

By the 28 March the Eighth Army had outflanked the Mareth Line and its advanced elements had reached Gabes. The enemy endeavoured to make a new stand along the Wadi Akarit. On the morning of 7 April he was in full retreat from the Akarit position northwards along the coastal road and north eastwards from El Guettar on the Second United States Corp front.

This general retreat afforded the Allied Air Force its great opportunity. In the past the enemy had, by using bad weather and the hours of darkness, been able to get quickly out of range of the Allied Air forces when he had decided to retreat, but this was now impossible as the Allied Air Force was in a position to strike along his whole flank. Continuous attacks were maintained until the enemy had retreated behind the Enfidaville lines and the targets had disappeared.

General Alexander then started to regroup his forces moving the Second United States Corps to the northern coastal sector to relieve British units of the Fifth Corps. Number Twelve Air Support Command moved to a group of landing grounds in the Le Sers area to conform.

By 16 April the Western Desert Air Force was located at forward landing grounds north of Sousse and were able to operate in the Bay of Tunis approaching from over the Cape Bon peninsula. They were given the task of intercepting the enemy's air transport convoys, which were being used to maintain supplies to the hard pressed axis forces.

At first results were disappointing, but on the 18, 19 and 22 April they achieved resounding successes, with the result that the enemy abandoned the use of air transport by day and made attempts to operate a small number of aircraft at night. These attempts were countered by the employment of night fighters which maintained patrols over likely points of arrival.

Meanwhile the Allied Air Force were continuing to attack the enemy bases in Northern Tunisia, and his shipping at sea. A concentrated attack opened on 22 April on all known enemy landing grounds. After one day's attacks the enemy began to group his offensive fighter aircraft on landing grounds in the Protville and Soliman areas, but the majority of the Axis Air Force began to withdraw to bases in Sicily. By the 23rd the Allied Air Force was able to conduct practically continuous offensive operations unhindered by the enemy air force.

Meanwhile the Eighth Army had failed to penetrate the Enfidaville line and attacks in other sectors by the First Army had not been very successful, indeed the enemy had



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launched on the 20/21 April a counter attack against the First Army which had been partially successful. For these reasons General Alexander decided to change the point of attack further to the north, and ordered the Eighth Army to send reinforcements to the First Army for the purpose.

The night of 5/6 May saw the beginning of a maximum air offensive in support of the First Army's drive for Tunis, night bombers kept the enemy's bases and landing grounds under continuous attack. The next morning all the air forces were in readiness to co-operate in the final onslaught. Pre-arranged sorties bombed in such a manner as to give depth to the artillery barrage and concentrated on an area four miles long by three and a half miles wide. Eventually the Army's advance was so far ahead of the programme and the situation so confused, that the maximum air effort had to be discontinued. By nightfall the Army had reached Massicault and was half way to Tunis. On 7 May Tunis was captured by the British and Bizerta by the Americans. On the 13th the Axis forces surrendered unconditionally.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPTION OF TORCH

On 8 November 1942, American and British forces landed in French North Africa. Of all the Allied operations in the Second World War few are more interesting than Operation Torch, the code-name given to the Allied landings in North Africa; and none surpassed it in complexity, daring, and the tactical and strategic surprise it achieved. The forces engaged in the operation were drawn from every service of the American and British armed forces, at a time when, both the United States and the United Kingdom were heavily pressed, the one in the Pacific, and the other in the Middle East. Although the Axis powers were aware that an Allied operation was impending in the autumn of 1942, they were completely misled over its destination. The French authorities, too, in North Africa were taken off their guard.

French North Africa in 1942 was comparatively unknown; no major war had been fought there since the days of the Roman Empire. Apart from the fact that little interest had been shown in that area, it is a well known fact that the physical features of geography influence the course of a military campaign. It is for these reasons, and to present the reader with a clear picture of the landings and the subsequent campaign, that the narrative begins with a survey of the three French North African territories.

Tunisia<sup>(1)</sup>

Tunisia has an area of over 50,000 square miles. It is bounded on the west by Algeria, on the south by the Sahara desert, on the south east by Libya and on the north east by the Mediterranean. Of its total area, thirty per cent is mountainous, twenty three per cent consists of desert, salt lakes, and small waterways. It is divided into four principal sections or regions. The northern region has extensive mountains, which run from north east to south west and large fertile valleys including the valley of Medjerda, the only river of importance which flows north east into the Mediterranean. The eastern region consists of coastal plain gradually rising into the mountainous regions in the west. The western region is an area of high table lands and pastures with one mountain near the Algerian border of over 5,000 feet. The southern extending into the Sahara is a desert region with numerous oases and gardens and small salt lakes and streams.

Climate

The climate ranges from temperate Mediterranean conditions in the north to semi-tropical in the south. Snow is practically unknown in the city of Tunis and the winters are relatively mild. During the summer months temperatures of 110° to 115° Fahrenheit in the shade are known. Most rainfall occurs in the period November to March. It averages fifteen inches per year in the North and diminishes steadily towards the South. Fog is rare on the plains in the Northern interior, but frequent in the mountains at night and in the early morning. Two-thirds of Tunisia is less than 1,700 feet above sea level, and the coastal plains from Bizerte to Tripolitania are rarely over 600 feet.

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(1) See Map No. 6.

Communications

Tunisia is connected with Algeria by two main roads, the one following the coastline, and passing through the principal ports and the other running parallel to the railway which is about forty to fifty miles southwards from the coast. The usefulness of these roads was limited by the fact that they cross a number of mountain ranges with the resultant steep gradients and hairpin bends difficult to negotiate with heavily loaded transport. Prior to 1942, both these roads were macadamized but there were considerable stretches of gravel surfacing. The shoulders were not built and were later to give way under heavy traffic.

The main road to the south runs from Tunis via Enfidaville, Sousse and Sfax to Gabes, and thence to the borders of Tripolitania. As far as Gabes it was macadamized and was capable of taking two lines of traffic, with a broad strip of ground on either side to which were confined carts, camels and donkeys. The main road from Gabes continued southwards through Mareth, centre of the defence system to the town of Medenine, the principal outpost. At Medenine it branched off eastward to Sarsis, on the coast, south eastwards to Ben Gardane and southwards to Tatahouine. According to the information available prior to the Allied Landings all these were metalled and capable of taking modern mechanised transport, but could not stand up to heavy and continued traffic. From these termini up to the frontiers, the roads were little better than cattle tracks.

The defence of Tunisia in 1942 largely depended for communication upon the main line railway running from Tunis through Djeida to Constantine and Algiers, and from there to the principal Atlantic ports of Morocco. A spur connected this highly strategic railway with the Port of Tabarka on the north west coast of Tunisia, and in Algeria it was linked with the ports of Bougie, Philippeville and Bone. The line crossed a series of mountain ranges and had numerous steep gradients, the absence of heavy duty locomotives available in North Africa severely limiting the freight that could be carried by rail.

Algeria<sup>(1)</sup>

Algeria lies directly south of the Metropolitan coast of Southern France; its two bigger ports, Algiers and Oran, corresponding in site and function to the leading southern French ports, Marseilles and Toulon. This terrain can be divided into three areas: the 'Tell', a country of forested parts and cultivated lands; the 'Steppe', with grasses and pastoral economy; and the desert. The northern portion of Algeria, comprising the 'Tell' and the 'Steppe', has an average elevation of 3,000 feet. The coast is dominated by the mountains which slope sharply down to the sea. Behind the mountains lie the extinct volcanoes and crystalline rocks of the Taureg Massif, followed by the sandstone plateaux of the Azter and the Muydir-Ahmet. This area is bordered, in turn, by the plateaux Tademaït, El Golea, and M'Zab, which run to the southward, and die out in the vast areas of sand dunes and finally the desert.

The coast of Algeria is generally bold and, although

(1) See Map. No. 6.



there are a few sandy beaches in the bays, these are usually backed by cliffs. Nearly all of the streams have sand bars across their mouths, and it is only in winter that Channels are formed of sufficient depth, to permit small craft to enter.

#### Climate

On the coastal plain, the summer is oppressive with the high humidity; but the climate in winter resembles that of a rather good English Autumn. In the 'Tell', up to medium altitudes the summers are agreeable with cool nights; in the winter there are heavy snows. Continental conditions prevail in the high plateaux which are not under the influence of the Mediterranean; in the winter heavy snows and dry winds bring the temperature below freezing; but in the summer the plateaux are even hotter than the coast, the land becoming parched, and mirages are customary in the clear air. The nights are cool all the year round. In summer the seasonal lakes, known as "Chotts" dry out partially and become treacherous marshes, which are dangerous to cross except by known routes.

The Saharan Atlas, because of its greater elevation, receives more rain than the plateaux but otherwise its climate is similar. The hot, dry, desert wind, the sirocco may sweep over the country at any time, but is most frequent between May and October. It usually carries fine sand and dust, which withers vegetation and impairs visibility, not to mention its trying effect on human beings.

#### Communications

The Algerian-Tunisian railways comprise a west-to-east standard-gauge main line from Oujda in Morocco to Tunis, with branches to all of the ports, and three principal lines running southward to the desert. These three lines run from Oran to Columb Bechar; Algiers to Djelfa; Constantine to Touggourt. The best equipped and best maintained line is the Casablanca-Oran-Algiers-Tunis line.

The topography of Algeria offers obvious difficulties to motor transport; and, although the main routes over the mountains are passable throughout the year, one or two cross country routes are blocked by snow for nearly half the year.

#### Airfields

There were in 1942 only two first class airfields with full service equipment; these were at Maison Blanche near Algiers and La Senia at Oran. There were three other airfields of adequate size but lacking complete equipment: Blida, Oued Hamimine, at Algiers and Le Croub near Constantine respectively.

In addition to these and three inferior airfields in Southern Algeria there were thirteen operational aerodromes of adequate size for use by all types of service aircraft. There were seaplane and flying boat stations at Algiers, Oran and Bougie and seven other stations along the coast.

#### Morocco<sup>(1)</sup>

Bounded on the north by Spanish Morocco, and on the

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(1) See Map. No. 6.

SECRET

4

south by Spanish held Rio de Oro, French Morocco extends along the coast of North West Africa for over 500 miles. It embraces what is popularly regarded as Morocco, as well as the principal Moorish towns. It contains more varied terrain than any other part of North Africa. Along the Atlantic coast there is a rich plain normally devoted to the raising of grain crops, and a mildly humid climate. This agricultural area has an excellent network of roads and is well serviced by its numerous, although small ports. Behind the coastal plains are the Atlas Mountains which run generally in a south-westerly/north-westerly direction. Some of the peaks reach heights of between 10,000 and 13,000 feet. Behind the mountains is a zone of high plateaux continuing into Algeria and the Sahara.

Climate

Climatically, however, French Morocco differs from Algeria and Tunisia. Breezes from the Atlantic cooled by the Canaries current bring the average temperatures well below that of the more Northerly colonies. The cool, damp, breezes from the south and south-west from the Atlantic effectively counterbalance the extreme heat generated across the Atlas mountains in the Sahara. The Atlas mountains insulate most of the country from the Sahara heat, but the summer wind from the desert - the Sirocco - passes the mountain barrier and brings great heat with it in its season. Winter temperatures inland are lower, just as summer temperatures are higher. The dry season is the summer period from May to August when little rain falls anywhere in Morocco. The rainy season is the first three months of the year from January to April when a fair amount of rain falls in the northern sector of the country. Rain falls in small amounts about one day in three and in quite an appreciable quantity about four days each month.

Airfields

There were in 1942 at least seventeen first class airfields in French Morocco, situated outside the principal cities. Secondary airfields were numerous. The best airfield, however, was at Port Lyautey which had a seaplane station attached with landing areas in the Sebou river.

C.O.S.(41)2(0)  
8 Jan. 1941 and  
J.P.(41) 288  
25 Mar. 1941.

Strategical Importance of French North Africa

The western end of the Mediterranean was a key point in the maintenance of the British blockade of Hitler's Europe. For some time the completeness of the blockade was menaced by the prospect of a threat against Gibraltar by a German advance through Spain. A German invasion of the Iberian peninsula meant that the use of Gibraltar as a naval and air base would be denied to the United Kingdom; for the chances of a successful Spanish resistance to a German drive southwards were remote. If such an invasion took place, additional bases would have to be found; and these could best be found in French North and North West Africa.

The value of these bases in these French African colonies was of no little importance; but if French North Africa would re-enter the struggle against the Axis, not only would the rest of the French Empire probably follow suit, but it would form a barrier against the spread of German influence to the southward. The ultimate British object, then, in this area was to bring French North Africa over to their side, to continue the war against Germany and Italy.



Early Attempts to rouse French North Africa

C.O.S.(40)34(0)  
23 Dec. 1942

Although it was not until November 1942 that the Allies landed in French North and North West Africa, the possibilities of undertaking such an operation had long been entertained in Great Britain. Several attempts were made to enlist the support of the French in North Africa in the war against Germany and Italy. All these attempts conform to the same pattern. Even Torch approximated in essentials to these early efforts. It is instructive, therefore, to examine one of these early attempts. The first was initiated in December 1940 by the Prime Minister, who sent a message in the most assuring of terms to Marshal Petain and General Weygand the French Delegate General in North Africa. Great Britain's situation although far from roseate, was certainly not as dim and dark as it had been in mid 1940. If at any time in the near future, the French Government decided to resume the fight against Germany and Italy, the Prime Minister offered to send a strong and well equipped expeditionary force of up to six divisions to aid in the defence of Morocco, Algiers and Tunis; the R.A.F. would render important assistance.

Tangier's  
Telegram No.11  
4 Jan. 1941

23 Jan. 1941  
C.O.S.(41)18(0)

D.O.(41)6th  
Meeting,  
20 Jan. 1941

General Weygand's reply was conciliatory, yet non-committal. There was complete identity of views between the Marshal and himself; any idea of an alliance between France and Germany was preposterous and, certainly there was no question of the cession of bases to Germany, or to Italy, anywhere within the French Empire. He himself was prepared to continue the struggle against the Axis, subject to certain definite assurances from the United Kingdom. The tone of this telegram and the 'highly satisfactory interviews' of "Lancelot"<sup>(1)</sup>, engendered hope of a French resurgence. The Defence Committee ordered plans to be prepared to meet this contingency. Speed was essential, for the pressure of events might make it necessary to afford early help to General Weygand.

J.P.(41) 115  
13 Feb. 1941

C.O.S.(41) 54  
13 Feb. 1941

The inherent difficulties of sending help to General Weygand were increased by the impossibility of foretelling the exact circumstances in which he would ask for assistance. The Chiefs of Staff, however, decided that plans for assistance to General Weygand should be based on an appreciation of the most probable situation with which he would be faced.

On consideration of the problem, the Joint Planning Staff recommended, as a basis for planning, that the composition of a force to assist General Weygand should be of the order of:-

One Corps of two divisions.  
One Army Tank Battalion.  
Two Fighter Squadrons.  
Two Medium Bomber Squadrons.

But instead of ear-marking forces for this particular operation<sup>(2)</sup> a "general purposes" expeditionary force was to

(1) "Lancelot" (? Sir John Dill) was the code name for a British representative who had several interviews with General Weygand.

(2) At this time the C.O.S. were besieged with requests for expeditionary forces to attack almost every island in the Mediterranean.

be prepared. This force would be available to proceed to General Weygand's assistance, should he ask for help.

Throughout 1941, various proposals of aid to General Weygand were examined and dropped. The last was started by rumoured changes in the Vichy regime. Petain was to give place to more advanced collaborationists because he would not stomach increased German demands. Weygand, it was hoped, by German pressure, and by the success of the British offensive in the Western Desert would break with Vichy and ask for British assistance. This view in respect of British success in Libya leading to a definite committal of General Weygand was not supported by the Joint Intelligence Committee and the Joint Planning Staff. Yet, a force (Gymmast) was held in readiness to assist him and on 9 December, 1941 was allowed to proceed around the Cape of Good Hope to the Middle East. (Immediately the Joint Planning Staff set about planning another force on the lines of Gymmast.)

J.P.(41) 912  
(O) and (E)  
Draft

J.P.(41) 920  
5 November 1941

C.A.S. to  
A.O.C. in C.  
X701/2205/  
1.12.41  
J.P.(41)1046  
Dec. 1941

#### America declares War upon the Axis

The entry into the war of America, with its vast potential resources in men, material and production, necessarily brought a profound change in the situation relative to North Africa. American public opinion has never been homogeneous, and in early 1942 was certainly not unanimous about the conduct of the war. The divisions of opinion in the early months of 1942 were three in number. The Eastern region of America between the Atlantic and the Appalachians and Alleghanes, demanded the more vigorous prosecution of the war in Europe; the western States fearing a Japanese assault upon their coasts were strong protagonists of the war in the Pacific; the middle region, the 'Middle West' was not particularly interested. In some measure this tug-of-war between Eastern and Western war areas was reflected in the highest levels of the United States Services. President Roosevelt and General Marshall saw the importance of the European theatre; Admiral King's views were strongly in support of the war in the Pacific.

J.S.M. 224  
21052/12.5.42

#### Arcadia

Following immediately upon the entry of the United States into the war, the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, crossed the Atlantic in H.M.S. Duke of York with his Service advisers to confer with President Roosevelt and the American Chiefs of Staff. At a series of Conferences (Arcadia) held in Washington between 26 December and 14 January it was agreed that the combined British American resources should concentrate firstly on the defeat of Germany and Italy. The security of the United Kingdom and of America was, however, of primary importance, and it was agreed that no offensive operations were to be undertaken which would weaken their defence.

C.O.S.(41) 80  
29 Dec. 1941.

C.O.S.(42) 81  
9th Meeting  
12 Jan. 1942

Amongst the combined offensive operations considered at Arcadia, was an American-British landing on the French North West African coast. This scheme had the blessing of both the President and the Prime Minister. Indeed, the latter could telegraph, somewhat paternally, after his first meeting with the former, that the problem of French North Africa, was "not a question of whether but of 'how'". Planning was to begin for this Super Gymmast as soon as possible. At the earliest, the American component, which was to be the larger,



Gney 326  
14 Jan. 1946

C.O.S.(42) 84  
(9) 14 March  
1942 and J.S.M.  
No. 119

to conciliate French opinion(1), could not be assembled before the middle of May, 1942. In the meantime, to seize a favourable opportunity should a chance of a cheap and easy entry into French North Africa occur, the British element, already planned and prepared for a British Gymnast, was to be despatched. On the 14 March, 1942 however on British recommendations, detailed planning for Gymnast was to cease in London until further instructions were issued. Planning was continued in Washington.

#### In Search of an Offensive

C.O.S.(42)  
23rd Meeting (0)  
9 April 1942

D.O.(42) 10th  
Meeting,  
14 April, 1942

W.M.(42) 54th  
Conclusions  
Confidential  
Annexe,  
29 April 1942

Early in April, General Marshall, accompanied by Mr. Harry Hopkins visited London with a tentative proposal for an invasion of the Continent in a cross-channel operation. At that time, Russia was falling back before the full fury of the German invader; and it was agreed that everything practicable must be done to relieve the pressure on the Red Army. Should Russia collapse, the way would be open for a complete German conquest of Europe and a juncture with Japan in the Indian Ocean. Although the earliest date on which a full scale combined American-British cross-channel operation could take place was June 1943 (Code name Round-up), the War Cabinet gave general approval to these proposals, and instructed the Chiefs of Staff to examine them. Their report recommended that plans and preparations for a diversionary operation (Sledgehammer) should be completed with all despatch, with the exception of the decision to take up shipping, for which two months' notice was required. If this was not made by 1 August it would be impossible to make the diversionary attack across the Channel because of the stormy weather conditions usual in Autumn.

C.O.S.(42) 167(0)  
June 1942.

W.M.(42) 73  
Conclusions  
Confidential  
Annexe.

The Prime Minister agreed to these recommendations; it would seem wise that all preparations should go forward for Sledgehammer; but the launching of it was to be dependent not on a Russian failure but on a Russian success and consequent proved German demoralisation(2). The War Cabinet endorsed this view, and laid down two principles for operations on the Continent. There was to be no substantial landing on the Continent in 1942 unless we were prepared to stay there; and there was to be no substantial landing in France unless the Germans were demoralised by failure in Russia.

W.P.(42) 219  
10 June 1947

W.P.(42) 254  
15 June 1942

These decisions were conveyed to M. Molotov, who had been pressing in London and Washington for a Second Front in Europe. The urgent need for aid to Russia in a more substantial form than materials and the bombing of Germany was recognised; but the United Kingdom was not prepared to risk a second Dunkirk; "it could only do the Allies harm and encourage Germany".

C.O.S.(42) 189(0),  
29 June 1942

Later, in June the Prime Minister accompanied by General Sir Alan Brooke and Major General Hastings Ismay went to Washington(3). At a meeting held at the White House on

C.C.S. 27th  
Meeting,  
19 June 1942

DS 20834/1(21)

- (1) French feeling towards Great Britain had been embittered by actions at Mers-el-Kebir and Dakar, German propaganda exploited these and the later events in Syria and Madagascar most skilfully.
- (2) The underlining is the Prime Minister's.
- (3) The Prime Minister's visit was the outcome of conversations with Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had given the Prime Minister an account of his talks with the President.

the 21 June 1942, the President and Prime Minister concluded that the possibilities of operation Gymnast should be explored carefully and conscientiously<sup>(1)</sup>. Planning which was to be done in Washington should be completed in all detail as soon as possible.

The possibility of operations in France and the Low Countries was not neglected. The most resolute efforts were to be made to overcome the obvious difficulties and dangers of such an operation. Could a sensible and sound plan be devised, the United States and the United Kingdom would not hesitate to put it into operation. If detailed examination should show that despite all efforts, success was to be problematic, an alternative was to be got ready. That alternative was to be Gymnast.

C.O.S.(42)  
65th Meeting(0)  
10 July 1942

In July, at a C.O.S. meeting in London, it was unanimously agreed that Sledgehammer offered no hope of success in 1942, and would merely ruin all prospects of the large scale invasion in 1943 (Round-Up). As the conditions were most unlikely to arise which would ensure the success of Sledgehammer, the War Cabinet agreed that the operation should be abandoned and that the Americans should be encouraged to agree to Gymnast.

W.M.(42) 87th  
Meeting  
Confidential  
Annexe  
7 July 1942

Prime Minister's  
Personal Tele-  
gram T.967/2  
No. 108,  
8 July 1942

Thereupon the Prime Minister telegraphed the President that "no responsible British General, Admiral, or Air Marshal is prepared to recommend Sledgehammer in 1942. I am sure that Gymnast is by far the best chance for effecting relief to the Russian Front in 1942. This.....is your commanding idea. Here is the true Second Front of 1942".

C.O.S.(W)217  
00172/8  
July 1942

At the same time, the Chiefs of Staff sent a summary of their conclusions to the Joint Staff Mission in Washington but the latter were unenthusiastic about the proposals. Both Admiral A. B. Cunningham<sup>(2)</sup> and Field Marshal Sir John Dill felt that if the Africa plan were pressed to the detriment of the American build-up in the United Kingdom the Americans would say they were finished with Europe and the United States' Chiefs of Staff might react strongly in favour of the Pacific war.

J.S.M.293  
22312/8  
July 1942

J.S.M. No. 303  
00252/16  
July 1942

The President, however, remained steadfast to his decision that Germany was the main enemy and to his determination that the United States forces should do battle with Germans in 1942. Yet he would only agree to Gymnast if his Chiefs of Staff would recommend it. The Joint Staff Mission suggested that it was up to the British Chiefs of Staff to persuade their American counterparts of the suitability and of the feasibility of the operation.

C.C.S. 23rd  
Meeting  
22 July 1942

To discuss the British proposal, General Marshall, Mr. Harry Hopkins and Admiral King, visited London. In meetings with the Prime Minister and the British C.O.S., the Three Musketeers<sup>(3)</sup> were convinced of the impracticability of Sledgehammer in 1942 and agreed to the abandonment of that project. In its place the C.C.S. proposed:-

C.C.S. 94.

- (1) It must be noted that the news of the fall of Tobruk 21 June 1942, had been received by the Prime Minister just prior to this meeting.
- (2) Until June 1942, Naval Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.
- (3) The description President Roosevelt gave to General Marshall, Mr. Hopkins and Admiral King.

"That if the situation on the Russian Front by the 15 September, indicates such a collapse or weakening as to make Round-Up seem impracticable of successful execution, the decision should be taken to launch a combined operation against North and North West Coast of Africa at the earliest possible date before December 1942."

Planning for this African operation was to begin without delay. Henceforward the African operation was to be known as Torch.

J.S.M. 326  
C.O.S.(W) 239  
31 July 1942.  
W.M.(42) 101  
Torch Annexe 309  
P.M.P.T. No.  
17468/82

Instead of waiting until 15 September, both American and British Chiefs of Staff were anxious that a decision about Sledgehammer/Torch should be made as soon as possible. On 31 July, President Roosevelt made the decision that Torch should now be accepted as the main objective for 1942; and it was to be mounted without delay. At the same time General Eisenhower<sup>(1)</sup> was to act as the American Supreme Commander. On request of the British Chiefs of Staff however the President agreed that he should be appointed as Allied Commander-in-Chief for the forthcoming operation.

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(1) Commander U.S. Forces in the European Theatre of Operations.



TORCH IN EMBRYOEarly Efforts Fruitless

C.C.S.(42)33rd  
Meeting.  
24 July 1942

In view of the speed with which Torch was to be mounted, the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that, as a matter of urgency, the British Joint Staff Planners should prepare a first outline plan as a basis for further combined planning. A small group of the British Joint Planning Staff had been considering such an operation as Torch since the middle of July; and on the 27th of that month, the British Chiefs of Staff ordered them, to prepare in co-operation with the United States Joint Planners a general appreciation of the problems involved and a general outline plan preparatory to detailed planning.

C.O.S.(42) 76th  
Meeting.  
27 July 1942

C.O.S.(W) 237  
4 Aug. 1942

Speed and surprise were essential. Apart from the tactical benefit of surprise, the earlier the operation could be staged, the greater the advantages which would accrue. If possible, the operation should be mounted early in October; for October was the month of crisis. Towards the end of that month, whatever the result in Russia, the Germans were bound to start withdrawing their troops for rest and refitting. Prior to this there would be a lack of German reserves in Western Europe; there would be no German forces available to coerce Spain from her neutrality; and few to put pressure on Vichy or overrun unoccupied France. By November these favourable conditions might cease to exist.

C.O.S.(W) 236

Tulip No. 50  
7 Aug. 1942

To take advantage of this situation the British Chiefs of Staff urged a date, early in October. They were somewhat alarmed when their American counterparts put their earliest provisional date as the 7 November. As they explained to the Prime Minister, they had understood that the Americans had been preparing for Gymnast, if not since February at least since June 1942. They adhered to this earlier opinion that the operation should be launched at the earliest possible date.

Annexe to  
C.O.S.(42) 90th  
Meeting.  
14 Aug. 1942

In reviewing the various outline plans which were devised before one was finally approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the terms of General Eisenhower's directive must be considered. Although the directive was not formerly communicated to General Eisenhower until the 14 August he was well aware of the tenor of its instructions. Issued by the British Chiefs of Staff, on behalf of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the directive defined General Eisenhower's initial object as:-

"The establishment of firm and mutually supported lodgments in the Oran, Algiers and Tunis area on the North Coast and in the Casablanca area on the North West Coast in order that appropriate bases for Combined and intensified air, ground and sea operations would be readily available."

Subsequently, the Allied Commander-in-Chief was directed to exploit the lodgments in that area in order to acquire complete control of the entire area including French Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Ultimately he was to encompass, the complete annihilation, in co-operation with the Allied forces in the Middle East, of the Axis forces in North Africa, in order to secure communications through the Mediterranean and to facilitate operations against the Axis on the European Continent.

1st Outline Plan  
9 Aug. 1942

In accordance with their terms of reference, General Eisenhower issued his first outline plan, (1) the title being "Draft Outline Plan (Partial), Operation Torch." This plan was designed merely to initiate and give direction to more detailed planning. It envisaged simultaneous assaults at Bone, Algiers, Oran and Casablanca. Fears of German intentions towards Spain and Spanish will to resist German oppression dictated a landing at Casablanca (2), and its inclusion as a point of assault, would mean the delay of the other attacks "inside" (3) the Mediterranean until the 7 November.

Annexe to C.O.S.  
(42) 86th Meeting  
(0) 11 August 1942

General Eisenhower asked the British Chiefs of Staff to comment on the plan, unofficially. In view of achieving the earliest possible date, the limitations of the weather conditions at Casablanca in November, and the likelihood that the Germans would more readily send reinforcements to Sicily than attempt to invade Spain, they thought it would be better to accept a delay of three to four weeks between the start of operations "inside" the Mediterranean and those on the Atlantic coast. If all the landings could take place at the same time, so much the better; but here shipping was the limiting factor. Primarily in view of the limitations of naval forces and transports, General Eisenhower accepted the British Chiefs of Staff opinions and set about revising his original plan.

C.O.S. (42) 88th  
Meeting (0).  
12 Aug. 1942

C.O.S. (42) 239  
(0) 22 Aug. 1942

C.O.S. (42) 98th  
Meeting (0)  
24 Aug. 1942

Ten days later he put forward a more complete and detailed version. The main change in this plan was that it left out an attack on Casablanca. Attacks were to be made only at Oran, Algiers and Bone; subsequently Philippeville was added as an additional point of assault. The date for these attacks was brought forward to the 15 October. Again the British Chiefs of Staff were asked to comment. They considered that the initial assaults, which envisaged the landing by D plus twenty, of no more than three divisions would not give that impression of overwhelming strength, which was an essential point of the whole operation. It was apparent, moreover, that the build up would be too slow to enable a sufficiently rapid advance to Tunisia. At an "off the record" discussion with General Eisenhower, they asked him to consider what additional forces would be required to include Casablanca in the initial operation; and with its inclusion, he was to give a firm date for the operation. He was to assume that he possessed the forces envisaged in his revised outline plan and the additional forces he required to make the assaults in greater strength and on a wider front, including Philippeville and Casablanca.

C.O.S. (W) 263

The British Chiefs of Staff acquainted the Joint Staff Mission in Washington with their views on General Eisenhower's revised plan and with this, a request for information about the additional forces required to assault Phillippeville and Casablanca. At the same time they instructed the Joint Staff Mission not to communicate any of this knowledge to the

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- (1) This document bears no serial number; two copies of it were issued personally to each Chief of Staff.
  - (2) It may be noticed that these fears were entirely American.
  - (3) The phrase "inside" was used to describe the operations against North Coast of Mediterranean Africa, while "outside" was used to describe the landings at Casablanca.



United States Chiefs of Staff, as this might prejudice the impending approach by the Prime Minister to the President for the additional forces required for the Philippeville and Casablanca landings.

J.S.M. 365  
25 Aug. 1942

J.S.M. 369

While General Eisenhower was working out the additional forces required for these two extra assaults, he received a new directive from the United States Chiefs of Staff. This second directive, sent on the 25 August, confined the initial objective to the Casablanca-Oran area, and relegated the securing of control of Tunisia to the ultimate stage. General Eisenhower had informed the United States Chiefs of Staff of the comments by the British Chiefs of Staff upon his revised outline plan; and the former satisfied themselves that no additional forces could be produced to attack Casablanca simultaneously with the other places of assault. Their reasons for adopting this attitude were suggested to the British Chiefs of Staff by the Joint Staff Mission. Torch would be the Americans first major offensive; it must not fail for political reasons; for the repercussions failure would have on American public opinion; and for the effect any United States reversal would have on the occupied countries of Europe. Then the United States Chiefs of Staff held a pessimistic view of the situation in Russia; they doubted whether the Russians could combat the German offensive of 1942. There were, also, grave doubts in their minds whether the United Kingdom could hold out in the Middle East; and they discounted the possibility that Torch might eventually join hands with the Allied forces in the Middle East. Holding such views, the United States Chiefs of Staff were anxious to secure locations on the Atlantic seaboard. Thus Morocco would be a valuable strategic objective. Moreover, the ceaseless clamour of the protagonists of the war in the Pacific was pressing for more resources to increase the scope and extent of operations against Japan.

J.S.M. 371

It seemed that deadlock would ensue and the operation be cancelled. The early occupation of Tunisia, which, in British eyes, was the crux of the operation seemed to be submerged in the American desire for security with a limited and circumscribed objective. In these circumstances, no recourse was left but to suggest that the impasse should be resolved at the highest level.

#### Resolution by Prime Minister and President

P.M.P.T.  
No. 180  
26 Aug. 1942

Accordingly the Prime Minister entered the lists. As if he had no official cognizance of the revised American directive, he telegraphed the President that as Torch was political in foundation, both of them together should lay down the political data. It would be reasonable to assume that Spain would not go to war with the United States, nor with the United Kingdom on account of Torch; it would be at least two months before the Germans could force their way through Spain or procure some accommodation from her; French resistance in North Africa would be largely token, capable of being overcome by the suddenness and scale of attack, and that thereafter the North African French might actually help the Allies under their own Commander. Vichy would not declare war on the United States and United Kingdom; although Hitler would put extreme pressure on her, he would not have the forces to overrun unoccupied France, while at the same time, he was kept pinned in the Pas de Calais area. "A bold, audacious bid for a bloodless victory may win a very great prize." He suggested giving General Eisenhower a directive something on the lines:-



"You will start Torch on October 14, attacking with such troops as are available and at such places as you deem fit."

P.M.P.T.  
T.11 38/2  
27 Aug. 1942

He followed this up with a second telegram, expressing the profound British disappointment at the directive issued to General Eisenhower by the American Chiefs of Staff. The whole pith of the operation was lost if the Allies did not take Algiers as well as Oran on the same day.

P.M.P.T.  
T.1155/2  
31 Aug. 1942

The President considered that the real problem was that there were not enough naval and air escorts, and combat loaders to enable more than two landings to be attempted. He proposed that American troops should land simultaneously near Casablanca and Oran and that they should seek to establish "road and rail communications, back of the mountains." Casablanca had to be taken as one of the initial points of assault; it would provide a sure and permanent base in the North West because a single line of communication through the Straits of Gibraltar was far too hazardous in the light of their limited resources. Moreover, he felt that the initial assault must be made exclusively by American ground troops, supported where necessary by British naval and air units. Initial landings by a combined force would result in resistance by the French; and he was certain that an American landing without British ground forces offered the best chances that there would be no, or only token, French resistance. A week after the United States forces had landed, during which time he would secure the non-resistance of the French, British forces could move into Algiers and to the Eastward. The President, however, did not regard these proposals as final; he left the door open for negotiation and compromise; he ended his telegram by saying that if both nations re-examined their resources and stripped everything to the bone, a "third landing should be possible."

C.O.S.(42) 107th  
Meeting (0)  
31 Aug. 1942

To British eyes it was obvious that the President was determined upon two points; the landing forces in the initial assaults must be wholly American; and Casablanca must be one of the first places to be attacked. But his suggestion that British forces should occupy Algiers by invitation, a week after the initial assaults, was not welcomed by the Prime Minister and the British Chiefs of Staff; they were firmly entrenched in the belief that Algiers was the key to the whole operation; and not to take Algiers on the same day as Oran and Casablanca would ruin all chances of an early occupation of Tunisia.

The British viewpoint was put strongly by the Prime Minister in his answer to the President. To risk occupying Algiers a week after the initial assaults was hazarding another Dakar, an operation so cluttered up with preliminary processes that it rendered abortive the voice of the guns. British participation in the operation would be disclosed by the assembly of British naval forces and aircraft at Gibraltar sometime beforehand. The initial fighting, necessarily, would be between French and British aircraft, and French batteries and British ships; the chances of a successful disembarkation on the beaches near Casablanca were four to one against success; "and in the night all cats are grey."

P.M.P.T.  
T.1137/2  
3 Sept. 1942

In answer to these objections to his proposed plan of only two landings at Oran and Casablanca, the President suggested that there should be three simultaneous landings at Casablanca, Oran and Algiers. The attacks on Casablanca and Oran were to be made by American forces; Algiers was to be

assaulted initially by an American force which was to be followed within the hour by a British 'follow-up' force. The forces he envisaged, necessary to the successful accomplishment of these objectives were:-

- (a) Casablanca (United States).....34,000 assault troops  
24,000 in the immediate follow-up.
- (b) Oran (United States).....25,000 assault troops  
20,000 in the immediate follow-up.
- (c) Algiers (United States -  
British).....10,000 United States  
assault troops, to  
be followed within  
the hour by British  
troops.

The United States could furnish the Casablanca and Oran force and ten thousand men for the Algiers assault. The United Kingdom would be required to furnish the additional forces required for the Algiers assault and the follow-up troops. Shipping and naval escort for the Oran and Algiers forces would have to be supplied by the United Kingdom; for the Casablanca expedition there were sufficient American naval escorts and shipping available.

P.M.P.T.  
1173/2  
3 Sept. 1942

P.M.P.T.  
T.1178/2  
4 Sept. 1942

P.M.P.T.  
T.1181/2  
5 Sept. 1942

These proposals evoked the answer from the Prime Minister that "we think a working plan can be made on that basis provided the emphasis is shifted", viz., by reducing the Casablanca force by twelve or ten thousand men. The President was willing to reduce the Casablanca landing force by the number of combat loaders to accommodate five thousand men. Since a reduction had been made, also in the original Oran assault force, this released a total of British American combat loaders, sufficient for ten thousand men. Thereupon the Prime Minister telegraphed the British agreement with the military layout as proposed by the President. Something of the President's and Prime Minister's relief at this agreement to proceed with Torch can be gathered from this final exchange of telegrams. The President 'shouted' "Hurrah"; while the Prime Minister contented himself with urging "O.K. Full Blast".

C.O.S. 103/3

C.O.S.(W) 299  
29 Sept. 1942  
C.C.S. 41st  
Meeting.  
29 Sept. 1942

In accordance with the general military layout, as agreed by the President and Prime Minister General Eisenhower produced his final plan on the 20 September 1942. According to the terms of his revised directive the plan had to be submitted to the Combined Chiefs of Staff for approval. The plan was approved by the United States Chiefs of Staff with minor amendments; but the British Chiefs of Staff had never seen the plan and asked the Joint Staff Mission not to commit them. At a meeting held on the 29 September, 1942 in Washington, the Combined Chiefs of Staff took note that General Eisenhower's plan had been approved by the United States Chiefs of Staff and that it was being submitted to the British Chiefs of Staff. On the 2 October, Field Marshal Sir John Dill was able to inform the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the British Chiefs of Staff had signalled their approval of the Torch outline plan as amended by the United States Chiefs of Staff, and agreed with them that it was unnecessary for the Combined Chiefs of Staff to approve the Annexes to the plan as they were matters of detail.

Final Plan

A.H.B. No.  
IIJ1/25/1/42

The outline plan in its final form was issued on the 8 October 1942. It laid down that the object of the operation was "to occupy French Morocco and Algeria with a view to the earliest possible occupation of Tunisia and the establishment of a striking force which could ensure control of the Straits of Gibraltar, by moving, if necessary, into Spanish Morocco". To this end simultaneous landings were to be made near Casablanca, Oran and Algiers, followed rapidly by an advance into Tunisia. For political reasons the initial landings were to be made by predominantly American forces, with the necessary British naval and air support.

The assault forces were to be divided into three Task forces, the Western, Centre and Eastern Task Forces. The Western Task force was to occupy the port and adjacent aerodromes at Casablanca. In conjunction with the Centre Task Force it was to establish and maintain communications between Casablanca and Oran; and these two forces were to build up land and air striking forces, prepared to occupy Spanish Morocco immediately the necessity arose. This force was to consist of, initially, the following:-

- 3 Regimental Combat Teams (3rd Division)
- 2 Regimental Combat Teams (9th Division)
- 1 Armoured Combat Command (1 Regiment)
- 1 Armoured Combat Command Team (2 battalions loaded)  
(on sea train.)

The naval support for this force was to be American and the Western Air Command (United States) was to provide fighter defence and army support for this force.

The Centre Task Force was to take and occupy the port and airfields adjacent to Oran apart from acting in conjunction with the Western Task Force, it had also to establish and maintain communications between Oran and Orleansville. The forces for the assault phase were:-

- 18th Regimental Combat Team
- 26th Regimental Combat Team
- 16th Regimental Combat Team
- Combat Command (1st Armoured Division)
- 1st Ranger Battalion.

The air defence of this force was to be undertaken by Western Air Command whilst the naval supporting forces were to be British. The Eastern Task force was to occupy Algiers and the airfields nearby. It was to establish and maintain communications between Algiers and Orleansville. A further charge was laid upon this force; it was to build up as rapidly as possible through Algiers and its adjacent ports a striking force to occupy Tunisia at the earliest possible moment. The forces chosen for the Algiers Assault were:-

- 168th Regimental Combat Team (United States from United Kingdom)
- 39th Regimental Combat Team (United States from United Kingdom)
- 11th Brigade Group (British)
- 36th Brigade Group (British)
- I Commando (Composite United States-British)
- VI Commando (Composite United States-British).

The naval support force for this landing was to be British.



The Eastern Air Command (British) was to provide fighter defence in the Algiers area and to the Eastwards as the Allied advance to Tunisia proceeded.

With the issue of the final outline plan Torch period of travail was ended; it had emerged from the womb of speculation; and concrete and detailed planning for the curiously fathered but lusty young infant could be pressed on with all urgency.

BR.1736(31)

Before the outline plan could be finalised, two subsidiary operations had to be incorporated. Experience in Madagascar had shown that the French were likely to sabotage the vessels and harbour installations in their ports if they considered there was a risk of their falling into enemy hands. Accordingly, it had been planned that both at Oran and Algiers, the Naval assault was to be opened by vessels breaking into and entering these harbours, with the object of preventing the enemy from executing any pre-arranged sabotage plans. The operations were named Reservist and Terminal respectively. In addition to these, another and more ambitious plan had been evolved for the capture by a paratroop force of the aerodromes Tafaraoui and La Senia - both situated in the vicinity of Oran.

#### Planning for the use of Airborne Troops

A.F.H.Q. File  
No. 381 in Box  
No. 1184

The paratroop attack on Tafaraoui airfield was the cause of much controversy. As early as the 19 August General Doolittle<sup>(1)</sup> was anxious that some airborne force should be employed at Oran. On that day it was tentatively decided at a conference between Generals Doolittle, Hansell and Clark that two members of Headquarters, European Theatre of Operations, United States Army, would come to Allied Force Headquarters to plan the details of the parachute task. On the 23rd these two members reported and planning was begun. Their task was changed on 25 August to "Explore the possibilities for the employment of paratroops in the Torch Operation (sic)". By the 7 September it was decided that with the forces available the paratroop attack should be concentrated on one objective and that Oran was the logical point of assault. Doubt was expressed on the "cracking up of the transports" south of Oran but the opinion of the specialists<sup>(2)</sup> was that there would be room for twelve transports to return to Gibraltar; the remainder would have to land in the desert and they were hopeful that these landings could be made without too much damage to the aircraft.

Ibid 28 Aug. 1942

Ibid 7 Sept.  
1942

Ibid 8 Sept. 1942

During a discussion on the air plan as a whole, Air Marshall Welsh<sup>(3)</sup> questioned the advisability of using paratroops. He felt that the rapid movement of ground forces to Tunis by air in order to forestall the Axis forces at that key point might be of the greatest importance to the success of the entire undertaking. The use of paratroops, should in his opinion, have been weighed carefully against the possibility that many transports would be lost in the operation, thereby limiting the ability to move forces, later by air

Ibid 9 Sept. 1942

(1) Commanding General, U.S. Twelfth Air Force.

(2) Lt.Col. Raff } of 503rd Parachute Regiment (U.S.)  
Major Yarborough }  
Colonel Bently } of XII Air Transport Command.

(3) A.O.C. No. 333 Group, later E.A.C., vide Chapter III.

East of Algiers. As up to five squadrons would be available in the United Kingdom for later operations he stressed the necessity for the formation of a group of transports operating directly under Allied Force Headquarters.

Ibid 15 Sept. 1942

The General Officer Commanding, First Airborne Division, Lieut.-General Browning, entered into discussions on the use of airborne troops. He postulated the use of British airborne troops in the operation and suggested the use of his First Airborne Division. Major General Mark W. Clark explained to him, at a conference at A.F.H.Q., that the Allied Force would like to employ his division flown in American transports to assist the movement of the Eastern Task Force to the east of Algiers. The G.O.C. First Airborne Division promptly agreed that all or part of his force was ready for such an operation, but there were not sufficient transport aircraft available. A U.S. Transport Group (64th Transport Group) was set at the disposal of the G.O.C. First Airborne Division for training purposes.

Ibid 21 Sept. 1942

The difficulty was, however, to get the British paratroopers into the area of operations. The Assault convoys were all filled. All U.S. air transport<sup>(1)</sup> was committed to the movement of key maintenance personnel to Oran and Casablanca for Twelfth Air Force units arriving early in the operation. Any idea of using these transports as a shuttle service was impracticable because of the difficulty of petrol supply. The result was that no British paratroops could be in the theatre of operations until D plus four days. Therefore the only possible paratroop attack was the one already decided upon on Tafaraoui.

Ibid.  
27 October 1942

Major-General Clark's visit to North Africa<sup>(2)</sup> however, brought new information. General Mast<sup>(3)</sup> had assured him that no resistance would be offered at either Oran or Bone airfields. It was obvious, therefore, that alternative plans should be prepared; one to be used in the case of the expected resistance, and another to be used if there was no or only token resistance. This second plan called for a landing by loaded transport aircraft at La Senia airfield. The planes would re-fuel and be ready to fly to Bone early on D plus one. No jump would be made unless conditions so required. A decision as to which plan was to be adopted would be signalled in ample time before the paratroop force took off.

A.F.H.Q. Operation  
Memoranda No. 8  
24 Sep. 1942 and  
A.F.H.Q. Memo  
Clark to Sanders  
3 Oct. 1942

Earlier the Air Section of A.F.H.Q. had been requested to study the plans for the use of transport aircraft and submit to Major-General Clark recommendations on their most effective employment. The N.C.X.F.,<sup>(4)</sup> the G.O.C. First Army, and the A.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Air Command submitted their requirements for air transport, in a plan, "Joint Outline Plan, for the Employment of Airborne forces in the Eastern Theatre". The object of operation Torch was "to secure French Morocco,

A.F.H.Q. File  
G3-64/Air

- (1) XII Air Transport Command had three Groups available. One was allocated to the paratroop raid on Tafaraoui (the 62nd). The other was the 60th, and a third for training in the U.K.
- (2) See Chapter 4.
- (3) See Chapter 4.
- (4) Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force; at this time Vice-Admiral B. Ramsay.

and Algeria with a view to the earliest occupation of Tunisia" Intelligence appreciations of Allied Force H.Q. on Axis reactions to the Allied Landings in Algeria considered that the Axis could land 2,000 troops by D plus seven and that they could increase this force to 14,000 Airborne troops by D plus fourteen. It was also possible that the Axis powers might transfer to Tunisia troops by sea to augment those already conveyed by air. Be that as it might, there was no doubt that the Germans would have sufficient troops in Tunisia by D plus seven to prevent the Allied forces from capturing the airfields near Bizerta and Tunis.

Seaborne forces of sufficient strength to capture and hold these airfields would be available after the arrival of the convoy K.M.S.2 on D plus four; but it would not be possible to operate them east of Djidjelli until strong land-based fighter cover was available. If these same forces were sent by land, they could not possibly reach Tunis nor Bizerta by D plus seven. The only possible method by which the C.-in-C's objective might be achieved was to use airborne troops to take and hold the airfields of Bone, Bizerta and Tunis, before the axis could forestall the Allied troops. Taking into account a degree of unserviceability of aircraft, it was their opinion that three groups of transport aircraft should be concentrated on the operation so that the Tunisian airfields could be captured and used as fighter squadron bases in advance of the German attempt to land troops.

The three Commanders of the land, sea, and air forces in the Eastern Task Force, emphasised that such an operation could only be undertaken in the event of French acquiescence. If they were hostile, it was unlikely that the air forces could carry sufficient airborne troops to capture the Tunisian airfields, and owing to the time it would take for the land and sea forces of the Allies to fight their way east, it would be beyond the ability of any air transport force, the Eastern Task Force were allotted to maintain them. In these circumstances it would be their aim to meet and hold the Axis forces as far east as possible. To do this it was considered that two Air Transport Groups would be required from D plus three onwards to carry airborne troops to the seizure of the aerodrome at Djidjelli before D plus four. The possession of this airfield was of vital importance, as fighters based upon it could provide continuous air cover over the port of Bougie. Fighters based on airfields in the vicinity of Algiers would be out of effective range for this purpose and part of the convoy K.M.S.2 was due to arrive off Bougie on that day. Thereafter, it was planned to capture the airfields at Philippeville and Bone in advance of the ground forces, while the Navy protected the left flank and brought in supplies through these ports. This plan<sup>(1)</sup>, however, was not accepted. Instead the plan to capture Tafaraoui was preferred.

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(1) In the reports of all three British Commanders on Operation Torch, they express their regret that this plan was not insisted upon. See C.S.21833 (Anderson), C.S.26023/45 (Welsh) and C.S.35926/47 (Cunningham). It is true that in the event, the failure to reach Tunis and Bizerta before the Axis allowed the capture of 200,000 Axis prisoners and their equipment; but that eventuality was not envisaged at the time the operation was planned and executed. -

Narrator's Note.



Policy towards Vichy and French Forces

C.A.S. File  
1764

J.P.(42) 816  
15.9.42

As the objective of the operation was not an assault upon an enemy coast, but an occupation of territory belonging to a former ally the policy to be adopted towards Vichy and French forces was the subject of considerable debate. At the time Torch was mounted, the existing instructions were that Gibraltar would engage, in all circumstances, with all the forces at its disposal, the Richelieu and the Jean Bart should they attempt to pass into the Mediterranean. They were not to engage any other Vichy man-of-war. In October 1942 the importance of Gibraltar and its airfield in the approaching operation was more clearly seen and it was necessary to revise the policy towards Vichy forces. The existing distribution of Vichy capital ships and cruisers was most favourable and no alteration in their locations was desired. Bearing in mind the fact that any attack on Gibraltar before D Day would seriously endanger the success of the operation it was essential to guard against any unforeseen incident which might precipitate an attack on the fortress.

C.O.S.(42)132(0)  
30.9.42. and  
Naval Signal  
1935A/14 Oct. 1942

Accordingly instructions were issued that, in the period before the Torch assault, no offensive action was to be taken against French forces unless those forces had first taken hostile action against the Allies; that no action was to be taken against French war ships, even if they essayed the passage of the Straits; that if French war ships appeared in the vicinity of our convoys in the Atlantic, north of the Canary Islands, or in the Mediterranean, south of the Balearic Islands, they were to be warned to keep clear, and, if the order was disobeyed, sunk. Surface forces were to open fire on any darkened ship which failed to identify itself, and submarines voyaging unescorted outside territorial waters were to be engaged. Should Gibraltar be attacked from the air she was to stand on the defensive and not retaliate by attacking French air bases. After the Torch assault had been launched, offensive action was only to be permitted against French forces when hostile intent had been shown by their action or disposition. In the air, any French aircraft approaching within sight of the Allied Naval forces or convoys off Gibraltar or any aircraft in flight or about to take off, after the warning had been issued, was to be regarded as hostile. The policy towards Vichy and French forces was to be officially communicated to the Vichy Government and to the Governor of Dakar as soon as the first assaults had taken place. A warning was to be broadcast to the French Fleet in North Africa and Dakar and it was agreed that General Eisenhower should perform that duty in his capacity of Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Forces.

J.S.M.418  
9.10.42

Deception and Cover Plans

C.A.S. File  
1611

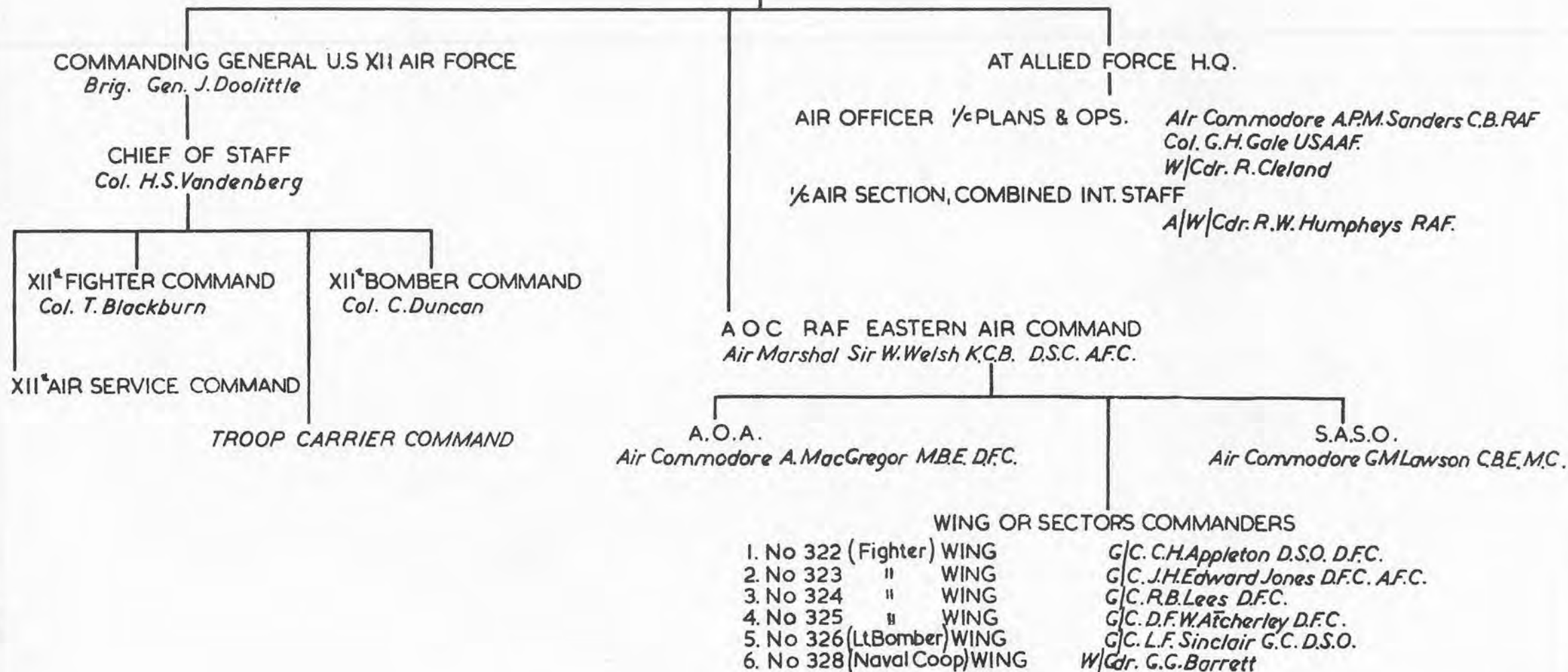
The decision to launch Operation Torch had been taken at a time when the Allies and the enemy were thinking in terms of a second front in Europe. It was necessary, therefore, to mislead the enemy as to the eventual destination of Torch. If the impression could be given that an operation of some considerable magnitude was intended against Europe, large Axis forces would be contained to rebut such an attack; and attention would be diverted from preparations for the forthcoming operation Torch. To this end a number of deception and cover plans were devised in order that the Allied forces might reach the coast of French North Africa unscathed.

The American forces taking part in the operation were made to believe that they were going to Haiti for training in

## ORGANISATION OF COMMAND OF AIR FORCES OPERATION 'TORCH'

## COMMANDER IN CHIEF

Lt. General Eisenhower



tropical warfare (Operation Sweater) while, at the same time, the Axis were given the impression that the expedition from the United States of America was destined for the Middle East to relieve the British forces in Syria and Cyprus (Operation Quick-Fire). In England the paramount necessity was to justify the concentration of shipping assembled in the Clyde and Mersey. It was bruited that the operation intended was the invasion of Norway. This was followed up by activities in the Scottish Command to further that impression; kit was issued to various troops and the 52nd Division was specially trained in mountain warfare (Solo I), to prevent the accidental disclosure of the destination of Torch forces. The British contingents concerned in Torch were made to believe that they were being prepared for a long journey to the Middle East around the Cape of Good Hope (Solo II). In order to further mystify and mislead both friend and foe, large quantities of anti-freeze compound were ordered from the Ministry of Supply, Norwegian currency was purchased, enquiry was made from Sweden for panchromatic snow filters and officers were instructed to make enquiry for arctic equipment.

Anticipating events, the success of the cover plans may be demonstrated by German actions. During the first three weeks of October the Luftwaffe flew a series of fighter reconnaissances by which nearly every port on the south coast of England was carefully watched. Another event, perhaps attributable to the success of the cover plans or perhaps attributable to Hitler's idee fixe that Norway was the "Zone of Destiny", was the fact that the Germans were sufficiently uneasy to enclose the Trondheim-Narvik district as a protected area; and, at the end of September, there were indications that they expected an attack by ten Anglo-American divisions; at the end of October the Germans proclaimed a prohibited zone along the Swedish-Norwegian frontier.

Even the arrival at Gibraltar of the numerous Senior officers of the various British and American forces concerned with Torch was carefully considered and a plan prepared to mislead the enemy as to their duties there. For example, Admiral Cunningham, the Naval Commander, arrived at Gibraltar ostensibly as Commander in Chief, Eastern Fleet and it was deliberately rumoured that he was on his way to Lagos, whence he would fly to his new appointment.

#### Command Generally

C.C.S. 33rd  
Meeting,  
25 July 1942

Because of the necessity for an American complexion to the operation, it was felt that an American must be appointed as the Commander-in-Chief. To this end Mr. Churchill telegraphed the President, asking for the appointment of General Eisenhower as Commander-in-Chief. After a slight delay, the President gave his approval.

Telegram No.1027  
10.8.42, and  
Telegram Marshall  
to Eisenhower  
11.8.42

At their meeting on the 25 July, the Combined Chiefs of Staff had decided that the Deputy to the Supreme Commander was to be British. However, the British Chiefs of Staff, at a conference with General Eisenhower expressed their preference for an American Deputy Supreme Commander, in order to preserve the continuity of the nationality of the Commander-in-Chief, in the event of any disability to him, and the fiction of a purely American enterprise. General Eisenhower recommended Major General Mark W. Clark as his deputy. The British Chiefs of Staff were in agreement with this proposal and General Marshall signalled the United States Chiefs of Staff concurrence.

It was felt that the title "Supreme Commander" was a



little too pretentious and should be reserved for the person who was to command the Allied forces in the cross Channel invasion of the Continent. The British Chiefs of Staff had objected to the use of this title at their conference with General Eisenhower on the 2 August, 1942; and in the directive issued to him on the 14 August, 1942, by the British Chiefs of Staff on behalf of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, he was appointed only Commander-in-Chief, Allied Expeditionary Force. Major-General Clark thereupon became Deputy Commander-in-Chief, and these titles were announced publicly on the 15 September 1942.

C.O.S. (Gen. Ismay)  
to Eisenhower  
4 Aug. 1942.  
Gen. Eisenhower  
to C.O.S.  
6 Aug. 1942

Meanwhile, as soon as Presidential approval had been granted to General Eisenhower's appointment, the British Chiefs of Staff, in order to expedite matters asked General Eisenhower for his ideas upon the Command arrangements for Torch. In reply to this invitation, General Eisenhower made his proposals in a letter to the British Chiefs of Staff. The details of his proposals for the Naval and Military Command do not concern this narrative. Suffice it to say that he considered he should have as his principal subordinates the following:-

The United States Army Commander

The British Army Commander

The Allied Naval Commander

The Allied Air Commander.

#### Air Command

"The Allied Air Commander was to command through the Air Commander, designated by each country in air units not specifically assigned as ground support units." Through the absolute authority of the Allied Commander-in-Chief to organise special task forces when necessary, it would always be possible to plan for a specific task "every airplane in the theatre under the operational control of Allied Air." With respect to the specific organisation of the British and American contingents, General Eisenhower said that there would be a single commander for the United States Army forces; and his authority would extend over the air squadrons serving in his "air support command". In the case of British ground and air forces, General Eisenhower wanted the British Chiefs of Staff to appoint the British Army Commander over the British ground and all "his directly supporting air units"(1).

C.O.S.  
(Brig. Hollis) to  
Gen. Eisenhower,  
8 Aug. 1942

So far as the air side was concerned, General Eisenhower's proposals did not meet with the approval of the British Chiefs of Staff. At a meeting between General Eisenhower and the Chiefs of Staff, the arrangements for command on the air side were concluded. The Chiefs of Staff were informed that the arrangements for the air command had been discussed by General Eisenhower and Air Vice-Marshal Slessor(2). They understood that the following organisation would be satisfactory to him. If this were so, they would recommend it to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

(1) The underlining is General Eisenhower's.

(2) A.C.A.S.(P), i.e. Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Plans).

- (a) A senior R.A.F. officer to be appointed to him at once. (It was understood that Air Commodore Sanders had already reported to him for this duty.)
- (b) An R.A.F. Officer Commanding to be appointed at once to command the Air Forces allocated to the Northern Force.
- (c) The system of command as between the British Task Force Commander and the Air Officer Commanding to be analogous to that obtaining in the Middle East as between General Auchinleck and Air Chief Marshal Tedder<sup>(1)</sup>
- (d) The A.O.C. would, at a suitable moment when operations developed become A.O.C.-in-C. under him and would command all the United States and British forces allocated to the Commander-in-Chief in the Northern area.

#### Final Air Command Arrangements

A.H.B. No.  
II A1/25/1/43

These arrangements proved satisfactory for these proposals appear in the final Outline Plan for Torch as the Command Relationship on the air side. There were to be two separate

- (1) The relationship existing between General Auchinleck and Air Marshall Tedder is best expressed in the words of Mr. Churchill:

D.O. (41) 17  
7 Oct. 1941

"Upon the military Commander-in-Chief announcing that a battle is in prospect, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief will give him all possible aid irrespective of other targets, however attractive. Victory in the battle makes amends for all, and creates new and favourable situations of a decisive character. The Army Commander-in-Chief will specify to the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief the targets and tasks which he requires to be performed, both on the preparatory attack on the rearward installations of the enemy and for air action during the progress of the battle. It will be for the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief to use his maximum force for these objects in the manner most effective. This applies not only to any squadron assigned to army co-operation permanently but to the whole air force available in the theatre.

Bombers may, if required, be used as transports or as supply machines to far-ranging or outlying columns of troops, the sole object being the success of the military operation. As the interests of the two Commanders-in-Chief are identical it is not thought that any difficulty should arise. The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief would naturally lay aside all routine programmes and concentrate on bombing the rearward services of the enemy in the preparatory period. This he would do, not only by night, but by day attacks with fighter protection. In this process he will bring about a trial of strength with the enemy fighters, and his best chance of obtaining local command of the air. What is true of the preparatory period applies with even greater force during the battle. All assembly or refuelling posts or marching columns of the enemy should be attacked by bombers during daylight with strong fighter protection, thus bringing about air conflicts not only of the highest importance in themselves, but directly contributing to the general result."

Air Commands, the Western and Eastern. The Commanding General of the Western Air Command, which was to be composed of the United States XII Air Force was to be Brigadier General James H. Doolittle, whilst the Air Officer Commanding the Eastern Air Command, formed from R.A.F. Squadrons was to be Air Marshal Sir William Welsh. The two commanders were to operate independently of each other, but directly under the Commander-in-Chief. They were to designate such subordinate commanders and air forces as might be necessary to work with the Western, Centre and Eastern Task Force Commanders respectively in order to ensure co-ordinated Air-Ground efforts.

The division of the air command into two separate and distinct commands was perpetuated by dividing the territory to be occupied into two, and giving each air command an area of its own. Broadly speaking, North Africa, from the Atlantic to the Tunisian Tripolitanian border was divided by a line running due south from Cap Tenes. To the westward of that line it may be said that the United States Twelfth Air Force was to be responsible for air defence, army support and bombing of enemy targets; to the eastward, the Eastern Air Command, with the additional charge of convoy protection.



## CHAPTER 3

DETAILED ROYAL AIR FORCE PLANNING

A.F. H.Q.  
File No. 381 in  
box No. 1184

A.M. File  
C.30435/46  
Gen. Eisenhower's  
Despatch

Early in August, 1942 the headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force was set up in Norfolk House, St. James Square, London. The form and the scope of the headquarters were shaped by the fact that the Commander of the expedition was an American; that the operation would in its initial phase be amphibious; and that the "Air would play a vital part in the operation."<sup>(1)</sup> Furthermore the numbers and diversity of the forces engaged in the operation determined to some extent the organisation and the extent of Allied Headquarters. The principle upon which that headquarters was based was in the words of the Commander-in-Chief that "Alliances in the past have often done no more than to name the common foe, and 'unity of command' has been a pious aspiration thinly disguising, the national jealousies, ambitions and recriminations of high ranking officers, unwilling to subordinate themselves and their forces to a commander of a different nationality or different service. I was determined, from the first, to do all in my power to make this a truly Allied Force with real unity of command and centralisation of administrative responsibility."

A.F. H.Q. File  
No. 381  
14th August 1942  
in box No. 1184

C.P.S. S.40/ Air. Min.  
of Civ.  
Conference 7th Oct.  
1942 AHB. No. IIA1/  
25/1/38

A.F.H.Q. Gen.  
Order No. 12  
1st Nov. 1942

A.F.H.Q. File  
No. 381

In accordance with this dictum, the administrative and operational planning for the operation was the direct charge of Major General Mark W. Clark, United States Army. On the Air Side Air Commodore A.P.M. Sanders was appointed as "Air Officer" to General Eisenhower to advise on Air matters, and to co-ordinate all the air planning. Later Brigadier General Louis A. Craig, A.A.F. from E.T.O.U.S.A. was appointed as his deputy. The main task of this section was to co-ordinate work of the planning of the staffs of the two air forces. Shortly before D-Day their title was changed from "Air Section" to "Air Staff" A.F.H.Q., and became an integral part of the General Staff. Originally both British and American Air Force Planning staffs had been merged; but as planning developed and the roles of the two air forces, one working in the east and one in the west defined, the United States Twelfth Air Force, considered that their responsibilities in the west were divorced from those of the Royal Air Force. Accordingly they gradually separated themselves and were established in another part of Norfolk House.

Formation of No. 333 Group, Royal Air Force

The air force planning for the operations was conducted by two agencies, by the Air Ministry and by No. 333 Group. Towards the end of July a small staff assembled in the basement at the Air Ministry and gradually the personnel of No. 333 Group was built up. On the 18 August, it moved to

- (1) A.M. Welsh offers an alternative or additional explanation  
"In a combined or Allied Headquarters engaged in detailed planning only one staff system can be used, and in Torch it was decided to adopt that of the Americans. The decision was arrived at because the average British Officer had considerably more experience than the American, and it was thought could more easily adapt himself." C.S. 26023/45 p.4.  
Compare Memo to C.O.S. 26 August, 1942, by Major General Mark W. Clark. "I discussed this question with General Gale this morning and told him our organisation would be modelled generally after the American system."

A.H.Q.S./42/Air

C.S. 16228 and  
Admin. Plans

Norfolk House, where it was accommodated along with the other staffs planning operation Torch. The task of No.333 Group was to plan administratively and operationally the part the Royal Air Force was to play in operation Torch and the subsequent development and build up of the Royal Air Force for the proposed Allied Advance into Tunisia. It had, moreover, in conjunction and consultation with the Air Ministry to arrange for air anti-submarine protection to the convoys carrying the Expeditionary Force to North Africa, to consolidate and correlate, to meet both Naval and Military requirements, the photographic reconnaissance tasks and the Naval demands for general sea and harbour reconnaissance of Axis and Vichy French shipping, both merchant and naval. On the other hand, the various Air Ministry departments concerned determined the size and composition of the Royal Air Force component of the Allied Expeditionary force and, owing to the demands of the operation on other Air Force Commands, did a considerable amount of the administrative planning.

Security

AHBIK/24/176A

Speed was the measure of success of Torch and in order to ensure as complete and as all-pervading a surprise as possible, elaborate and stringent security measures were devised and maintained throughout the preparation and planning stage of Torch. The numbers of those who had knowledge of the plan for an invasion of North Africa was kept down to the absolute minimum. A series of grades of knowledge about Torch was instituted. In Category "A" were those for whom full information was absolutely essential. Those who did not need to know more than that an operation was intended in the general area in which Torch was to take place were Category "B": they were told verbally the point or points but not the date of the assault. Lists were kept of personnel in both these Categories including Clerical Staffs. There was a third classification "C" in which were those who knew no more than that an overseas operation was being mounted but it was considered impracticable to keep a list of those with such knowledge. Elaborate instructions to ensure secrecy were promulgated about the classification and the transit of documents; and the Bigot procedure was to be used in all signals connected with and concerning Torch. Within the Air Ministry a special code name was given to Torch it was to be known as Cackle. The points of assault were given code names. Only such maps were to be displayed as were necessary to enable the planning to be carried out; and these were to have the code names in place of the actual geographical names. This grew out of a visit of the Prime Minister who complained to the Chiefs of Staff of the alarming lack of security at Norfolk House; and the Chiefs of Staff acted on this request.

P.M. Personal  
Minute to C.O.S.  
in C.A.S. File  
1733

A.F.H.Q.

C.P.S./415/Org.  
ORB No.333 Gp.

In Command of No.333 Group was Air Marshal Sir William Welsh, K.C.B., D.S.C., A.F.C. who reported to General Eisenhower on 10 August, 1942. His two principal subordinates were A.O.A. Air Commodore A. MacGregor, and his S.A.S.O. Air Commodore Lawson. The organisation of the No.333 Group followed normal Royal Air Force procedure. The officers for No.333 Group were drawn indiscriminately from the various commands at home; and the staff was complete in a comparatively short time.<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Diagram No. 2 shows the organisation by 29 September, 1942.

# ORGANISATION OF HEADQUARTERS No 333 GROUP

## AIR OFFICER COMMANDING

*Air Marshal Sir William Welsh K.C.B. D.S.C. A.F.C.*

SENIOR AIR STAFF OFFICER  
*Air Commodore G.M. Lawson C.B.E. M.C.*

AIR OFFICER ADMINISTRATION  
*Air Commodore A. MacGregor M.B.E. D.F.C.*

### AIR STAFF DUTIES

1. ARMY COOPERATION  
*G/C. R.J. Cooper*
2. NAVAL COOPERATION  
*W/Cdr. Finlay M.B.E.*
3. CORPS H.Q. LIASON  
*W/Cdr. L. Mathias*
4. CORPS H.Q. LIASON  
*W/Cdr. M.J. Muspratt-Williams*

GROUP CAPT. OPS.  
*G/C T.C. Traill Q.B.E. D.F.C.*

CHIEF INT. OFFICER  
*S/Ldr. W.R. Norton*

ADMIN PLANS  
*A/W/Cdr. W.J. Maggs*

SENIOR PERSONNEL STAFF OFFICER  
*W/C I. Hodgson*

GROUP CAPT ORGANISATION  
*G/C. MacFadyen*

MOVEMENTS  
*W/Cdr. B. Allen*

QUARTERING  
*A/W/Cdr. J.W.E. Wheatley*

### HEADS OF SERVICES

ARMAMENT  
*W/Cdr. D.E.B. Wheeler*

CHIEF DEFENCE OFFICER  
*Lt/Col. H.M. Salmon M.C. RAF Reg.*

C.M.O.  
*G/C.A. Allen*

S.ACCTS.O.  
*W/Cdr. G.W. Lynn*

P.M.O.  
*G/C. W.J.G. Walker*

C.S.O.  
*A/C/C. E.M.F. Grundy O.B.E.*

NAVIGATION  
*W/Cdr. D.E.B. Wheeler*

S.E.S.O.  
*W/Cdr. B.S. Cartmell*

S.ENG.S.O.  
*W/Cdr. F.W. Cotton*



Air Estimate of the Situation

AHB. No. A1/  
25/1/46  
A.H.Q./S55/  
Air. Encl. 1 and  
CPS/Air AHB  
No. A1/25/1/43  
  
CPS/74/Air

The higher object of the expedition to North Africa was to create a situation which would enable the Allies to seize and occupy the whole of French North Africa. This would allow them to control sea communications in the western Mediterranean and to conduct at the earliest possible moment offensive operations against the Axis in the Mediterranean. The outline plan devised to realise this objective entailed simultaneous landings at Casablanca, at Oran to secure French Morocco, and if necessary Spanish Morocco, and at Algiers to secure Algeria and Tunisia.

Role of the Air Forces

CPS/49/Air  
AHB. No. A1/  
25/1/43

The aims of the Allied Air Forces were to provide air cover and air support for the initial assaults; to protect bases and communications against air attack, and, in conjunction with naval forces, against attacks by submarines and surface raiders; to disseminate propaganda by leaflet dropping; to provide air co-operation and support for land operations subsequent to the assault phase; and lastly to provide strategic air forces for offensive operations against the Axis outside French North Africa. Air cover and support for the landing could only be provided by carrier based aircraft; the physical facts of geography prevented shore based Royal Air Force or Twelfth Air Force aircraft from undertaking this part in the operation. The other tasks, however, could be accomplished by shore based aircraft. It was necessary to provide aircraft suitable for the type of operations they had to perform: fighters to protect the ports of disembarkation in the area of operations, and the convoys' routes to and from them; general reconnaissance and anti-submarine aircraft had to protect the seaborne convoys, by anti-submarine patrols and by anti-shipping operations both inside and outside the Mediterranean. Included in the air forces to be sent to the theatre of operations must be transport and communication aircraft; transport to assist in the maintenance of the combatant air forces, and to act as troop transports; communication aircraft to facilitate the rapid movement of land and air Commanders Staff. Above all aircraft had to be provided for Army support and for strategic bombing and long range fighter operations in aid of the ground forces.

Ibid

Need for Adequate Air Forces

During the early stages of the operation the provision of adequate air forces to protect ports and convoys was vital. Unless seaborne convoys could be protected, satisfactorily, while they were on their way to North Africa, and during disembarkation, it would be impossible to exploit or maintain any initial success, or to build up forces during the subsequent operations. Apart from securing the safety of the ports and the convoys, a considerable display of Allied Air Forces, would have a most salutary effect on the French. The ability to hit hard against any French resistance was much more likely to induce their acquiescence or their early collapse. Therefore the maximum air strength which it was practical to introduce into the area should be sent and they should be sent as early as possible.

Ibid

Limiting Factors

In the earlier stages of the operations, the R.A.F. owing to its commitments in other theatres of war could not make available more forces than were necessary to achieve

their share in securing French North Africa. The U.S.A.A.F., however, was not so circumscribed and restricted; the build up of the U.S. forces in the theatre could be arranged with a view to seizing the earliest opportunity of conducting offensive operations against the Axis in the Mediterranean. It was impossible to establish at an early date in North Africa a Salvage and Repair organisation, capable of undertaking the rebuilding of badly damaged aircraft. But whereas the R.A.F. units in Torch would be able to call reinforcements from the United Kingdom, at short and regular intervals, the bulk of the U.S. air units might not be able to be reinforced for some considerable time after their arrival in the theatre. Moreover, the lack of previous operational experience by a proportion of the U.S. aircrew might give a higher rate of wastage than in the R.A.F. The U.S. air units would, as a result, constitute a wasting force, which would have to draw from its own first line strength to replace losses. For both air forces during the early stages the wastage rates might be high; as much as one third of initial equipment aircraft per squadron per month.

Besides these factors the total strength of the Allied air forces which could be employed at the outset was governed by the number of squadrons of suitable types which could be made available from British and American sources; by the speed with which aircraft, could be passed through the bottle neck of Gibraltar, (especially fighters which had to be erected); by the number of captured airfields suitable for the fast aircraft the Allies were sending; even by the fact that the aircraft capable of flying to the theatre of operations could not be flown in from bases in the United Kingdom without due regard to the arrival of their maintenance personnel, and the supplies of petrol, equipment, stores and M.T. the speed of whose arrival was limited by the shipping facilities available. Lastly, experience has shown that too rapid a 'build-up' of air forces in a new theatre of operations was 'likely to lead to congestion, inefficiency, and a high rate of wastage.'

Ibid

#### Ground Mobility of the Air Forces

Since the basic aim of the operation was the early occupation of Tunisia, and since the most easterly landing on the North African coast was to be at Algiers, it was most necessary for a proportion of the air units introduced into the area of operations at their outset to be organised on a basis of full ground mobility so that they could move to the east as soon as possible. An early collapse of French resistance would most assuredly mean that such ports as Bougie, Philippeville, and Bone would be opened to Allied shipping; but this would not alter the requirement for complete ground mobility of air units. The increased scale of air attack, which the Axis would bring to bear on these ports would seriously interfere or even prevent the disembarkation of convoys at these ports until adequate air cover over them has been established. The ground parties, stores and equipment necessary to enable fighters to operate had, therefore to be moved forward from the Algiers area overland. The number of vehicles needed to give the selected squadrons, the required degree of flexibility and mobility would occupy, inevitably a substantial amount of shipping space in the early convoys to Algiers; and this in turn, would limit the total number of squadrons which could be introduced into the Eastern Task Force Area.

Tasks Confronting No. 333 GroupC.P.S./S6/  
Air

This estimate of the situation enabled the Staff of No. 333 Group to break down the problem with which they were presented into its varied constituents, and one of the first essentials was appreciation of the scale of enemy efforts against airfields, ports and convoy bases from D-Day to D plus twenty nine. This had envisaged too not merely the threat from the Axis air forces, but also the scale of attack the French air forces could be expected to mount. These appreciations had to be considered separately, and a summary, showing the total air opposition to be expected included.

Next came tasks concerned with the disposition and employment of the Royal Air Force component of Torch. There was the Naval Co-operation plan which had to be prepared in conjunction with the staffs of the Naval Commander-in-Chief and Commander-in-Chief Coastal Command. This plan involved Air-Sea Rescue and anti-submarine patrols over the Atlantic and inside the Mediterranean.

The Naval-Air Co-operation PlanA.H.Q. S42/Air  
Encl. A

The western approaches to Gibraltar inside the Mediterranean, and off the North African coasts were likely as the operation developed to become one of the most concentrated areas for enemy submarine attack in the world. Hence not only would it be vitally necessary to protect the Torch convoys but also if there were enough specialised aircraft, these waters should prove a most fruitful hunting ground for destroying U-Boats. It was necessary therefore that the maximum number of aircraft which could be operated should be provided to meet the naval requirements.

The Naval Commander "X" Force made his requirements known to the Air Officer Commanding No. 333 Group on 27 August and two days later these were discussed with the Air Officer Commanding No. 333 Group and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Coastal Command. By 12 September in view of the change of plan the Air Officer Commanding decided to discuss the naval requirements with the N.C.X.F. afresh, in case they had to be modified; and then to discuss them with Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

As a result of these meetings, the air plan for Naval Co-operation was issued on 21 September. The requirements for Air Co-operation by N.C.X.F. can be summarised:

- (a) Strategical reconnaissance of harbours in South Eastern France, Algeria and Morocco, West Africa and Italy to report movements of hostile naval forces and shipping.
- (b) Anti-submarine protection in the Straits of Gibraltar and along the convoy routes.
- (c) Long range anti-submarine and reconnaissance patrols for surface ships and submarines, inside and outside the Mediterranean.
- (d) Offensive action bombers and torpedo aircraft against enemy ship targets.
- (e) Fighter protection for convoys.

These requirements were met by the Air Plan for Naval Co-operation. Operational considerations and the proposed employment of aircraft to provide the necessary co-operation



were divided into two stages. The first stage, viz. from the departure of the convoys from allied ports up to and including D plus four; the period from D plus four to D plus twenty-eight was considered as the second stage. During the first stage of the operation of all general reconnaissance aircraft both outside and inside (but excluding the North East Area) was to come under the control of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Coastal Command who was to meet the Naval Commander-in-Chief's requirements with aircraft based in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar.

#### Strategical Reconnaissance

In the first stage photographic reconnaissance flights were to be flown every third day from D plus two to D plus four and thereafter daily; of the South of France by aircraft based in the United Kingdom, from Gibraltar (where the P.R. unit was to be increased to six Spitfires) of Oran, Algiers and Casablanca. West Africa dealt with Dakar, while Malta, in addition to its usual photographic reconnaissance of Taranto, Naples, Messina, Palermo and Cagliari, was to undertake the coverage of Bizerta and Tunis. These photographic reconnaissances were to be co-ordinated by Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command.

#### Method of dealing with reports

After the assault, the six Photographic Reconnaissance Unit Spitfires which had moved from the United Kingdom to Gibraltar were to cross to Algiers on D plus four and from that date Allied Force Headquarters would allot tasks for photographic reconnaissance in collaboration with Gibraltar and Malta to meet the requirements of the Naval Commander-in-Chief and G.O.C., E.T.F.

#### Anti-Submarine Protection in Straits of Gibraltar and along Convoy Routes

From the time of the departure of the first convoys from United Kingdom carrying the Expeditionary Force to North Africa A.S.V. equipped aircraft would operate along the convoy routes from Gibraltar from D plus four onwards throughout the hours of daylight. In addition, A.S.V. equipped Swordfish would carry out anti-submarine searches during the hours of darkness in the area of the Straits of Gibraltar. To augment the General Reconnaissance force at Gibraltar, a second Squadron (No. 500 Hudson) was to be available for anti-submarine patrols from Gibraltar from D plus two onwards. In order to provide anti-submarine patrols within the Mediterranean as far to the eastwards as possible, No. 600 Squadron was to move into Oran on D-Day, and remain there until it moved forward to Algiers on D plus fourteen. By D plus four No. 608 (G.R.) Squadron (Hudson) would, it was anticipated have arrived at Algiers when it was hoped to extend the area of operations further to the East.

#### Long range Reconnaissance Patrols inside and outside the Mediterranean

Initially long range reconnaissance patrols were to be carried out by aircraft based on Gibraltar, Bathurst and Malta. It was left to the Air Ministry to decide the precise zones for which each base would be responsible in respect to the following areas:

- (i) To North East and West of Balearic Isles.
- (ii) To South of Sardinia.

- (iii) To South West along Moroccan Coast and Canary Islands.
- (iv) By flying boat from Bathurst in vicinity of Cape Verde and Canary Islands.
- (v) The inner approaches in the St. Vincent Area.

The only change in the second stage was to be that squadrons based at Algiers would cover convoy routes east and west of that port to the limit of their range.

#### Offensive Action Against Enemy Targets

No special or additional squadrons were to be provided for offensive action against enemy shipping in the first stage: The General Reconnaissance squadrons disposed, as above, were to regard this as an additional commitment. In the second stage one light Bomber Squadron would be available at Algiers on D plus four and three additional light bomber squadrons were planned to arrive there on D plus fourteen. Two of these squadrons were Bomber Reconnaissance Squadrons for Army support. Provision was being made for a Beaufort Squadron to arrive at Djidjelli or Philippeville on D plus nineteen. This squadron was primarily to be used against shipping with additional role of reconnaissance over areas covered by enemy fighter aircraft.

#### Fighter Protection of Convoys

During the first stage of the operation, fighter protection of the convoys was to be provided by carrier based aircraft until land based aircraft could be flown into African airfields. It was anticipated that this would be on D-Day and after this it was hoped that a force of shore based fighters would be built up to provide fighter protection for convoys east of Oran.

#### Responsibility and Areas of Control

From D plus four it was hoped Air Headquarters Algiers would be in a position to control all Ground Reconnaissance Squadrons and P.R. Flight Algiers. The Greenwich Meridian was the suggested line of demarkation of responsibility between Gibraltar and Air Headquarters Algiers after D plus four when the two General Reconnaissance Squadrons were located at Algiers i.e. on D plus fourteen: Air Headquarters Algiers would take over responsibility from Gibraltar, east of 2° west. (1)

A.H.Q./S42/Air  
Encl. 19A

There was no provision in the Air Plan for Naval Co-operation for the convoys sailing directly from the United States to Casablanca; and a signal asking that this be remedied was sent from General Clark, at that time on a visit to Washington. Accordingly on the suggestion of the Air Officer Commanding No. 333 Group, a Conference was held to discuss whether Gibraltar should be responsible for this task. (2)

It was agreed that the Air Officer Commanding Gibraltar (Air Vice Marshal Robb) would be responsible (under the

- 
- (1) Reconnaissance Wing Headquarters at Algiers was to start to form on D plus four - the main wing being planned to arrive at Algiers on D plus fourteen.
  - (2) Representatives of the Air Staff, No. 333 Group, A.F.H.Q. and the Admiralty attended.

direction of the Air Officer Commanding No.333 Group in conjunction with Admiral Cunningham and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Coastal Command) for reconnaissance, convoy escort and anti-submarine patrol outside the Mediterranean to the extent of the range of his aircraft, and as far north as a line approximately east and west through (the exact boundary between Gibraltar and Coastal Command was to be notified by A.C.N.S.(H)) and inside the Mediterranean initially as far as 7° 30 east. This boundary would be altered and adjusted according to the operational situation. Control of the Royal Air Force at Gibraltar would pass to Air Officer Commanding No.333 Group on the arrival of General Commanding Allied Expeditionary Force, Naval Commander-in-Chief and the Air Officer Commanding No.333 Group.

Ibid  
encl.27A

By the 14 October, the General reconnaissance arrangements for Torch were almost complete; and on that day a final conference was held at the Air Ministry between representatives of Air Ministry, No.333 Group, A.F.H.Q., Admiralty and United States Navy. The issue still to be decided was the provision of anti-submarine cover during the approach and assault period of the Casablanca landings. Arrangements had been made for such cover but, owing to the distance, it would be light and could not be counted upon after the initial or assault phase. As a result of representations by Air Vice Marshal Sanders to General Eisenhower, the United States Navy now proposed to make available two amphibian Catalina squadrons (P.B.Y/5.As.) to give extra air cover to Casablanca forces during the assault period. They proposed that one squadron (V.P. 73) should move into Northern Ireland and then to Gibraltar and the other (V.P.92) direct from United States to Freetown. Both squadrons were to move into Casablanca when there was available accommodation. The limiting factor was the airfield accommodation at Gibraltar,<sup>(1)</sup> and although the reason was adduced that amphibian Catalinas at Gibraltar would be ready to operate if the flying boats were weather bound, the proposal could not be accepted. Instead as an insurance, Coastal Command agreed to place three Mosquitoes at the disposal of Gibraltar. Squadron V.P. 73 U.S.N. was to remain in Northern Ireland until airfield accommodation was available at Gibraltar or Casablanca; Squadron No.V.P.92 U.S.N. was to operate from Freetown on anti-submarine duties until accommodation was available at Casablanca.

Ibid  
24A

#### Size and Composition of Royal Air Force Component

C.S.16228

C.O.S. (42)  
81st Meeting (b)

These tasks were in the minds of a meeting called at the Air Ministry on 15 August. The Chiefs of Staff Committee had invited the Service Departments concerned to take all preliminary measures that were possible before the completion of an outline plan for Torch; and the Director of War Organisation called to the meeting, representatives from all the Air Ministry branches concerned with the mounting up of an overseas operation, from No.333 Group and from the E.T.O.U.S.A. They considered a long and comprehensive agenda on a "special operation" whose nature was briefly explained.

C.S.16228  
and Narrator's  
interviews

Security naturally was the first item on the agenda; and to ensure this a special code name by the Air Ministry part in the planning was adopted; henceforth the operation was referred to as Cackle in Air Ministry elsewhere Torch.<sup>(2)</sup>

(1) See Chapter 4.

(2) In spite of this an R.A.F. Officer (who is nameless) came from the meeting and at a book shop on the corner of Whitehall and the Strand bought maps covering the area of attack. He was dismissed.



SECRET

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But by far the most important item the meeting had to consider was the composition of the force. It was decided that the Royal Air Force component should be despatched in two echelons, Party A and Party B and the composition of each echelon and the total force should be as follows:-

Composition of Force

<u>Composition of the Force</u>	<u>Party A</u>	<u>Party B</u>	<u>Total</u>
A.H.Q.	1	-	1
Composite Group H.Q.	1	1	2
Composite	4	3	7
M.B. Wing H.Q.	-	1	1
Day (Fighter) Squadrons	7	12	19
Night (Fighter) Squadrons	-	2	2
Fighter Bomber Squadrons	2	-	2
Long range Rec. Squadrons	1	-	1
L.B. )	4	6	10
M.B. )	1	-	1
L.R. G.R. Squadrons	15	20	35
Repair and Servicing Unit	4	4	8
Air Stores Park	4	4	8
Base Personnel Staff Officer	-	1	1
Base Accounts Officer	-	1	1

Types of Aircraft

The type of aircraft with which the squadrons should be equipped were decided at the meeting. It was recommended that the day fighters should be equipped with Spitfires and the night fighters with Beaufighters and the fighter bomber squadrons with Hurricanes; Wellingtons were to fulfill both medium bomber requirements, while Hudsons were to be provided to meet the long range General Reconnaissance commitment; but the type of aircraft to fill the long range reconnaissance duty had to be found. It was also anticipated that light bombers would be included in the force. An additional problem arose from the amphibious nature of the operation and from the only available air base for the initial assault stages (Gibraltar); facilities had to be arranged for the accommodation of carrier aircraft. These were to be the subject of a special meeting to be called by D.D.W.O. (1) with D.P.S.M., D.D.E. (8) and D. of Movements; as an interim measure arrangements were to be made for accommodation on the next out-going (Gibraltar) convoy for thirty-four pilots and two hundred and fifty aircraft erection personnel.

Establishments and Personnel

Units were to have special establishments and the basis on which they were to form were the Middle East establishments. Those units going in Party 'A' were not intended to be fully mobile, at first, except with certain reservations, but it would be necessary for the whole force to be built up eventually to mobile establishments. Establishments of units in Party 'A' were to be capable of splitting up into two echelons. All establishments were to be kept down to the absolute minimum especially with regard to specialist officers. Existing units were to be raised to United Kingdom establishments by the Commands concerned. However three days later the composition of the force was revised thus:-

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Composition of Force

	<u>Party A</u>	<u>Party B</u>	<u>Total</u>
A. H. Q.	1	-	1
Composite Group H. Q.	1	1	2
Fighter Wing H. Q.	3	2	5
Light Bomber Wing H. Q.	1	-	1
Fighter Squadrons - Spitfires	5	4	9
Hurricanes	2	4	6
Fighter Bombers - Hurricanes	2	-	2
Night Fighter Squadrons -			
Beaufighters	-	2	2
Light Bomber Squadrons - Blenheims	2	-	2
Bostons	2	-	2
C.R./L.R. Squadrons - Hudsons	1	-	1
P.R.U. - Spitfires	1 flight		
	14 (+1 flt.)	10	24

Accordingly the various Commands were notified of the squadrons selected and any special requirements. Fighter Command was to provide the following Squadrons:-

Party A

<u>Squadrons and Type</u>	<u>Assembly Station</u>
No. 154 Squadron (Spitfire)	Digby
No. 81 Squadron (Spitfire)	Digby
No. 242 Squadron (Spitfire)	Wellington
No. 416 Squadron (Spitfire) R.C.A.F.)	Turnhouse
No. 243 Squadron (Spitfire)	Turnhouse
No. 253 Squadron (Hurricane)	Hibaldstow
No. 43 Squadron (Hurricane)	Kirton Lindsey
No. 174 Squadron (Hurricane) Bomber	Warmwell
No. 175 Squadron (Hurricane) Bomber	Warmwell

Party B

<u>Squadron and Type</u>	<u>Assembly Station</u>
No. 93 Squadron (Spitfire)	Kingscliffe
No. 152 Squadron (Spitfire)	Wittering
No. 72 Squadron (Spitfire)	Ouston
No. 111 Squadron (Spitfire)	Foulmire
No. 32 Squadron (Hurricane)	Honiley
No. 87 Squadron (Hurricane)	Charmey Down
No. 245 Squadron (Hurricane)	Middle Wallop
No. 247 Squadron (Hurricane)	Exeter
No. 55 Squadron (Beaufighter)	Honiley
(1) No. 406 Squadron (Beaufighter)	Scorton (R.C.A.F.)

Bomber Command was to provide two squadrons of Bisleys, No. 18 and No. 114 Squadrons, while Army Co-operation Command

- (1) It was anticipated that it would be necessary to nominate two other squadrons in place of the two Canadian Squadrons and on the 21 August this was done; No. 232 Squadron (Spitfire) replaced No. 416 Squadron (Spitfire) R.C.A.F. and No. 600 Squadron (Beaufighter) replaced No. 406 Squadron (Beaufighter) R.C.A.F.

was to make available two squadrons of Blenheim Mark V aircraft, No.13 and No.614 Squadrons. Only one squadron of Hudsons was requested at this stage to fulfill the G.R. requirements, and Coastal Command nominated No.608 Squadron.

C.S.16288  
Encl.125A

The R.A.F. component of the expedition was taking shape. By the 18 September it had been decided to withdraw two of the single engined fighter squadrons, Nos.245 and 247, and to replace Nos.174 and 175 fighter bomber squadrons with Nos.225 and 241 Army Co-operation squadrons. In addition, three G.R. squadrons were now required, another Hudson squadron and a squadron of torpedo bombers. The latter could not be met from the resources available for Torch, but an additional Hudson squadron, No.500, was included in the R.A.F. component.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### The Army Co-operation Plan

C.A.S./49/Air

After the occupation of Algiers the object of the expedition was to advance through eastern Algeria to Tunisia as rapidly as possible. The attainment of this objective depended greatly on the reaction of the French to the assault. Two plans were made to embrace the possible actions of the French: one plan, Plan X was devised on the assumption that French resistance would be stubbornly and seriously maintained: the other, Plan Y, assumed French acquiescence.

#### Plan X

Appreciation and  
outline plan by  
Commander  
1st Army

IIA1@25/1/26

78th Division, (less one brigade group) and one armoured regimental group of the 6th Armoured Division were to leave Algiers on the eighth or ninth day after the landings and advance to Bougie using separate roads. It was intended that this force should capture the airfields at Djidjelli and Setif and if Bougie had not already been taken by the forces under General Ryder,<sup>(2)</sup> then the 78th Division were to capture the port.

After these tasks had been accomplished, it was anticipated that a halt would have to be made on the general line Setif-Djidjelli, to await the arrival of reinforcements consisting of the advanced headquarters V Corps, the headquarters of the 6th Armoured Division, the 38th Infantry Brigade group, the 1st Guards Brigade group and an Armoured Regiment, together with additional transport vehicles.

Ibid

As soon as these reinforcements had been received, the time was estimated as about twenty-two days after the landings had taken place, the whole force was to advance along the coastal road with the object of capturing Constantine and particularly the port and airfield at Bone. This object having been achieved, it would then be necessary to wait on the line already secured for the arrival for the K.M. 4 convoy, which would bring the rest of the 6th Armoured Division and some of the V Corps medium artillery. The convoy was expected to unload in the ports of Algiers, Bougie and Philippeville.

(1) A complete order of battle will be found in Appendix No.1.

(2) General Ryder's U.S. formations were to remain in the area Orleansville, Algiers, Blida, Bougie to cover the main base area and the airfields and ports within it.



It was estimated that thirty-five days after 'D' Day V Corps, by then consisting of the 78th Division and the 6th Armoured Division, both complete with transport, would be able to resume the advance to the east. The first objective being the line Souk Ahras - Bone, and the second Le Kef Tabarka. The successful completion of these operations would ensure the protection of the airfield at Duzerville and the ports at Bone, La Calle and Tabarka. Forty days after 'D' Day German opposition on a scale of one German mobile or armoured division plus up to ten thousand not very mobile troops might be expected.

Ibid

At this stage a further pause would be needed to await the arrival of more reinforcements in convoy K.M.S.5., which would bring the remainder of V Corps troops, first reinforcements both tanks and personnel, petrol and ammunition, supplies and third line transport, and possibly the leading elements of the next division.

Throughout the advance a fleet of landing craft and coasters was to accompany the force, the former being used to the maximum to outflank any enemy opposition to the advance along the coastal road. In addition an airborne force was considered necessary for use either in the capture of airfields well in advance of the main land forces, or to outflank areas of stiff enemy resistance. For these purposes it was estimated that a Brigade of three parachute battalions and at least one group (fifty-two machines) of transport aircraft would be needed. All to be under the control of the First Army.

As each airfield was gained, it was intended that the maximum number of air squadrons should be moved forward from Gibraltar or from the United Kingdom with priorities in the following orders:- fighters, bombers, reconnaissance aircraft and lastly Army Co-operation squadrons.

The transport aircraft allotted to the force were to be called forward from the United Kingdom as soon as sufficient airfields were available to accommodate them. As many as possible of the parachute troops were to be brought out by sea in the convoys K.M.1. and K.M.2. to Algiers; or if that was not practicable, in the transport aircraft. It was emphasized that the seizure of airfields near the coast was more important than the capture of those inland, although the latter were to be brought into use as rapidly as possible.

#### Plan 'Y'

The general plan remained the same as for 'X', but the assumption that the French would assist, or at least not interfere with the movements of the Allied force, enabled the tempo to be greatly increased.

Ibid

It was planned to employ airborne forces to control airfields as far east as circumstances would allow; even to the extent of holding those at Tunis and Bizerte. It was intended to support these airborne detachments by the employment of small mobile road and seaborne columns. To accomplish this the Eastern Task Force would have to have under its own control a parachute brigade and sufficient aircraft to lift the formations. In addition it would be necessary for the convoy K.M.3 to be sailed direct into the ports of Bone and Philippeville as well as Bougie and Algiers.

In order to assist the R.A.F. to take advantage of such a rapid move to the east, sufficient A.A. guns had

been included in convoy K.M.2. to cover the coastal airfields between Algiers and Bone. But if the airfields at Tunis and Bizerte were to be held, it would be necessary to fly A.A. guns there, or to arrange for them to be provided by friendly French garrisons on the spot, until the Army's A.A. guns could be brought there much later by road.

Ibid

After the arrival and disembarkation of convoy K.M.3. V Corps was to concentrate as far east as possible in the area Bone - La Calle - Souk Ahras - Duvivier and to push advanced columns forward to deny the ports of Tunis and Bizerte to the enemy and to gain touch with the Allied forces on the airfields there. It was realized that these advanced forces could only be composed of small numbers at first and that they would have to depend for their maintenance largely on transport aircraft, coasters and landing craft.

It was considered that under the most favourable conditions the following might be achieved. D plus six or seven Airborne troops to Bone and Philippeville, and later to Tunis and Bizerte (or possibly to Tunis and Bizerte direct). On D plus twenty-one V Corps would advance to the area La Calle - Duvivier and send forward advanced columns to Tunis and Bizerte.

Finally, it was stressed that the forestalling of the arrival of German Forces in Tunisia could only be achieved if the Eastern Task Force was allotted an adequate transport air force which must be available to operate in the theatre of operations not later than D plus six.

C.P.S./49/Air

In view of the fact that either of these two plans might have to be implemented at short notice, the plan for Air Support and Tactical Reconnaissance had to be highly flexible. The circumstances in which the fighting would be conducted, and the type and degree of opposition were unknown. It was not, then, possible to specify in detail the arrangements which would be made subsequent to D plus twenty. The Army Co-operation Plan was designed to cover the first twenty days of the operation and was divided into three phases.

#### First Phase - D-Day to D plus four

As soon as airfields were made available near Algiers, five fighter squadrons would be stationed there, principally, it was hoped, at Maison Blanche. The main role of these fighter squadrons was to provide fighter defence for the port of Algiers, airfields and convoys. There would be, however, six pilots in one of the fighter squadrons stationed at Maison Blanche, who were trained in Tactical reconnaissance, available exclusively for this duty. If demands became so heavy, arrangements would be made to accelerate the arrival of an army co-operation squadron which was due to arrive at Maison Blanche on D plus five. Requests for tactical reconnaissance during this period were to be made by G.O.C. 34th (U.S.A.) Division, or the G.O.C. 78th Division (which ever was in control of active operations during this phase) to the Officer Commanding the Fighter Sector at Maison Blanche, as soon as communications had been set up. Requests for fighter protection were to be made in the same way, but the provision of fighter protection outside of Algiers would depend on the situation at the time.

#### Second Phase - D plus five to D plus twenty

At the beginning of this phase, it was expected that the constitution of the R.A.F. at Algiers would be:-

A.H.Q.	Algiers
No.322 (F) Wing consisting of 3 (F) Squadrons 1 (A.C.)	Maison Blanche
No.323 (F) Wing consisting of 2 (F) Squadrons 1 P.R. Flight	Maison Blanche
No.326 (L.B.) Wing consisting of 1 (L.B.) Squadron	Blida
No.328 (G.R. Wing) consisting of 1 (G.R.) Squadron	Blida

Tactical reconnaissance for the 78th Division would now be flown by No.225 (A.C.) Squadron, which was to be located, at first, on Maison Blanche. Demands for reconnaissance were to be passed through an Army Air Signals Company's channels until the arrival of the appropriate army sets. Strategic photographic reconnaissance was to be the duty of No.4 P.R.U. flight at Maison Blanche. Demands for photographic reconnaissance was to be made to Air Headquarters.

Plans for the provision of Air Support would be concerted directly between the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command, - as No.333 Group was to become in the area of operations. As a result, the allotment of air forces for army air support would be detailed by Air Headquarters in accordance with the prevailing general situation. Calls for support from the 78th Division would be made to the appropriate Wing headquarters, which would supply them up to the allotment made by Air Headquarters. It might be that Officers Commanding Wings might have to refuse a call for air support, if the air situation at the time warranted. In that event the matter had to be reported to Air Headquarters as soon as possible describing the circumstances.

Communications would be through No.7 Army Air Signals Company which would be at 78th Division Headquarters. When the 78th Division moved East with the Army Air Signals Company (A.A.S.C.) too far for direct point to point communication via A.A.S.C. rear links to be maintained with aerodromes, requests for reconnaissance and support would be made through a wireless link provided by using a spare A.A.S.C. link as step up, or if this was impracticable, by re-transmission from the First Army Command Post through Air Headquarters Algiers, thence to Maison Blanche or Blida. In these circumstances air support had to be to a set plan and could not be improvised at very short notice.

Starting on D plus fifteen Eastern Air Command would be increased by the following forces:-

- 1 A.C. Squadron, under No.322 (F) Wing, later to be transferred to No.325 (F) Wing.
- 1 L.B. Squadron, under No.326 (L.B.) Wing.
- 2 B.R. Squadrons, under No.323 (L.B.) Wing.
- 1 G.R. Squadron, under No.328 (G.R.) Wing.
- 1 New Fighter Wing, No.324, of four Fighter Squadrons.

#### Other Planning

Other R.A.F. planning will be dealt with in the body of the narrative in the appropriate chapter.



THE JOURNEY TO NORTH AFRICA

No. 333 Group  
files

The Allied Expeditionary Forces sailed in four main convoys; they were designated 'K.M.S.' for a slow convoy and 'K.M.F.' for a fast one. K.M.S.1 sailed from the United Kingdom on the 22 October and consisted of 47 merchant vessels and eighteen escorts. K.M.F.1 sailed from United Kingdom on 27 October and consisted of forty merchant vessels escorted by the C.S.I.O. in H.M.S. Sheffield and eleven other escorts. The 'K.M.' convoys split into two sections, one for Algiers and one for Oran (subsidiary convoys were designated 'K.X.') and left at varying dates from mid September when store ships departed for Gibraltar.

Comments on  
Despatches of  
General  
Eisenhower and  
Admiral Cunningham  
by A.H.B.  
Narrator  
(Coastal Cmd.)

The task of providing air cover for the vast Torch armada was formidable. The danger of submarines converging in the path of the convoys was ever present; and to counter this menace it was necessary to provide air escort for each convoy during the hours of daylight. It was appreciated that over eighty U-Boats were available in or near their main bases in the Bay of Biscay, - a further twenty-five in the Eastern Atlantic and a further twenty-four in the Mediterranean to attack the convoys. To counter this threat, R.A.F. Coastal Command were forced to make certain dispositions and reinforce their squadrons operating in areas where attack was most likely. Two Hudson squadrons and twelve Catalina Flying Boats were attached to the existing force at Gibraltar. One and a half squadrons of Halifax aircraft and two Liberator squadrons of U.S.A.A.F. were loaned from R.A.F. Bomber Command and the Eighth Air Force, to assist in anti-submarine warfare in the Bay of Biscay.(1)

The main duties laid on Coastal Command were to harry the U-Boats in the Bay of Biscay area so that the expedition could pass unseen across their transit routes from the main Biscay bases, and to provide anti-submarine escort to the convoys as far as their range would permit. Secondly it was to provide anti-submarine escort to the convoys as they passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and to them whilst off the assault beaches, after which a maximum effort was to be expended in keeping U-Boat forces away from the build up and supply lines.

Coastal Command discharged these duties admirably. Not only did it carry out its normal routine work, but the tempo of operations from Iceland was increased. Reconnaissances of Norway were made daily in case the German heavy battle-ships should attempt to escape and molest the convoys. Naturally, however, its main work was in the Bay of Biscay and from Gibraltar. Anti-submarine sweeps were flown before, during and after the passage of the assault convoys in that area to the East of their routes in order to keep U-Boats clear and prevent the launching of attacks from U-Boat bases in France. Furthermore, it provided anti-submarine escort to individual convoys across the mouth of the Bay and as far South as their range from the U.K. would permit. Bad weather interrupted the continuity of the escort and prevented flying from the escort carriers travelling with the assault convoys except on a very few days.

The routeing of the convoys precluded land

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(1) For the narrative of the effort of Coastal Command in support of Torch, see R.A.F. Narrative of Coastal Command.

Admly. No.  
M.0534751 1943

based aircraft from giving continuous anti-submarine escort along their entire track. To bridge the gap left in the air cover when the convoys passed out of the range of aircraft based in the U.K. and before the aircraft from Gibraltar could resume a continuous patrol, two auxiliary carriers were attached to the two assault convoys; H.M.S. Avenger sailed with convoy K.M.S.1 and H.M.S. Biter with K.M.F.1. Both carried three Swordfish of No. 833 (Naval) Squadron; their task was to provide air escort to their respective convoys. The Biter's susceptibility to pitch and her liveliness in the Atlantic rollers allowed flying to take place only on three days; flying was attempted on a fourth, but two out of her three Swordfish were damaged beyond repair. The Avenger had a similar experience; flying was possible on five days and seven sorties were flown; an attempt to fly on 1 November resulted in one Swordfish being so badly damaged that it was pushed over the side.

There were no sightings of submarines and the convoys neared Gibraltar unmolested.

Admiralty Battle  
Summary No. 1736  
(31) Operation  
Torch

Perhaps the presence of the carriers acted as a deterrent, but due tribute for their safety must be paid to the sterling efforts of Coastal Command, the skilful routing of the convoys and, to the discovery by the U-Boat packs of a convoy homeward bound from Sierra Leone (No. S.L.125). This convoy drew the U-Boats like a magnet; and they attacked it mercilessly from the 27 to the 31 October(1). So it was that the convoys reached the Gibraltar area unscathed.

#### Importance of Gibraltar

C.O.S.(42)12/6  
Meeting (0)  
3 Oct.1942

C.O.S.(42)291  
3 Oct.1942

A.H.B. ORB.  
A.H.Q. Gib.  
Nov. 1942

The narrative of R.A.F. operations in operation Torch begins when the A.O.C. No. 333 Group assumed command of the R.A.F. at Gibraltar. The British Chiefs of Staff had argued that, during operation Torch, General Mason Macfarlane, in his capacity as C.-in-C. Gibraltar, Admiral Cunningham and A.O.C. Gibraltar were to be placed under the operational control of General Eisenhower. The A.O.C. of No. 333 Group, now to be known as Eastern Air Command, arrived at Gibraltar on 2 November, 1942 and assumed control.

Gibraltar was the pivotal point of the whole expedition. Perhaps never in its long and battle scarred history as the British gateway to the Mediterranean, had it played so vital and important a part. In operation TORCH it fulfilled not only its wonted roles of a naval base and army fortress, but its new guise as an R.A.F. operational airfield. For it was only from Gibraltar(2) that aircraft could be provided to guard the convoys in their passage of the Straits and escorted to their assault positions off the North African shore; and it was only from an airfield, built half out to sea that the fighter aircraft could be erected and flown to their destinations in North Africa.

Narrator's interviews  
with G/C. Bolland,  
R.A.F., Col. Henson,  
R.E. and Information  
from D.W.8 F. War  
Office

#### The Airfield at Gibraltar

In order to arrive at a proper understanding and appreciation of the immensity of the task confronting Gibraltar's resources and of the contribution Gibraltar made to the success of Torch, it is necessary to describe the

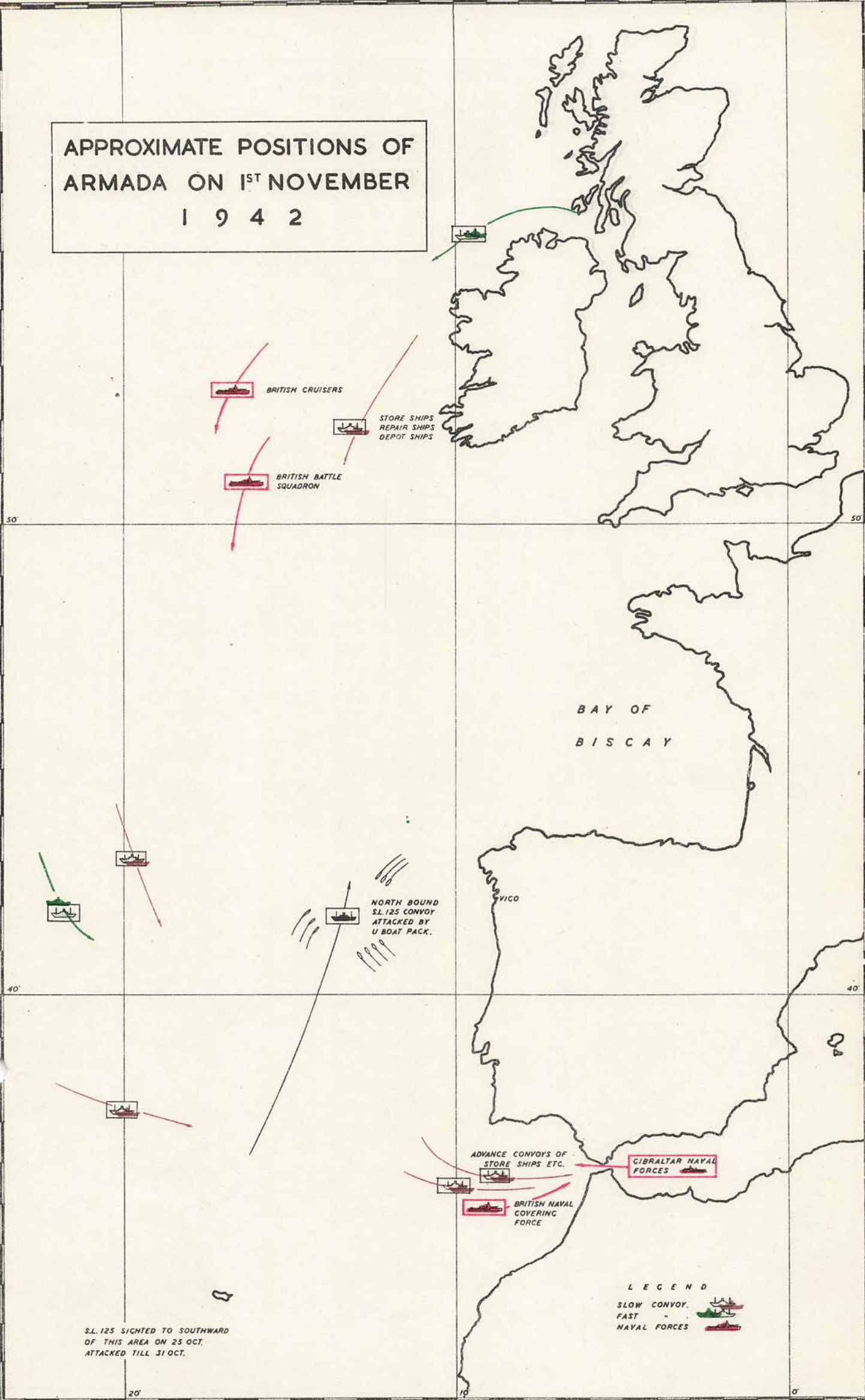
(1) See Map No. 1 which shows the position of Torch Armada and SL.125.

(2) There were not sufficient carriers available.



# APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF ARMADA ON 1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER

1 9 4 2





geographical peculiarities of the R.A.F. Station North Front(1). The airfield is situated directly under the north face of the Rock; it consists of a rectangular piece of ground, bordered on the west by the Bay of Gibraltar, on the east by the Mediterranean, and on the north by the frontier road adjoining Spain. The area is approximately one thousand yards long by eight hundred yards wide. Prior to March, 1942, there was a landing strip nine hundred and eighty yards by seventy-five yards in the centre of this small area of land and during that month, work was commenced on extending this runway into the sea at its Western extremity; and it was continued by such a magnificent effort on the part of the Garrison Royal Engineers, that by 4 September, 1942, this landing strip had been converted into a fully tarmacked runway fourteen hundred yards long by one hundred yards wide. The whole of the administrative buildings, living quarters and dispersal area were also included in this small space, as well as a cemetery which occupied thirteen acres.

#### Active preparations for Torch at Gibraltar

##### Dispersal

Ibid.  
O.R.B. North  
Front, Oct. and  
Nov. 1942

The aircraft dispersal areas were alongside the runway on sandy soil, and were liable to become water-logged with any heavy fall of rain; and as it was of vital importance that this dispersal area should be useable whenever required, it was necessary, temporarily, to defer work on the extension to the runway in order to surface as much as possible of this area during the short time available before the operation was to start. On 4 September, 1942, this decision was made and all efforts were concentrated upon resurfacing and producing new dispersal areas sufficient to accommodate a number of aircraft of the order of

- 450 Fighters.
- 60 Hudsons.
- 36 F.A.A. aircraft.
- 15 P.R. aircraft (Mosquito and Spitfire).
- 10 Amphibian Catalina.
- 20 Communication aircraft(2) (Fortresses, Liberators, Halifaxes and C.47s).
- 6 M.S.F.U. (Hurricanes).
- 2 Met. Flight Hudsons.

To accommodate such a large number of aircraft in such a congested space, it was necessary to clear the north face of the Rock where blasting had previously taken place, remove a minefield, level off an area of the North and South side of the runway extension, build a tar macadam road of seven hundred yards from the face of the rock to form an entrance and exit for parked aircraft, and to make good a large area on each side of the runway which would otherwise have been unserviceable for heavy aircraft. Once again the garrison Royal Engineers laboured with a will and the proof of their work can be realised from the fact that in spite of a rainfall of 12.48 inches at Gibraltar during November, 1942, no aircraft failed to take off from North Front airfield during operation Torch because of the bad condition of the ground.

O.R.B.  
North Fronts  
Nov. 1942

##### Special Erection Party.

Not only did preparations for Torch involve alterations

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- (1) See Map No. 13.
  - (2) An average figure for November, 1942.

C.S.17228

to the airfield, but they imposed a task of considerable magnitude upon the special erection party. This party had been formed, originally to assemble aircraft (principally Spitfires) shipped from the United Kingdom in crates for flying to Malta from aircraft carriers. The aircraft requirements for operation Torch demanded eight squadrons of twelve Spitfires each for the U.S. Twelfth Air Force, and for the Royal Air Force, three squadrons of eighteen Spitfires each and two squadrons of eighteen Hurricanes (fighters) each and one squadron of eighteen Hurricanes (bombers). To meet this requirement one hundred and sixteen Spitfires and thirteen Hurricanes arrived for assembly on the 28 October.

D.W.O. folder  
PA/C/1/12

To render possible the completion of the erection of these aircraft in time for operation Torch eighty-six additional maintenance personnel were to be sent to the Special Erection Party. Owing to a misunderstanding, they were drafted elsewhere, and did not arrive at Gibraltar. The lack of maintenance personnel was worsened because a large number of the key members of the Special Erection Party were embarked in H.M.S. Furious which was delivering thirty Spitfires to Malta; and they did not return till the 31 October. However, one hundred and fifty soldiers were borrowed from the Fortress Garrison and the work of assembly was begun. Working continuously from 0700 to 2200 hours in all weathers searchlights from the rock illuminating their work after dark - they erected one hundred and eight Spitfires and thirteen Hurricanes which were test flown, had their cannons tested and were dispersed by 2200 hours on 6 November. Thus the aircraft got ready were only eight short of the total requirements for the initial stages of Torch. Work then ceased on erection and all the energies of the Special Erection Party were bent to the task of having all these aircraft serviceable by the night of the 7 November. They worked all through that night and by 0430 hours on 8 November all aircraft were in readiness, waiting to be manned by their pilots.

#### Fuel Storage and Accommodation

Various other preparations had to be made for Torch. Prior to that operation all petrol for use at North Front had been stored in the open on the airfield in four gallon tins, the average stock being between one and two million gallons. It was decided as a measure of safety to remove as much of this reserve as was possible to a site on the eastern beach road. This dispersal might have caused a serious delay in refuelling; and it was decided to sink three 12,000 gallon tanks and fifteen 1,900 gallon tanks on the airfield to serve as an immediate reserve for such periods. The size of the task of refuelling can best be realised when it is appreciated that 968,500 gallons of petrol were handled between 1 November and the 11 November out of four gallon tins; and it must be remembered too, that all that petrol had to be filtered through chamois leather to prevent any risk of water contamination. Not the least of Gibraltar's difficulties was to find quarters for the air force personnel who were constantly arriving at Gibraltar for Torch. Gibraltar's accommodation was already strained but by borrowing accommodation from the military authorities and using a "doubling-up" process, this problem was met.

O.R.B.  
North Front  
Nov. 1942

#### Anti-U-Boat Operations from Gibraltar.

At the end of October sweeps were flown along the tracks of the approaching Torch convoys. The general situation, so far as the U-Boats were concerned, was that the

O.R.Bs. A.H.Q.  
Gib. North  
Front

Gib. File  
A.H.Q./5103/1/  
INT.

convoys whilst they were on their way from the United Kingdom, did not appear to indicate any high concentration in the Western Approaches to Gibraltar; and those U-Boats present in the Gibraltar area concentrated on the Sierra Leone convoy which was, at this time, crossing through Gibraltar's operational zone. In pursuance of the usual policy in the period preceding Mediterranean convoys, anti-submarine sweeps were flown to the east for the first few days of the month of November. From the 6th of that month the anti-U-Boat operations were intensified. Sweeps were flown by Hudsons to the east and to the west, usually in groups of from four to five aircraft. These sweeps were often duplicated by similar sorties four hours later. By the 5 November, the main convoys were approaching Gibraltar and were given escort by Catalinas in order to conserve the Hudsons for offensive sweeps. The general policy now pursued was to give convoys, either close or distant, escort by Catalinas, one Catalina being able to continue the task as long as three or four Hudsons, which were thereby saved for strikes.

The convoys passed through the Straits on the night of the 5/6 November, and an increasing number of offensive sweeps by Hudsons were ordered and flown. On the 6th the total number of sorties rose to thirty-six. The results of this policy were soon apparent and nine sightings, including six attacks took place within the Mediterranean; but no sightings were made to the westward, although ten Hudson sorties swept that area. On the 7th a great effort was put forth; forty-eight sorties, involving three hundred and ninety-four hours flying took place. Sixteen Hudsons sweeps to the east on that day gave rise to another six sightings and another three attacks. To watch the situation in the west five Hudsons flew diverging anti-submarine patrols, which resulted in one U-Boat being sighted.

The exceedingly heavy cover of the Western Mediterranean succeeded in its object; and the convoys were able to reach their assault positions almost unscathed(1). On the 8 November fifty sorties were flown to give anti-submarine protection to the assault forces at Casablanca, Oran and Algiers.

This is a convenient point to break the story of anti-submarine operations from Gibraltar, to return to the task of the fighters assembled there and to describe the other important operations from Gibraltar.

#### Special Operations from Gibraltar

##### General Clark's Conference at Chercell

The United States of America had not broken off diplomatic relations with Vichy France or the Vichy Colonies; and the policy of Economic Aid had enabled America to keep an administrative staff in French North Africa. This staff acted more or less as American agents and kept Washington informed of the temper of opinion and the mood to resist of the disaffected elements in French North African colonies. By mid-October, 1942, Mr. R. D. Murphy, Head of the Civil Affairs Section for Torch(2) had so managed affairs that the

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(1) U.S.S. Thos. Stone was damaged on 7 November, 1942. She was towed to Algiers.

(2) According to H.S. Butcher "Three years with Eisenhower" p.87. "He might be described as head of the American fifth column set up there!"



visit of a high ranking officer was necessary.

According to reports from "Colonel MacGowan" (Murphy's code name) certain French Army and Air Force units were favourably disposed towards an American landing and would welcome the American forces. In order to verify this and to discover the plans made by the French to aid the Allies, Major-General Mark W. Clark, was sent. He was Deputy Commander-in-Chief whose special charge was the plans of the forthcoming operation torch; he had, therefore, a full and detailed knowledge of the Allies plans.

Admiralty Ref.  
M.052138/42

The Deputy Commander-in-Chief left on the 18 October and was flown to Gibraltar in a Flying Fortress (B-17) of the U.S. Eighth Air Force. At night on the 19th the submarine P.219 slipped her buoy at Gibraltar and proceeded seawards. Two days later Major-General Clark and his party<sup>(1)</sup> were disembarked shortly after midnight near Algiers. "Colonel MacGowan" along with General Mast and some of his staff officers were waiting on the beach for the party from the submarine. They all then adjourned to a nearby villa where General Mast produced detailed plans for landings and the capture of ports and airfields. Generally, General Mast claimed there would be little difficulty about neutralising airfields because if General Giraud approved he would issue appropriate orders. The French Navy, however, were not likely to prove as accommodating; General Mast and his secret group believed that the French Navy would put up a stiff fight at the outset, which was likely to diminish and that the Navy could soon acquiesce; "they would have no place but to go out and no place but to come in."<sup>(2)</sup> The Giraud-Mast clique however did not trust Darlan whom they alleged would try to 'climb on the band wagon'. They could not accept the part he was to play in the military hierarchy as proposed by General Eisenhower, to satisfy the French demands of 'defence d'honneur'. But the proposal that Giraud would become Governor and Mast, Deputy Chief of Staff of Allied Expeditionary Force seemed to be acceptable.

Patrol Log  
H.M. Sub. P.219  
later "Seraph"

The conference over, General Clark was to have to delay his departure from the North African coast for several hours. The threat of a police search of the villa where the conference was held and the Allied party had to take to the woods. Eventually the party were re-embarked in the submarine.

O.R.B. A.H.Q.  
New Camp.  
No.202 Sqdn.

In order that General Clark could communicate the results of his conference to Allied Expeditionary Force H.Q. as soon as possible, a flying boat was to come from Gibraltar and meet the submarine. A Catalina No. "L" of No. 202 Squadron was specially briefed for this task and on the 24th General Clark was transferred to the flying boat and reached London the next day.

#### Discussions with General Giraud

As a result of General Clark's interview with the disaffected elements in French North Africa arrangements were made to issue a proclamation in General Giraud's name asking Frenchmen to assist the Allies; and the General

- (1) The other members of the party were Brig.-Gen. Lenintzer, Colonel Hauben, Colonel Holmes - all of U.S.A. Captain Light, U.S.A. and Captains Courtney and Livingstone and Lieut. Foot of S. Boat Sec. Special Service Brigade.
- (2) A remark of General Eisenhower's on hearing General Clark's report of this statement.

Patrol Report of himself was to be conveyed to North Africa in time to use his  
H.M. Sub. P.219 personal influence and prestige to stop needless bloodshed.  
27 Oct.-11 Nov. A change in the plan was made and General Giraud was to be  
1942. taken off by submarine from the south of France and  
O.R.B. H.Q.Gib. transferred to a flying boat which was to fly him to  
C.A.S.Folder Gibraltar for conferences with the Allied Commander-in-Chief,  
"North Africa - Allied Expeditionary Force(1). Early on 6 November  
Political" General Giraud came on board the submarine. Owing to a  
failure in its wireless system, there was no announcement of  
Ibid his safe embarkation(2). A Catalina - No. "C" - of No. 202  
Squadron was sent to search along the line of advance of the  
submarine; and the two met early on the morning of the 7th.  
The General and his party were transferred to the flying boat.  
Considerable difficulty was encountered over this and it took  
two hours to accomplish(3). The flying boat reached  
Gibraltar shortly after 1500 hours and its passengers were  
landed. Immediately General Giraud went into conference  
with General Eisenhower and Major-General Clark(4).

#### Photographic Reconnaissance in the North African Landings

O.R.B. R.A.F. Prior to the North African landings, aircraft of the  
Station, North No. 1 P.R.U., Benson had been responsible for photographic  
Front, Sept.-Nov. reconnaissance from Gibraltar, and aircraft, generally one or  
1942 two Marylands, were attached to the R.A.F. North Front for  
this purpose. Most of their work consisted of flights over  
Spain. As a result of a complete re-organisation of  
Photographic Reconnaissance Units in England, No. 1 P.R.U.  
was disbanded on the 18 October and squadrons, numbered 540  
to 544 inclusive, were formed for P.R. purposes. On the  
30 September, the solitary Maryland at Gibraltar  
was replaced by a flight of three Spitfires, detached from  
No. 1 P.R.U. These three aircraft became "B" Flight of  
O.R.B. No. 544 No. 544 Squadron, the rest of the squadron remaining at its  
Squadron. Oct.- base, R.A.F. Station, Benson.  
Nov. 1942.

IIK/24/176C  
encl. 5A

On the same day, the Director of Operations (Naval  
Co-operation) informed the A.O.C.-in-C. Coastal Command of the

- (1) The code name for this operation was Minerva and for General Giraud King-Pin.
- (2) It is told that while transferring from the small boat to the submarine, King-Pin fell into the sea and had to be yanked out by the scuff of his jacket by an unknown British sailor!
- (3) Patrol report of H.M. Submarine 219 observed that the operation of transferring the passengers would have been greatly improved had aircraft stopped engines..... P.219.....had to create a lea for launching and manning Folboats and the aircraft proceeded about one knot into the wind, slowly widening the gap between aircraft and submarine. ".....the draught (sic!) caused by the propellers of aircraft made it most difficult for the Folboats to approach the aircraft. Secondly when the aircraft eventually did stop engines a sea anchor would have been of the greatest assistance, as with the engines stopped, the aircraft drifted to leeward nearly as fast as the Folboats could proceed through the water.
- (4) The conference will be discussed in Chapter 6 - Political Background.



This Narrative  
Chap. II

photographic reconnaissance requirements for Operation Torch which had been finally consolidated and co-ordinated by the Air Section of Allied Forces Headquarters. Briefly, they were as follows: A daily sortie from the United Kingdom to Toulon: a daily sortie from Gibraltar to the ports and neighbourhoods of Oran, Algiers and Casablanca. The primary object of the sorties was the location and identification of Axis and French Naval Units in these harbours. In addition, the reconnaissances from Gibraltar were to endeavour to secure information requested by the U.S. Task Forces - mostly in connection with the condition of airfields and beaches, especially in the Casablanca and Oran areas.

O.R.Bs A.H.Q.  
Gib. and R.A.F.  
North Front

Meanwhile, the normal reconnaissances from Gibraltar were made and Spitfires visited places in Southern Spain as far apart as Valencia in the East and Badajos in the West. The Balearic Islands had been covered as well as Casablanca, Oran and Algiers. Had unfriendly eyes been watching and recording - as they were<sup>(1)</sup> - the direction and frequency of these flights, there was nothing to indicate that the operations were intended against North African ports.

O.R.B. No. 540  
Squadron.  
O.R.B. No. 4  
P.R.U.

On the 1 November, Area Combined Headquarters was formed at Gibraltar and became responsible for the photographic reconnaissances required. On the 5th and 6th their resources were augmented by the arrival of three Mosquitos of No. 540 Squadron and six Spitfires of No. 4 P.R.U. (later No. 682 Squadron). The Mosquitos were intended for the Toulon sorties, in case weather prevented aircraft flying from the United Kingdom; and the Spitfires were earmarked for use in North Africa as soon as a suitable airfield had been secured.

R.A.F. Station  
Medenham  
'Monthly Review'

Photographs taken the day before the Allied Landings disclosed the following French Naval dispositions: at Algiers, two submarines: at Oran, one Cassard Class Contre-Torpilleur, three Simoun Class destroyers and six submarines; at Casablanca, the battleship Jean Bart, one Duclat Trovin Class 6" cruiser, three Contre-Torpilleurs, seven destroyers and ten submarines. By the same date the reconnaissances of French aerodromes revealed that, at Algiers, Maison Blanche, there were thirty-two aircraft, and at Blida fifteen; at Tafaraoui, near Oran, there were nine aircraft thought to be L.E.O. 45s, whilst at La Senia, the nearer aerodrome to Oran, thirty-three aircraft were seen, mostly small types. The reconnaissances of ports Lyautey and Sale, near Rabat, showed four and thirteen aircraft on the ground respectively. An earlier report on Casablanca airfield gave a total of forty-one aircraft seen on the ground, of which twenty-eight were small machines. The construction of shelters and trenches was in progress and the airfield was defended by three heavy gun anti-aircraft batteries. Reconnaissances of the more remote airfields, situated in the hinterland behind Casablanca and Oran, did not produce anything of importance.

O.R.B. R.A.F.  
Station,  
Medenham  
Appendix 3001

Ibid  
Appendix 2756

Ibid  
Appendix 3008

O.R.B.  
A.H.Q. Gib.

On the day of the actual Allied Landing in North Africa, two Mosquitoes were sent to Toulon, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. They kept a constant watch on the port from that day onwards and were at last rewarded for their vigilance by being the first to report the scuttling of the French Fleet.

(1) German observers were present in La Linea. Indeed, when flying took place from the airfield at North Front, a German, complete with binoculars, could be seen on the roof of the highest hotel watching the aircraft taking off and landing. With that wit, characteristic of the Royal Air Force, he was immediately called "The German Duty Pilot".



Naval Beach Reconnaissances and Pilotage

Admiralty Ref.  
M.053475/1943.  
Report of  
Proceedings of  
Beach  
Reconnaissance  
and Pilotage  
Parties

The Naval requirements for photographic reconnaissances laid especial emphasis on the whereabouts and dispositions of the Axis and French fleets. By mid September it was decided that reconnaissances of the beaches were to be entrusted to a Specialised Naval Party (Forces Koodoo and Inhuman). Unfortunately these parties, due to unforeseen delays, were prevented from making the full reconnaissances of the beaches that they had planned. Instead a compromise was adopted whereby periscope reconnaissance by submarine was deemed sufficient.

The Approach to Assault Positions

30 Oct.-  
14 Nov.  
"War Diary" of  
F.O. Force "H"

On the night of 5/6 and 6/7 November the vast armada constituting the Torch assault forces passed through the Straits of Gibraltar. The comparatively uneventful journey was marred on the 7 November. The U.S.S. Thomas Stone was damaged in the stern, whether by mine or torpedo, from an aircraft or by a torpedo from a submarine cannot be determined. This was the only untoward incident in the voyage of the assault convoys; and they then, split up into their Algiers and Oran sections, voyaged on to their pre-arranged release positions. That the convoys reached these positions unscathed, was not entirely due to good fortune and the success of the cover plans. These helped; but the heavy naval covering force cruising to the northward<sup>(1)</sup> of the assault convoys, bore the brunt of the Luftwaffe's attacks.

On the afternoon of the 6th, Force 'H' occupied the attentions of a Ju.88 reconnaissance aircraft, and a Potez 63<sup>(2)</sup> which appeared earlier, was shot down into the sea by Martlet fighters from H.M.S. 'Formidable'. The following afternoon, a heavy attack developed on this naval force. The Algiers assault convoy was in sight of Force 'H', but the attacking aircraft preferred to concentrate on the naval force. The Ju.88's pressed home their attacks. Both high level and shallow dive bombing, synchronised with torpedo attacks, were used. There was no damage to the assault convoys but one destroyer, damaged by a near miss had to return to Gibraltar. Early on the morning of D-Day Force 'H' was circled by an aircraft dropping flares from 0355-0500 hours. Aircraft were heard over the fleet, but owing to the prevailing weather conditions of poor visibility, no attacks were made.

(1) Force 'H'.

(2) This aircraft presumably came from Blida.

SECRET.



MAP NO. 2.

CHAPTER 5

THE LANDINGS IN NORTH AFRICA

The Algiers Landings

GS. GS.  
No.4180

Algiers stands on the western shore of the bay of the same name. Several forts dominate the city which lies hemmed in between the sea and a range of low hills. The eastern arm of Algiers bay is formed by a headland Cap Matifou<sup>(1)</sup> which extends for about two miles. The small village of Jean Bart lies on its eastern extremity. Pointe Pescade, the northern extremity of Cap Caxine is ten miles to the west of Cap Matifou. Sidi Ferruch, six miles to the south-west of Pointe Pescade is a small peninsula surmounted by a modern fort. To the south of the town lies the fertile "Plaine de la Mitidja" separating the coastal sector from the foothills of the Tell Atlas about twenty-five miles away. In this plain lie the airfields at Maison Blanche and Blida. Maison Blanche was about five miles to the east of Algiers on the main coast road, and Blida, about fifteen miles to the south-west of the town proper.

Plan for the Landings

The first assault was planned for H hour (0100 hours) on 8 November. It was to be made by the 34th Infantry Division (U.S.) under the command of Major Gen. C.W. Ryder, U.S. Army. Major Gen. V. Eveleigh O.B.E. commanding the 78th Division (British) was to land with the advanced H.Q. 78th Division attached to H.Q. 34th (U.S.) Division ready to assume command of the elements of the 78th Division as soon as the assault phase was complete. Landings on the open beaches were to continue only until the port of Algiers and its adjacent airfields were captured or had surrendered. As soon as possible after that event, the command of both British and American elements of the Eastern Assault Force was to pass to the G.O.C., First Army, and the 78th Division would begin the eastward drive at the earliest possible moment.

Landing Beaches

Three main beaches were selected for the landings at Algiers and were designated 'Apples' 'Beer' and 'Charlie'. The 'Apples' Beach lay five miles to the south-west of Sidi Ferruch and stretched another five along the coast. 'Beer' Beach stretched eastward from Sidi Ferruch to a point two miles beyond Pointe Pescade. 'Charlie' Beach stretched six miles eastward from Cap Matifou. These beaches were subdivided into various parts.

The Attack Opens<sup>(2)</sup>

BR 1736(31)

By the evening of 7 November, the assault forces were at their release positions. All was ready for the landings at Algiers. Zero hour was 0100Z hours on 8 November 1942. The attack, under the command of Rear Admiral Sir Harold Burroughs K.B.E., D.S.O. carrying his flag in H.M.S. Bulolo opened punctually at 0100 hours.

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(1) G.S. GS No.4180. Main places however are given as the normal English versions.

(2) See Map No. 7.



'Apples' Beach

'Torch' Orders  
Naval.

The landings in the Apples sector went according to plan. A portion of the fast assault convoy would reach its release position at 2245 hours on the 7th, being 'homed' or directed by a marking submarine. Assault flights for the 'Apples' beaches would then be disembarked; the landing craft heading towards Sidi Ferruch to minimise any chance of detection by infra-red detectors. They would, then, be led towards the beach by an M.L. (Motor Launch). At H-hour<sup>(1)</sup> the landing craft would beach and the assault would begin.

BR.1736(31)

The plan was effected almost to the letter. The weather was fine with a moderate swell and clear visibility, but a very strong set carried the ships away from their release position in a westerly direction. At 2214 hours on 7 November the assault portion of convoy K.M.F.A.1. sighted the marking submarine. By 2300 hours the landing craft of two of the three ships were in the water and formed up behind the M.L. which was to lead them in. This flight found their way in without much difficulty. It then deployed and landed at Itham on 'Apples Green' beach. The landing craft from the other ships, failing to find the M.L. made for the shore independently and landed on the same beach shortly afterwards. Later this beach proved to be dangerous because of its stony nature and had to be closed.

'Beer' Sector

The landings on 'Beer' Sector, however, were far from achieving the moderate success of 'Apples' Sector; they were marred by a series of avoidable mistakes leading to no small confusion. Briefly the procedure for locating the beaches had partly broken down. The pilot in the marking submarine had not been picked up by the M.L. and the unpiloted flights from the ships in the assault portion instead of landing their forces on 'Beer' white and 'Beer' red beaches had landed too far to the westward. The VIth Commando were landed on a beach, subsequently identified as Bain des Romains, eight miles to the east of Sidi Ferruch, and west of the 'Red' beaches. The pilot managed to lead in the first two flights of the assault craft; the first landed on beaches further to the east, but the second flight landed on 'Beer' Green and successfully captured the Fort at Sidi Ferruch.

The Capture of Sidi Ferruch

At 0120 hrs. the troops of the British 1st Commando, including in their ranks some U.S. troops, and the whole dressed in U.S. pattern steel helmets and wearing the American national emblem as a shoulder flash, landed on 'Beer Green' beach. Shortly before this an Observation Post party of 456 Lt. Battery R.A. under command 168 R.C.T. had landed on 'Beer Green' and had met General Mast commanding the Division d' Alger. The Commando force under Lt. Col. T. H. Trevor, had completed their landing by 0245 hours and had advanced along the promontory into Fort Sidi Ferruch without opposition. At the Fort, Gen. Mast formally surrendered it to Lt. Col. Trevor. This surrender enabled landings to continue on 'Apples and Beer' beaches throughout the day unopposed. Gen. Mast warned Lt. Col. Trevor that the French Air Force at Blida might oppose the landing and advised the immediate occupation of the airfield, and put the transport

(1) A.F.H.Q. Operation memoranda No.13 Greenwich Mean Time was used until 21 November 1942.

at the Fort at Trevor's disposal. Leaving a detachment in the Fort, Trevor moved off to Blida at about 0415 hrs.

#### 'Charlie' Sector

In the meantime the force assigned to the 'Charlie' sector further east, consisting of the U.S. combat leaders-Samuel Chase Leedstown and Almaack,<sup>(1)</sup> picked up the marking submarine at 2315 hours and a little later the pilots from the marking submarine had a conference with the Senior Naval officer in charge of the Landing beaches and the Military Commander on board the Leedstown. At this conference the pilot requested that the time for the release of the first flight should be advanced by half an hour; and this flight was taken into 'Charlie Blue' beach by one M.L. The other M.L. was to lead in 'red' flight. They were to sail together and split at the Bordelaise rock. The pilot was to take the commando flight into 'Charlie Green' Beach from the Leedstown in the flotilla leaders craft. A further landing on beach 'Queenie Red' was cancelled. Weather conditions were fair. On reaching the Bordelaise rock the M.L. endeavoured to lead Red section to Red Beach but apparently the leading craft had not been briefed and continued to follow the assistant pilot to Blue Beach.

Many of the Leedstown craft were not in the water by 2359 hours, but were finally rounded up three quarters of an hour late. Due to a fog which drifted seawards from land, and the consequent reduction of speed to enable landing craft to keep together, this flotilla did not touch down at Green beach until 0250 hours - two hours late. The beach was without defences, although the garrison of Fort Matifou were fully alert. At 0340 it opened fire on the western transports across the bay. H.M.S. "Zetland" closing the shore at once replied extinguishing a searchlight and exchanging fire with the Fort which kept up a stubborn resistance. It was finally silenced during the afternoon by the bombs of the Fleet Air Arm and the guns of H.M.S. Bermuda.

#### The Army Ashore

##### Advance of the 11th Infantry Brigade

Meanwhile in the west and south the advance of the 11th Infantry Brigade was proceeding without enemy interference. By 0800 hours on 8 November, the potential centres of opposition seemed to be the garrisons in Blida and Algiers. The Commander of the Brigade sent a detachment to Blida aerodrome where opposition was expected; they arrived there about 1600 hours and stood ready to secure the aerodrome by force if the French should become hostile, but no incidents occurred. The remainder of the Brigade were to be used to reinforce from the south the main American advance on Algiers.

During the day negotiations had been opened between Major Gen. Ryder and Admiral Darlan and General Juin. Allied land forces were threatening the city and fighter aircraft had been operating from Maison Blanche from about 1100 hours. At 1700 hours Admiral Darlan had ordered all French resistance in the Algiers area to cease, pending the discussion of the Armistice terms.

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(1) The Combat Leader Thomas C. Stone had been torpedoed. See Chapter 4.

Operations on the left flank 8 November

The landing on 'Charlie Beach' was completed with some difficulty owing to the heavy surf, but by 0312 hours all troops were ashore. Four troops of Commando I and H.Q. moved along the road westward from Ain Taya towards La Perouse with one troop going along the beach to Jean Bart. The actual landing was unopposed, but at about 0400 hrs the guns of Batterie de Lazaret opened fire seawards, firing about ten rounds.

The defenders resisted attempts at a peaceful entry and an attack was begun by two troops at 0500 hrs. Meanwhile the Post de Surveillance at Jean Bart had been found clear of the enemy and the troops advanced from there to Fort d'Estrees. American forces of 39th Regimental Combat Team had landed on 'Charlie beach' and were advancing on Maison Blanche, but the Batterie de Lazaret and Fort d'Estrees guarding the seawards approaches to Algiers were still holding out. At 1040 hours the Batterie and Fort were subjected to a naval bombardment and air attack by Albacore aircraft of the F.A.A. at 1430 hrs. Troops moved up at 1600 hours to attack the Batterie de Lazaret which surrendered at 1700 hrs. Two U.S. armoured cars arrived at 1715 hours and with their support the troops moved to attack Fort d'Estrees. The attack continued until darkness, but was abandoned at 2000 hours.

NCKF letter  
C.P.S./42/Air

The Capture of the Airfields

The early capture of the airfields was vital to the success of the landings near Algiers although the initial air cover for the landings was being provided by Fleet Air Arm aircraft, the well known limitations of carrier-borne aircraft precluded the continued use of such aircraft as the sole means of air support. It was, therefore, necessary to seize and occupy the airfields at Maison Blanche and Blida as early as possible on D-day so that the R.A.F. fighters, assembled at Gibraltar could be flown to these airfields early on the same morning.

The Surrender of Blida

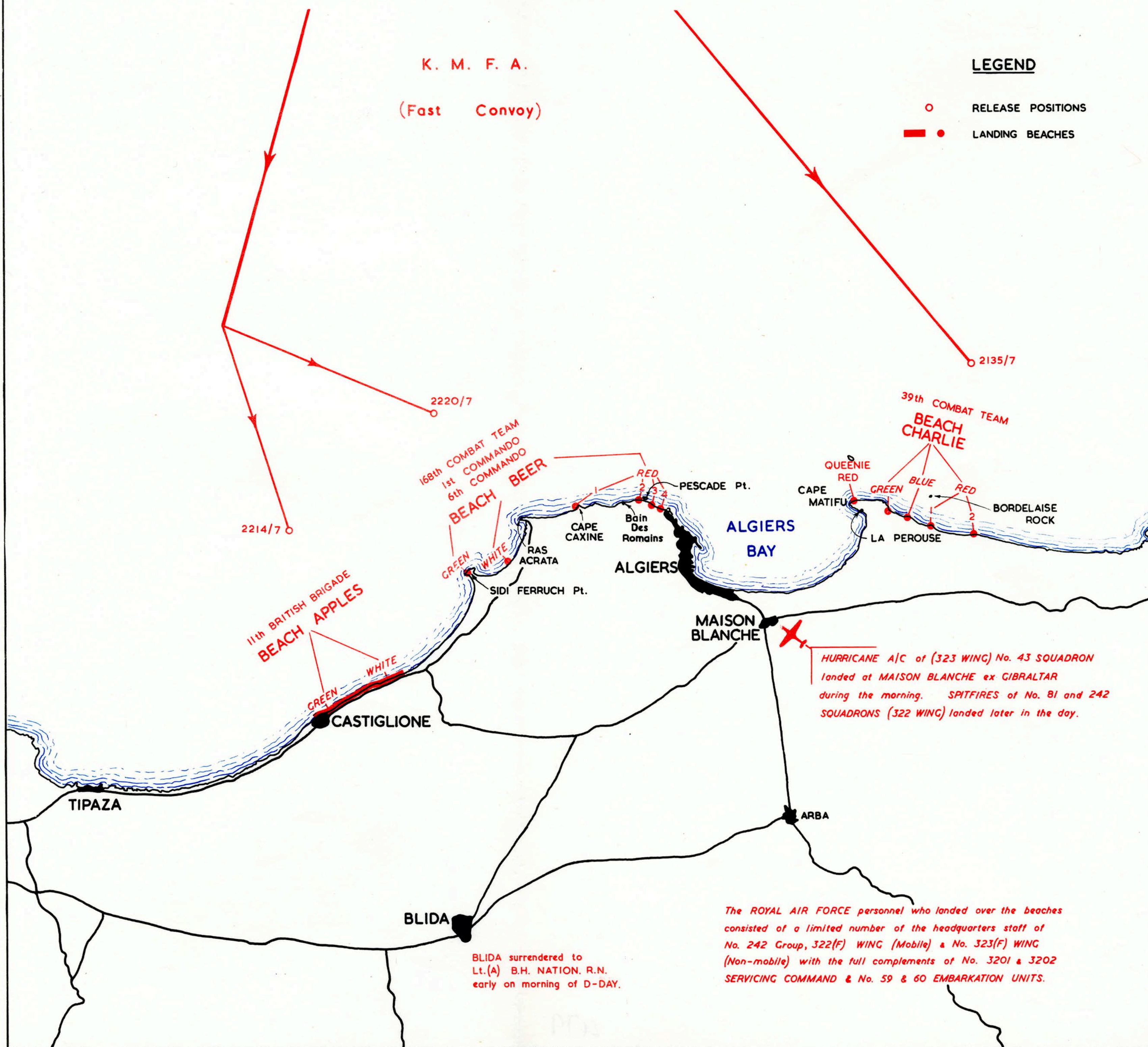
The surrender of Blida occurred in circumstances which, to say the least, are unusual. Early on 8 November, four Martlets from H.M.S. Victorious attacked two French aircraft on the ground at Blida. At 0800 hours a further flight of four aircraft renewed the patrol. After circling the aerodrome for half an hour Lt. (A) B.H.C. Nation R.N., the section leader, observed people on the ground waving white cloths. Having assured Victorious that he was over the correct aerodrome - it was marked Blida in large white letters - he received permission to land. Ordering the members of his section to keep watch, he landed and accepted a written statement from the Station Commandant that the base was at the disposal of the Allied Air Forces for landing purposes.

Lt. (A) B.H.C. Nation R.N. remained at the airfield until a party of Commando and Rangers arrived shortly before 1100 hours. These were a detachment of the force that had captured Sidi Ferruch earlier that morning. They had left at 0415(1) hours under the command of Lt. Col. Trevor. On

(1) See this Chapter - Capture of Sidi Ferruch.



# THE ALGIERS LANDINGS





arrival at Blida he disposed his troops for an attack on the airfield, and opened negotiations with the French Commander. By 1100 hours the troops had moved up to the hospital buildings opposite the main gate of the airfield. The situation appeared quiet for the time being, although French A.A. defences had opened fire on two British aircraft which had appeared in the vicinity.

#### The Taking of Maison Blanche

Joint Operation  
order for  
assault in  
E.A.C. file  
General Operation  
Instructions

The occupation of Maison Blanche, although made with no loss of life was a more arduous task. An R.A.F. advance party of Nos. 322 and 323 Wings, together with two Servicing Commandos, two A.A. Flights and four Signals sections sailed with the assault convoy (K.M.F.A.1.). Their role was to operate five fighter squadrons from Maison Blanche until the arrival of the personnel of the wing and the squadrons. They were to land on the assault beach 'Charlie' and then to move as soon as practicable to Maison Blanche.

The two main requirements demanded of this party were:-

(a) to establish an advance Wing H.Q. near the beach, whence fighter aircraft could be controlled, W/T communications established and embarkation units operated. No. 2 Force H.Q. Signals, No. 6001 L.W.3. and Nos. 59 and 60 Embarkation units were earmarked to this H.Q. under the command of O/C No. 322 Wing with the Senior Controller and Senior Administrative Staff Officers of that Wing; and

(b) All other units, Servicing Commandos the A.A. Flights and the H.Q. No. 323 Wing were to follow with their transport close behind the army to Maison Blanche in order to be able to operate aircraft from that aerodrome at a very short interval after its capture.

#### The First R.A.F. Ashore

O.R.B's of  
No. 322 and  
No. 323 Wings  
O.R.B's No.  
3201 and 3202  
Servicing  
Commandos  
M.A.C. File 22

C.M.H.  
Operation  
'Torch'  
Vol. II

O.R.B's as  
before  
Esp. No. 323  
Wing

The R.A.F. advanced party disembarked on Charlie Beach, at about 0500 hours on 8 November. They climbed up the cliffs to the small village of Ain Taya and entered it just as dawn was breaking. There the party was halted and so disposed that the immediate requirements demanded of it could be met. The O.C. No. 322 Wing set out for Surcouf where he intended to set up an advanced Wing H.Q. near the beach with H.Q. Signals, No. 6001 L.W.S. and Nos. 59 and 60 E.U. He ordered the Interrogating Officer, E.A.C. to take charge of the remainder, a rather mixed party, and to set out for Maison Blanche. The Interrogating Officer's fluent French stood him in good stead; he commandeered the motor-coach which took French Air Force Officers living out of camp in Ain Taya to Maison Blanche; and he and his party drove unopposed into the airfield past the French sentries. There they found the U.S. 39th Regimental Combat Team who had occupied the airfield since about 0640 hours. Their position was precarious as some of the French were definitely hostile. On the aerodrome there were about fifty D.W. 520's (Dewoitine fighters) lined up, ready to take off. Luckily the morning mist had spread an effective blanket over any attempted French air activity from Maison Blanche.

#### First Operations from Maison Blanche

Ibid

Soon afterwards at 0730 hours the O.C. No. 323 Wing arrived. He was anxious to prevent the arrival of any R.A.F. aircraft owing to the prevailing morning fog. However, an

Ibid, and H.M.S. Victorious Report of Proceedings in A.F. H.Q. papers.

E.A.C. File  
'Signals Out'  
A.O.C. No.A/101  
8 Nov. 1942 and  
H.M.S. Bulolo  
(from Lawson)  
No.Blue 260  
8 Nov. 1942

O.R.B's  
No.323 Wing  
No.322 Wing

Ibid

O.R.B's  
No. 81 Sqdn.  
No. 242

Signal N.C.  
E.N.T.F.  
(for Lawson)  
to C-in-C  
(for A.O.C.,  
E.A.C.)  
No.18222/9

Appendix VIII  
F.O.1.S.71/084  
8 Dec. 1942

hour later the ground mist lifted and shortly before 0900 hours a Fulmar II P of No. 809 Squadron landed to enquire about the situation at Maison Blanche. Just after 0900 hours eighteen Hurricanes of No. 43 Squadron flew in from Gibraltar after a two hours flight. Immediately afterwards a detachment of Servicing Commandos arrived from 'Charlie Beach' whence they had marched in three hours - just over twelve miles. The arrival of supplies of petrol and oil enabled them to refuel and service the Hurricanes.<sup>(1)</sup> Patrols were established immediately over the Algiers and Cap Matifou area.

#### Parleyings

Although patrols were being flown from Maison Blanche, all French opposition had not been crushed. French tanks were in action on the Maison Carree to Rouiba road and kept firing at the lorries bringing petrol and supplies from 'Charlie' beach to the airfield. A French A.A. gun to the northward was also in action; fortunately without result. The French troops allowed the Hurricanes to land and take off, but underneath their sullen acquiescence, there was a smouldering resentment which only needed the slightest puff to burst into flaming hostility.

Early in the afternoon the O.C. No.322 Wing joined the O.C. No. 323 Wing at Maison Blanche. At a conference held with the French authorities it was agreed that the French troops were to deposit their arms in their own armouries, which were to be guarded by American troops. However, so strong was the French amour - propre that a proposal to remove the rudders from all French aircraft was met with violent opposition and characteristic Gallic hand waving and shoulder shrugging; so much so that after the French Commander had promised that no French aircraft would attempt to take off the project was quietly dropped.

Later that afternoon Nos. 81 and 242 Spitfire squadrons arrived and began to take their part in maintaining the patrols.

#### Communications

The sea condition off 'Charlie' beach was too rough to land the R.A.F. equipment as planned. Many landing craft were wrecked and this prevented the landing of W/T vehicles with a consequent breakdown in communications. Neither point to point W/T stations, nor the R.D.F. light warning stations could be landed. The only communication between the beach and the command ship H.M.S. Bulolo, which was lying off the main beaches, west of Algiers and out of visual signalling touch with 'Charlie' beach, was a small army set. To improve communications, a Walrus of No. 700 Squadron was flown to Maison Blanche and was used as a W/T station until late on the 9th. Communication between Gibraltar and Algiers was conducted entirely through the Bulolo, as was the early warning of the approach of enemy aircraft and fighter control.

(1) According to Naval sources the R.A.F. did not operate until D+1 nor take over defence of port till D+2. See Admiral Cunningham's Report on Torch and F.O. Squadron No.71/084 8 Dec. 1942.



The Fleet Air Arm's part in the Assault

R.A.A. Letter  
No.306/5  
29 Oct. 1942

The tale of the landings near Algiers is not complete without inclusion of the part played by the Fleet Air Arm. The physical facts of geography prevented the Royal Air Force from playing the major role in the assault phases of Torch that it did subsequently in Overlord. Arrangements were made for the F.A.A. to perform the functions of a tactical air force on D-day and until such time as the R.A.F. were in a position to operate from airfields in North Africa.

R.A.A. letter  
No.306/5  
15 Nov. 1942

To enable the F.A.A. to execute these duties, a vast and speedy rearmament of its carrier-based squadrons was necessary. An intensive training programme was instituted in order to convert naval pilots to Seafire<sup>(1)</sup> aircraft in the short time available. In many cases the personnel of the operational squadrons<sup>(2)</sup> had been given leave after foreign service, as survivors, and as result of Pedestal.<sup>(3)</sup> In general squadrons returned from leave between the 7 and 10 September. In some cases aircraft were not at the station, and valuable time was wasted while the squadrons were awaiting aircraft. Some squadrons did not receive their aircraft until just before their carriers sailed.

E.A.C. File  
GEN. OP.  
Instructions

Two carriers were assigned to K.M.F. A.1., H.M.S. Avenger and H.M.S. Argus. Two additional larger fleet carriers H.M.S. Victorious and H.M.S. Formidable attached to Force "H" were, however, within easy call of the Algiers force, and their aircraft took a considerable part in the assault upon Algiers. The Argus carried a squadron of Seafires, Mark IIC, while the Avenger two squadrons of six Hurricane IIC each. The aircraft of both ships had the same duty to perform: they were to provide a standing patrol of four aircraft over the landing beaches. The Argus the 'Apples' and 'Beer' beaches and Blida airfield, and the Avenger over 'Charlie' beaches and Maison Blanche. Both carriers maintained the patrols as requested from first light to sunset. No contacts were made with Axis aircraft, nor were there any brushes with the French; the patrols were completely uneventful.

Argus No.  
C.3470/44  
19 Nov. 1942

Victorious  
No.0190/4153  
19 November  
Appendix I

Not so, the work of the two fleet carriers, H.M.S. 'Victorious' and H.M.S. 'Formidable'. The aircraft of both these ships played an important part in the assault on D-day. From first light six Seafires and eight Martlets of each carrier in turn had to be on patrol over Blida and Maison Blanche. Six sorties were made over the airfields of Maison Blanche and Blida during the course of the day. The Tac./R Squadron of H.M.S. 'Victorious' flew seven flights to provide information for the army; and the T.B.R. Squadrons made two attacks on forts which were holding up the Army's assault.

The Landings at Oran and Arzeu

Oran, capital of the province of the same name and second city of Algeria was a strongly fortified port, situated at the end of a spacious bay. The entrance to the port faces north-east through a narrow channel. Three miles

- 
- (1) Seafires were Spitfires modified for deck landing.
  - (2) The Naval term for operational squadrons is "worked up", which is equivalent to fit for operations on board a carrier.
  - (3) Malta Convoy: August 1942.

to the west across the bay is the naval harbour of Mers-el-Kebir. The small port of Arzeu lies to the south of Cape Carbon - about twenty-five miles to the east of Oran, and at the north-westerly end of a curving bay. Oran itself is situated almost mid-way between Gibraltar and Algiers, at a point where the Mediterranean is narrowest. The possession of these two ports by the Axis would have endangered, if not rendered impossible, Imperial communications in the Mediterranean.

A.F. H.Q.  
File 13/9 in  
box 2726

The capture of Oran and its adjacent airfields was the principal objective of the Centre Task Force. This was composed of the Naval Centre Task Force with Commodore T. H. Troubridge R.N. in command, and the Centre Task Force with Major General L. R. Fredendall, U.S. Army in command. The Fleet Air Arm would provide the air support and cover for the initial assaults while detachments of the U.S. Twelfth Air Force would take over these duties once they became established ashore.

Ibid

D-Day for this force was 8 November and the assaults on Oran and Arzeu were to be timed to take place simultaneously with the landings at Algiers. The occupation of this area required careful preparation because of the numerous forts and batteries protecting the port. Added to the fixed defences was a considerable number of units of the French Navy, and intelligence reports indicated that the naval forces and shore batteries manned by the navy would oppose any landing and that stiff resistance might be met. The French air strength in the neighbourhood concentrated mainly at the airfield La Senia had been estimated at fifty-five fighters (Dewoitine 520) and forty bombers, a mixture of Douglas DB-7 (Bostons), Glen Martin 167 and Potez 63.

#### Landing Beaches and Objectives

BR 1736(31)  
Admty Battle  
Summary No. 38

The arrangement of landing beaches at Oran was comparatively simple and consisted of three main beaches, "X", "Y" and "Z", and one subsidiary beach "R". An armoured column from Combat Command B would land at "X" Beach which lay at El Mrairia, near Cape Fegalo, with orders to capture La Lourmel airfield, and block the main roads north-east and south of it, advance south of Debkra and assist in the capture of the airfields at Tafaraoui and La Senia. The 26th Regimental Combat Team would land at "Y" beach near Les Andalouses to take control of the heights to the south of Oran and capture Oran from the west. The 18th Regimental Combat Team would land at "Z" beach near Arzeu with orders to capture the port of Arzeu and to help in taking Oran from the east. The 16th Combat Team would land at "Z" white beach to secure a bridgehead for Armoured Combat Command B, cover the east flank of the Oran force and take part in the capture of Oran. Combat Command B less the column on "X" Beach, would land at "Z" red beach to capture Tafaraoui and La Senia and assist in capturing Oran from the south. Meanwhile the 503rd Parachute Battalion would be flown from the United Kingdom with orders to neutralise all aircraft on La Senia airfield and to capture Tafaraoui.

#### The Assault on Oran

BR 1736(31)  
Admty Battle  
Summary No. 38

The attack opened, after some delay at 0116 hours on 8 November. Although the weather was calm, and the night dark, but with good visibility, the unexpected westerly set, which interfered with the landings at Algiers was equally disconcerting at Oran. In addition there was the chance



# ORAN

M E D I T E R R A N E A N S E A

Mostaganem

Arzeu

ST.CLOUD AND FLEURUS  
TAKEN ON NOVEMBER 8.

St.Cloud

Fleurus

MARSH

FIRST DIVISION BEATS  
TANK ATTACK OFF  
AT 1045. ON NOV. 9.

St.Lucien

Tarafoui

INITIAL SMALL LANDING  
FORCE SHATTERED:  
WALNEY & HARTLAND  
SUNK: ENGAGEMENT  
BEGAN SHORTLY  
AFTER 0300.  
NOV. 8.

ARMISTICE REACHED  
AT 1416 ON NOV. 10.

ORAN

La Senia

MOTORIZED COLUMN CAPTURES  
AIRFIELD AT TARAFOUI AT 1217  
AND LA SENIA IN EVENING

COLUMN CAPTURES  
AIN-EL-TURK EARLY  
ON MORNING OF NOV. 8.

Ain-el-Turk

LANDING IN FORCE  
EFFECTED 0300.

Les  
Andalouses

MARSH

SALT

SECRET

MAP No. 4.

AHJL MAP No. 384



appearance in the "X ray" sector of a small convoy of five French ships. One was boarded while the others attempted to escape. On sighting other ships of the assault force, they ran themselves aground. This interlude had an unfortunate delaying effect and caused no little confusion and loss of valuable time. The minesweepers were so badly delayed by the appearance of the French convoy that the assault vessels overran them. When order was restored, and it became clear that minesweeping would take too much time, the assault was ordered to proceed.

M.053475/43  
S.N.O. (L)  
Report

The assault craft should have found little difficulty in finding the assault beaches as the information provided by photographic mosaics, models and panoramas in addition to the reports of the Koodoo party.<sup>(1)</sup> Yet the assault craft of one ship failed to find its correct beach and the second wave landed first. Another beach in "X ray" sector proved to be so shallow that bulldozers had to be used to push off landing craft. A number were damaged beyond immediate use.

In the "Y" sector all landings were made on the correct beaches. Both of those 'cut up' very badly and what was worse a sandbar extended. This caused confusion and delay in unloading the assault ships. It was well that no opposition was experienced in both those sectors or the result might have been disastrous.

Ibid

#### Arzeu Assault

The landings near Arzeu were more successful. The French had left the lights burning on navigational buoys. These unfortunately were mistaken for the lights of the breakwater so that confusion resulted. Nevertheless the harbour was entered and several of the ships captured without loss to the Allies.

As daylight came in, however, French fire, hitherto sporadic became intense. This was soon extinguished and by 0745 hours the port and its environs were in Allied hands.

#### The Capture of the Airfields

A.F. H.Q.  
File 5/29 in  
box 2313

A.F. H.Q.  
File C.T.F.F.O.  
13/2 in  
box 2725

The occupation of the two most important airfields near Oran, La Senia and Tafaraoui had been entrusted to an American paratroop force. By 7 November (D minus one) the 2nd Battalion of the 503rd Parachute Infantry and thirty nine C-47 aircraft of the 60th Troop Carrier Group were assembled at the R.A.F. Stations St. Eval and Predannack. The signal which was to give the order for the commencement of the operation was to come from the Allied Commander-in-Chief at Gibraltar. This signal was to indicate whether the paratroop force was to arrive over the dropping zones at "H" hour ('War' Plan) or whether it was to take off at such a time as to arrive at La Senia at dawn ('Peace' Plan).

Ibid

The force embarked in the aircraft at 1700 hours on 7 November so as to be ready to undertake either plan. The signal came from Gibraltar indicating that the 'Peace' Plan was in effect. The take off thereupon was delayed till 2130 hours.

The thirty-nine aircraft took off punctually from both airfields and formed up into formation, the flights intermingling to some extent, before course was set for the

(1) See Chapter 4 - The journey to N. Africa.

Scilly Isles. On the way to the area of operations, because of the burning out of formation lights and because of the inability of aircraft to home on squadron commanders, the formations disintegrated amongst increasingly bad weather. Many aircraft became separated and crossed Spain and the Mediterranean on their own.

The secret homing device<sup>(1)</sup> failed because the signals which the ground component should have sent out were not received by any of the aircraft. The operator on the ground had destroyed his radio beacon when no aircraft were in evidence at the earlier time of arrival, which the war plan indicated. A ship which was to have transmitted homing bearings to the aircraft on 440 kilocycles transmitted on 460.

Some of the aircraft arrived at La Senia and in the neighbourhood of Oran shortly after daylight but a heavy ground fog made the observation of the terrain extremely difficult. They circled La Senia and found that their reception was not as friendly as forecast. They then landed on the Sebokra d'Oran.<sup>(2)</sup> They had suffered some casualties from the French fighters (DW.520). The other C-47s were scattered over the north-west corner of Africa.<sup>(3)</sup>

Tafaraoui was captured by the Eastern column of Combat Command "B", which had passed, as was planned through the 1st Division beachhead at Arzeu and turned south. It took Tafaraoui towards noon, after a short sharp fight. The way was now open for land based aircraft to re-inforce the Centre Task Force hitherto relying on the efforts of the Fleet Air Arm. The Allied Force Headquarters at Gibraltar was notified and about 1500 hours the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force ordered the 31st Fighter Group (Spitfire V) to fly to Tafaraoui.

History of  
U.S.A.A.F. in  
World War II  
Vol. II  
Chapter 3

#### The Arrival of the Twelfth Air Force

12th A.F. Intell-  
igence Summaries  
II J/15/8 and  
source as above

Twenty-four Spitfires of Nos. 308 and 309 Squadrons (U.S.) of the 31st Fighter Group left Gibraltar at 1540 hours on D-Day. As the formation approached Tafaraoui four aircraft were noticed 'doing lazy eights at altitude' over the airfield. Assuming that these aircraft were naval Hurricanes on patrol, the American squadrons began to land. When the last four aircraft were in position to land, the four aircraft which in the meantime had been orbiting overhead, dived to the attack. They were French DW.520.

Ibid

The attack misfired. The French aircraft shot down one Spitfire, but three of their number were lost in the process. This was the swan song of the French air force which had been largely crippled by the Fleet Air Arm on D-Day.

- (1) Rebecca/Bantam.
- (2) The dry bed of the largest salt lake near Oran.
- (3) Whereabouts of aircraft by end of D Day.

On Sebokra	30
Spanish Morocco	2
La Senia	2
Outside Oran	1
Gibraltar	2
Missing	2
Total	39

D-Day Operations of the Fleet Air Arm

Torch  
N.C./8

One fleet carrier, H.M.S. Furious and two auxiliary carriers, H.M.S. Biter and H.M.S. Dasher had been allocated to the Centre Task Force. The Fleet Air Arm were to be responsible for the protection of the convoys,<sup>(1)</sup> and the landings and for co-operation with the ground forces until such time as the Twelfth Air Force put in an appearance. To this end the Furious was equipped with nine Albacores, and twenty-four Seafires, while the auxiliary carriers Biter and Dasher carried fifteen and nine Hurricane II C each. In addition the Furious carried Fulmar II P aircraft for tactical reconnaissance purposes.

The operations began with a bombing attack by eight Albacores on the hangars at the north-west side of La Senia airfield. Seafires from the Furious and Hurricanes from the other carriers escorted the bombing force to give it protection in case it was attacked by hostile aircraft. The attack was pressed home with vigour. Four of the Albacores were shot down while the French lost two DW.520. Numerous French aircraft on the ground were destroyed.

Throughout the day the fighters gave constant cover over the assault beaches. Tactical reconnaissances for the Army were flown as and when required. During D-Day three special flights were made for this purpose from the Furious. The landing grounds at Balanche, Relizane, Mascara and Sidi Bel Abbes were given especial attention and French aircraft on them were machine-gunned from a low level. On one of these reconnaissances by five Seafires, one DW.520 was shot down.

Operations by Twelfth Air Force on D Plus one

12th A.F.  
Intelligence  
Summaries  
II J 15/8

The French at Oran had not capitulated as easily as they had done at Algiers. The morning of 9 November found them offering stiff resistance to the troops of Combat Command "B" in their attempt to gain La Senia aerodrome. All day long they fought for possession. Strong counter attacks on the American positions were launched by the French from the south. These were broken up by the armoured units of Combat Command "B" and the aircraft of the Twelfth Air Force.

Ibid

Spitfires from Tafaraoui were in close liaison with the ground forces and were used to attack isolated French units. Ten tanks were destroyed as well as twenty-five lorries carrying troops. An enemy battery two and a half miles south-east of Tafaraoui was silenced after it had intermittently shelled the airfield for several hours. Altogether forty-five sorties were flown for the loss of two aircraft, the pilots being saved.

At 1605 hours Brigadier-General Doolittle arrived at Tafaraoui flying from Gibraltar in a B-17 (Flying Fortress) escorted by a squadron of twelve Spitfires of the 32nd Fighter Group.

Capitulation of Oran

As darkness fell on the 9th some groups of the French were still resisting stubbornly. During the course of the afternoon the carriers Furious, Biter and Dasher had been withdrawn now that the U.S. XII Fighter Command was operating

(1) See Appendix 4.



from Tafaraoui. Their withdrawal was perhaps premature. Although three squadrons of Spitfires had arrived, there were as yet no bombers available and the carriers of Force "H" were asked to bomb two positions on the 10th which were holding up the American advance on Oran.

On the 10th the 31st and 52nd Fighter Groups were employed on escorting convoys, making reconnaissances and generally supporting the ground forces. Targets were not as plentiful as on the previous day, as the French had learnt the value of concealment and dispersal. Two U.S. aircraft were shot down by French A.A. guns.

About noon the U.S. Infantry had reached the outskirts of Oran and tanks entered the city from the south. Shortly afterwards, the Commanding General Centre Task Force, received the surrender of the city. Resistance, however, by forts and shore batteries continued until the evening.

#### The Landings in French Morocco

##### The Plan for the Capture of Casablanca

The attack on Casablanca was omitted from the first complete and detailed plan for the landings in North Africa, submitted by General Eisenhower. Although he personally was in favour of taking his entire force inside the Mediterranean, he realised that to enter the Mediterranean without establishing a base at Casablanca involved additional risks but agreed that Casablanca, when cut off from the eastward, would either fall of its own weight, or could be captured by columns moving back down the railway from Oran. He was also influenced by the desire to avoid the very great natural hazards involved in landing at Casablanca. These views were communicated to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but the United States Chiefs of Staff were opposed to the omission of Casablanca from the plan of attack. They considered that the risks involved in depending entirely upon the Straits of Gibraltar for a line of communication were too great and that, in spite of the limited capacity of the Casablanca-Oran railway, it was desirable to secure it as a partial insurance against possible Axis attempts against Gibraltar. Moreover, they believed that unless a strong force was landed immediately in Morocco the Spanish would be much more inclined to enter the war or to permit the Germans to use Spain as an avenue of advance against the Allied rear. Their views were eventually accepted, and the decision taken to include the capture of Casablanca in the plans for Operation Torch.

Casablanca was the largest town in French Morocco and the residence of the officers commanding the French Naval and Military forces in that area. Its harbour contained, in November 1942 numerous vessels of the French Navy, including the uncompleted French battleship Jean Bart which had escaped there when France fell in June 1940. In view of this and the fact that Casablanca was defended by heavy coastal batteries, the difficulty of securing it by direct assault from the sea had been fully appreciated and plans had been concerted in the United States, whereby three separate landings were to be made on the French Moroccan coast, at Safi, Fedala, and Medhia, places widely separated from each other. From these assault positions, troops, after having been safely landed ashore, were to converge upon Casablanca from the flanks and rear. The beaches which had been selected for the landings were pounded by notoriously heavy surf but it was assumed that the French would not

This narra-  
tive  
Chapter 2

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expect landings to be made at such places and it was thought that the advantages of surprise might be obtained by the adoption of this method of approach.

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 in  
box 2744

The execution of this plan was entrusted to the Western Task Force under the command of Major General Patton, an all American organisation, transported in American ships, and escorted and supported by the American Navy. Air support was to be provided initially by aircraft of the United States Naval Air Service and after the seizure of an airfield ashore, by fighters of the United States Twelfth Air Force, the 33rd Pursuit Group, which were to be carried to the scene of action in U.S.S. Chenango.

Ibid

The most northerly points on the coast selected for landing were the beaches on either side of the mouth of the river Sebou, near the little village of Mehdia about sixty-five miles north-east of Casablanca. The chief objective being the airfield at Port Lyautey situated on land enclosed by a large bend in the river Sebou at a distance of about nine miles from the mouth of the river. General Patton had expressed the opinion that the entire success of the operation depended on the securing of the airfield at Lyautey and the rapid acquisition of other airfields, "because it is only in the air that we can build up the necessary security to defeat and impress our enemies".

It was intended that as soon as the airfield had been captured, the seventy-six U.S. Army P.40's, borne in the U.S. aircraft carrier Chenango, should be flown in, and would then be able to operate in support of the Army's encircling movement against Casablanca.

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 (1)

Another landing was planned near the small port of Fedala, about fifteen miles north-east of Casablanca. General Patton considered that this might prove the most difficult, and was apprehensive of what forces the enemy might bring against him from Rabat. The little port of Safi, a hundred and ten miles south-west of Casablanca was the third selection. Here it was intended that two destroyers should enter and secure the port at the beginning of the assault, in order that it might be used as an unloading base for the Twenty-eight ton "General Sherman" tanks carried in the S.S. Lakehurst, a former train ferry, with a view to employing them in the attack on Casablanca. It was known that Safi was defended by three batteries and that there were troops, artillery and an air force at Marrakech whose motorised contingents might arrive in Safi within five hours of an alarm being given.

Intelligence sources had reported that the bridgehead across the river Rbia at Azemmour, just east of Mazagan, was strongly defended, and might prove an impassable obstacle in the path of the Sherman tanks in their dash towards Casablanca.

#### The Landings at Safi

Landings in  
N. Africa A.  
p. 46.  
(II J 15/29)

On 8 November 1942, the Southern Attack Group under Rear Admiral Davidson, flying his flag in the U.S.S. Philadelphia supported by the battleship New York and other naval and transport vessels, including the auxiliary aircraft carrier Santee, were in position off Safi in the very early hours of the morning. Two destroyers entered the port of Safi practically unopposed and secured possession. Troop landings were made on the beaches in the vicinity before sunrise and were not opposed seriously by the French. At

first light a few low flying attacks were made by the French Air Force but fighters from the Santee soon dispersed them.

#### Air Operations

The Santee which had taken up a position about forty miles off shore, maintained anti-submarine patrols during the unloading of the transports and was assisted in this task by seaplanes from the two battleships. Seaplanes were also directing their own ships gunfire against the enemy shore batteries. In this they were successful as all opposition from the batteries had been overcome by 0900 hours. Reconnaissances were made of the crossings over the river 'Rbia in the course of which four American aircraft made forced landings at Mazagan, the pilots being taken prisoner. Patrols were flown towards Marrakech in order to obtain early information of any intended rail or road troop movements from that quarter. At 1330 hours the Santee was compelled to discontinue flying operations as the wind had fallen light, so that reconnaissance duties had perforce to be undertaken by seaplanes from the Philadelphia, which could be catapulted. They reported that twenty-five light bombers with French markings had been seen on the airfield at Marrakech, but that no troop movements had, as yet, been observed. During the afternoon, an A-20 (Boston) aircraft, apparently on reconnaissance flew low over the harbour. It was shot down by A.A. fire and crashed near Safi airfield. By this time the S.S. Lakehurst had moved into Safi harbour and had begun unloading the heavy tanks. All resistance on shore had been overcome and a beachhead of five thousand yards had been secured.

#### Resistance by the enemy

At dawn the next day (9th) the Army issued a warning that the enemy were preparing to launch an attack from the air. As a result of this ship-borne aircraft were at once sent off on reconnaissance, but soon after they had taken off a thick fog developed. At about 0700 hours aircraft were heard flying over the harbour. One penetrated the fog and attacked the S.S. Lakehurst as she lay in harbour tied up to a pier. One bomb struck the pier, killing five men and wounding ten, besides destroying a light A.A. gun and two vehicles. Another bomb hit a warehouse which was being used for the storage of ammunition, and a series of explosions resulted. The aircraft, a twin-engined bomber, was shot down by A.A. fire from the transports and crashed in flames on one of the beaches. Soon afterwards the fog lifted and the Air Liaison Officer and his party came ashore at Safi. The advent of this Officer and his wireless equipment made it possible for all air effort to be directed and controlled from the ground. Aircraft were ordered to reconnoitre in the direction of Marrakech and Agadir. At Agadir nothing was seen owing to the prevailing fog, but at Marrakech the aircraft were fired upon by A.A. guns and in retaliation two bombs were dropped on the airfield. But shortly after mid-day it was reported that four twin-engined bombers had been seen with engines running on Marrakech airfield. This action was considered to be evidence of hostile intent, and the Santee immediately launched a force of eleven bombers and two fighters with orders to destroy all French aircraft on Marrakech airfield. As the aircraft were on their way a column of about fourteen vehicles were seen east of Bou Guedra (15 miles east of Safi on the Marrakech road) evidently on their way to the relief of Safi. The column was attacked by the Santee's aircraft, the vehicles were

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A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 (1)  
p.4

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 (2)  
B.R. 1736(31)

Annex: "D"  
C.T.F No.34  
Op. plan  
5 - 42

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and  
B.R.1736(31)



destroyed and set on fire, and the troops in the column fled towards the hills. The aircraft then went on to Marrakech where twenty French aircraft were destroyed on the ground and a hangar was set on fire. On the return journey another enemy column of forty vehicles was discovered proceeding towards Safi. This was also attacked and much damage was inflicted. That evening the landing ground at Safi had been captured, but was found unsuitable for use so that it was not possible to bring in the aircraft from the Chenango to help in these operations.

#### The action at Bou Guedra<sup>(1)</sup>

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 (2)

Early the next morning (10th) a detachment of the Armoured division moved out from Safi eastwards towards the enemy advancing from Marrakech. The opposing forces met in the vicinity of Bou Guedra where a fierce action occurred in which aircraft and tanks took part. The main body of the enemy eventually withdrew to a defensive position in the hills about thirty miles east of Safi, where aircraft continued to bomb their positions throughout the day. By nightfall tanks had advanced to the foothills in front of the enemy's main position.

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14(2)  
G 3 report  
p. 7

Earlier in the day aircraft had brought back photographs of the bridges over the river 'Rbia, which showed them to be undamaged. It was therefore decided, in view of the importance of advancing towards Casablanca as soon as possible, to break off the action at Bou Guedra, and the armoured division was ordered to travel throughout the night towards Mazagan and the bridgehead at Azemmour.

#### The French capitulate

Ibid

The next morning (11th) the armoured division was in position to cross the river 'Rbia at Azemmour and prepared to deal with any hostile demonstration by the garrison of Mazagan. Overhead, aircraft patrolled ready to support any action undertaken by the Army. But the French overawed by such a display of force, surrendered without fighting. The Armoured division crossed the river and hurried on towards Casablanca.

#### The Landings in the Casablanca - Fedala Area

IIJ.15/29  
p. 21

C in N.A.  
p. 32

The landings in this area were undertaken by the Centre Attack Group of the Western Task Force. In view of the large number of ships lying in Casablanca harbour the transports were protected by a strong Naval covering force consisting of the battleship Massachusetts, two light cruisers, several destroyers, and other vessels. Air support was provided by the aircraft carrier Ranger and the auxiliary aircraft carrier Suwanee while the aircraft carrier Chenango sailed in company with the other carriers.

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 (1)

At about 0500 hours troops were being put ashore on the beaches east of Cape Fedala. No serious opposition was offered by the company of Senegalese infantry which composed the garrison but presently the shore batteries in the vicinity of Casablanca opened fire on the transport vessels and the covering force. As soon as it was light a total of nine

(1) Shown on map French N. Africa 1/500,000 as Et Tleta de S'Embarek.

aircraft<sup>(1)</sup> were launched from the battleship Massachusetts and the cruisers Tuscaloosa and Wichita to undertake anti-submarine patrols and spotting duties.

The Ranger flew off eighteen fighters to neutralise the Rabat-Sale airport, followed by seventeen bombers S.B.D. (Dauntless) to attack submarines and surface ships at Casablanca and the coastal batteries at El Hank and Table d'Aukasha. At about 0700 hours the Suwannee launched 8 T.B.F.S. (Avenger) against the same targets in the harbour, escorted by fighters from the Ranger. While at the same time the enemy ships and coastal batteries were heavily shelled by the American warships. These aircraft were opposed by anti-aircraft fire and by six enemy fighters, but the latter were driven off and were not seen again.

During the morning such Naval vessels and submarines which remained in serviceable condition sortied from Casablanca. A spirited action followed, in which aircraft from the Ranger and Suwannee played a prominent part. It ended about noon with the destruction or repulse of all the French ships engaged. The Jean Bart tied up at her berth in the harbour, continued in action, in spite of the fact that she had been hit by five 16" shells from the Massachusetts and had been struck by two aircraft bombs. But her stern had settled until she was resting on the bottom. Many other ships, including three submarines, were lying badly damaged in the harbour. By 1500 hours all resistance had ended at Fedala and supplies were accumulating on the beaches.

At dawn the next morning (9th) the transports lying off Fedala were repeatedly bombed and shot up until the enemy were driven off by Naval aircraft. During the afternoon, Naval Air reconnaissance reported the presence of an enemy armoured force of approximately thirty vehicles at the intersection of the Boulhaut road with the Route Principale No. 1. This column was attacked from the air and three armoured vehicles were destroyed. Further air attacks were made on enemy armoured vehicles discovered east of the Neffifikh river, and along the Rabat road. The force landed at Fedala began to advance on Casablanca but was unable to proceed very far as the artillery could not be brought up owing to lack of transport.

The next day (10th) the shore batteries at El Hank and on the Jetee Delure were still in action as was also the Jean Bart in spite of the fact that they had been under continual naval gunfire. In the afternoon the batteries were heavily bombed by Naval aircraft. The Jean Bart was also attacked with 1,000 lb bombs, one hitting the water on her port beam, one forward of No. 1 turret and one on her starboard side aft. In spite of the destruction wrought by these bombs, the Jean Bart's 15 inch guns and fire control apparatus remained in a serviceable condition.

On 11 November, it had been decided to launch the decisive attack upon Casablanca. At 0700 hours the situation was very tense. Naval aircraft were in position over the French batteries ready to bomb, and the warships were about to open fire, but the attack was never launched as the French capitulated and hostilities came to an end.

#### The Landings in the Medhia - Port Lyautey Area

The northern attack Group escorting the transports

L in N.A.  
p. 32  
(IIW 15/29)

A.F.H.Q.  
77/1 in  
Ex. 2742

B.R. 1736(31)

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14(11)  
in Ex. 2724

A.F.H.Q.  
048.93  
in Ex. 1161

Ibid



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containing the troops which were to undertake the landings at Mehdiya was composed of the following ships: the battleship Texas the cruiser Savannah the destroyers Roe, Kearney and Ericsson. The Northern Air Group comprised the aircraft carriers Sangamon and Chenango. It was intended that aircraft from the Sangamon should be used entirely for covering the landings, and that the Suwanee, operating off Casablanca, should provide fighting and anti-submarine patrols for the northern force. The troopships arrived in the transport area rather later than had been intended due to a variety of unforeseen causes, and the element of surprise had been lost by reason of the delay. Nevertheless, the first waves of the attacking force were landed on the beaches on both sides of the river Sebou by 0515 hours, without opposition.

B.R. 1734 (31)

B.R. 1736 (31)  
p. 52L in N.A.  
p. 44  
(II J15/29)

A little later one of the shore batteries opened fire on the Savannah and Roe and they were attacked by two French fighters with machine gun fire; but by the time the Savannah and the Texas had flown off their aircraft the Sangamon operating in an area about thirty-five miles west of Mehdiya, had launched her aircraft to attack the airfields at Port Lyautey. Considerable difficulty had been experienced in flying them off owing to the light wind. In fact one aircraft had fallen into the sea while endeavouring to take off. As a result, launching by catapult became almost the standard method during the rest of the operation. At 0720 hours two enemy aircraft attacked the troops and landing craft south of the mouth of the river Sebou, and air fighting rapidly increased in intensity until about ten French Fighters were being engaged. Air support was requested, and by 0747 hours at least twenty F4F's (Martlet or Wildcat) from the aircraft carriers had arrived in the area and A.A. guns which had already been landed, shot down two enemy aircraft. During the morning the Army had established a beachhead south of the river mouth, but progress from then on became difficult. The garrison of the Kasba (the ancient Fort Lyautey) which consisted largely of soldiers of the Foreign Legion, contested every inch of the ground. Naval Air ground support control was not in operation, as owing to an administrative mistake the officer concerned had been embarked in one ship and his wireless equipment in another. As a result control was not in operation until the early morning of 9 November. The situation in the air was such that the carrier Ranger received an urgent request for support at Port Lyautey and as a result sent twelve fighters to that area. The Army's situation became critical during the afternoon, severe casualties had been sustained, no artillery or anti-tank weapons had been landed and the troops were in danger of being cut off from the beaches. But later, information received indicated that French tanks, infantry and armoured cars were moving north from Rabat and threatening the southern flank, and it became known that the Port Lyautey garrison had been reinforced from Meknes earlier in the day. A message was therefore sent to the American Admiral giving the location of the French concentrations and requesting naval and air support against them on the following day.

A.F.H.Q.  
77/14 (II)  
"Comments on  
Naval Air  
Support"L in N.A.  
p. 44

On the morning of 9 November, the transports moved in closer to the shore to facilitate unloading; this was made possible by the fact that the two 138 mm guns near the Kasba, which had given so much trouble appeared to have been silenced by the fire from the Savannah, but the force ashore had still made little progress towards its chief objective, namely the airfield at Port Lyautey. Aircraft attacked enemy artillery east of Port Lyautey and a French column of vehicles moving north on the Rabat road was heavily engaged. Eventually a tank battle developed on the Rabat road about



Ibid  
p. 54

four miles south of Mehdia, the enemy tanks were shelled by the Savannah and at least three were reported knocked out, one by a direct hit. The remainder dispersed and retreated rapidly down the road with spotting aircraft bombing them with excellent results. Late that evening orders were issued to the Army for yet another attack on the Kasba Fort at daylight the next morning, and for the seizure of the airfield at Lyautey at all costs.

II J.15/29

A.F.H.Q.  
045.93  
in box 1161

Early on the morning of 10 November, a naval crew in a small boat succeeded in cutting the cable supporting the net extending across the mouth of the Sebou river, and the destroyer Dallas, which had already made several abortive attempts to enter the river mouth, made her way up river. By 0737 hours she had arrived off Port Lyautey and her "raider detachment" landing under heavy fire had seized the airfield. The first P-40 Kittyhawk from the Chenango landed at 1107 hours, and damaged its undercarriage. During the day a further forty-three aircraft were flown in, but the remainder were retained in the carrier, owing to the condition of the airfield, which was pitted with shell holes and bomb craters. The Army were still making attacks on the Kasba, being supported by fire from the Savannah. The early morning had been calm and windless, so that it had been impossible for aircraft to be launched from the carrier. But at about 1030 hours Naval bombers were ordered to attack the main bastion of the Kasba. A flight of aircraft bombed the fort with shattering effect. The American troops who had been waiting only about two hundred yards away recovered from the shock more quickly than the enemy and rushed the main gate, and the fort surrendered. This ended the fighting in the Kasba area and the evening was spent by the Army in re-organising and preparing to attack Port Lyautey and Rabat-Sale on the following morning. Meanwhile French tank and infantry columns had again approached on the Rabat road from the south. They were immediately attacked with depth charges by aircraft from the Texas, a novel form of attack which proved most effective, a direct hit resulting in the destruction of three tanks. Bombers also took up the attack and the columns finally retreated south towards Rabat.

B.R. 1736 (31)  
p. 55

Early the next morning 11 November, a message was received from the French Military Headquarters at Port Lyautey which stated that by authority of Marshal Petain all resistance was to cease immediately. That the cessation of warfare was welcome to the French land forces soon became apparent. Spotting aircraft of the Texas reported having observed troops on the Meknes road who waved their handkerchiefs and clapped their hands as the aircraft flew over. From then on the French soldiers were most friendly, and prisoners even helped in the unloading of the American transport vessels.

Thus the capture of Casablanca was effected more easily than had been expected, in spite of the fact that the airfield at Port Lyautey had been seized too late for the Twelfth Air Force to take any part in the assault. Fortune had been kind in that on the first day of the landings the sea had not been as rough as had been forecast, and the opposition of the French Navy proved less formidable than had been anticipated.

## CHAPTER 6

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

C.A.S. Files  
passim and  
A.F.H.Q. Files  
passim

C.A.S. File 1763  
Signal No. 803  
C.G. E.T.F.  
to C-in-C.

From its very inception Torch was a political-military operation. This political complexion persisted throughout the landings and the race to seize and occupy Tunisia before the Germans. Indeed the political back-ground throws a menacing shadow over the exertions of the Armies and Air Forces. The situation which developed after the initial landings was far from the one expected. Gone was the "roseate picture of speedy aid by an efficient French Army". This was but a "figment of the imagination".

Difficulty in Dealing with General Giraud

It had been anticipated that General Giraud would arrive shortly after the initial landings and take charge of the French forces in North Africa. The glamour of his name and the honour in which it was supposed he was held would prevent needless bloodshed. Giraud was to order French forces in North Africa to offer no resistance to the Allied forces. These forces were expected to rally round this national French hero; and under his leadership the French would march alongside the Allies to do battle with the Axis.

Daily Review  
from C-in-C to  
C.C.S. from  
5 Nov. 1942 to  
8 Nov. 1942

To this end General Giraud had been aided to escape from France, but on arrival at Gibraltar he did not prove as accommodating, nor as acquiescent as the Allied C.-in-C. had hoped. After his arrival in Gibraltar Giraud made it quite clear that he did not approve the Allied plan of campaign and that he wished to delete it and substitute quite another of his own devising - which involved a landing in the South of France. Further he was not prepared to play second fiddle in the Allied orchestra. If he went to Algiers he would do so only as the Military Chief of the whole expedition and conduct the campaign against the Axis in accordance with his own strategic ideas and in the light of his vastly superior military experience.<sup>(1)</sup>

Signal No. 132  
C-in-C to  
C.C.S.  
8 Nov. 1942

From the time of his arrival and during the exacting time of D-Day, General Eisenhower was closeted constantly with Giraud, making continuous efforts "to draw him into (the) fold". He was ready to recognise him as the leader of the French Effort to save North Africa and to restore France; he was prepared to acknowledge him as the Senior Allied Officer in the region with all honour due to him in such a position; he even went the length of offering to consult Giraud constantly on all strategical matters; and generally to co-operate with him to the fullest extent. Eventually a "Gentleman's agreement" was concluded with Giraud. He was recognised as the leader of the effort to prevent Axis aggression in North Africa, the Commander-in-Chief of all French forces in the region, and the governor of the area. No later than 9 November Giraud would depart for North Africa to do his utmost to stop all resistance to the Allies, and to begin organising the French forces for employment against the Axis.

Agreement with Darlan

The arrangement with General Giraud was fruitless.

(1) It must be remembered that General Eisenhower was at that time completely unknown outside the American Army and had not yet acquired the prestige which he acquired in the later stages of World War II.

Signal N.527  
C-in-C to  
C.A.S.  
14 Nov. 1942

Marshal Petain's name was one to conjure with in French North Africa "Every one from the highest to the lowest attempt(ed) to create the impression that he live(d) and act(ed) under the shadow of the Marshal's figure". The civil governors in North Africa, the military and naval leaders there would agree only on one man as having the obvious right to assume the Marshal's mantle in North Africa. That man was Admiral Darlan.

The fact that Darlan was in Algiers at the same time as the discussions with Giraud were going on was not known at that time. It was the Allies misfortune that he happened to be there, ostensibly on a visit to see his sick son. It may be, though it has never been proved, that Darlan had heard a whisper as to the Allied intentions, and had used the excuse of his son's illness to explain his sudden appearance. Be that as it may, the Allies regarded Darlan as the most pro-German and Vichy tainted Frenchman of his time.<sup>(1)</sup>

As soon as negotiations were opened with the French for an armistice, it became clear that the Allies would have to deal with Darlan. General Giraud despite his past record in the French Army was powerless. He clearly recognised the overpowering situation. In consequence he modified his own ambitions and intentions. All French leaders professed that they would work with the Allies provided Darlan so ordered; but they would not follow anyone else. Admiral Esteva, the French Naval Commander in Tunis, obeyed Darlan, while General Nogues stopped fighting in Morocco on Darlan's order. It was clear to the Allied Commander-in-Chief that recognition of Darlan's position could not be ignored nor delayed. Accordingly he flew from Gibraltar to Algiers on 13 November and concluded an agreement with Admiral Darlan.

Ibid

#### Terms of the Agreement

The gist of the original agreement with Darlan was that the French forces would do what they could immediately to assist in taking Tunisia. The Group of French naval and military leaders were to organise French forces in North Africa for effective co-operation and were to begin the re-organisation, under General Giraud, of selected military forces for active participation in the war. They were to make every effort and use every expedient to win over the French fleet at Toulon.

#### The C.-in C's Justification for recognition of Darlan

The Allied hope of an early conquest of Tunisia could not possibly be realised unless there was a general acceptance of the agreement concluded with Darlan, Giraud and Nogues. Giraud, on whom Allied hopes had centred, was so fully aware of his complete inability to do anything by himself, even with Allied naval and military support that he cheerfully accepted the post of Military Chief in the Darlan Group. Without a

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- (1) He was described as a "skunk" by Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, Naval Commander Allied Force. There is some justification for Darlan's tortuous policy; he wished to keep the French fleet intact as a bargaining counter with the Germans. Looked at through French eyes, his conduct smacked of that narrow patriotism common to that cadre of high ranking French naval and military commanders, whose patriotism was of the order 'France first and France last'. Darlan was a patriot within his rights - Narrator's note.



strong French Government of some kind in North Africa, the Allies would have been forced to undertake a complete military occupation. The cost in time and resources would have been tremendous. In Morocco alone, General Patton<sup>(1)</sup> calculated that it would require 60,000 Allied troops to keep the native tribes quiet; and in view of the effect any tribal disturbance would have on Spain "you can see what a problem we are up against".

Finally the C.-in-C. urged that if Darlan were removed and if the Allies attempted to dictate the personnel of the Coalition to run North Africa, the following would be the consequences.

- (a) the Allied hope of securing organised co-operation in that region would vanish at great cost in additional troops and in complete stagnation of operations;
- (b) all French armed forces would resist the Allies passively, and in certain circumstances actively;
- (c) the Allied hope of occupying Tunisia quickly could not<sup>(2)</sup> materialise because Admiral Esteva would not<sup>(2)</sup> co-operate;
- (d) the opportunity of gaining some military assistance from remaining French naval, air and military units in French North Africa would disappear;
- (e) "the last glimmer of hope with regard to the French Toulon fleet would be gone."

The C.-in-C. ended with an eloquent peroration that "I am certain that anyone who is not<sup>(2)</sup> on the ground can have no clear idea nor appreciation of the complex currents of feeling and of the prejudices that influence the situation."

#### Criticisms of Dealing with Darlan

P.M. P.T. to  
President  
No. 190

The announcement of the agreement brought roars of protest from both the American and British press; and General Eisenhower was roundly criticised for his handling of the situation. The official British attitude was expressed in a telegram from the Prime Minister to the President. The P.M. could not say that his doubts and anxieties were removed by what the Allied C.-in-C. had proposed nor that the solution would be permanent or healthy. Nevertheless in view of the paramount importance of speed and of the fact that the Allied C.-in-C. expressed so strongly and ably his opinion, which was endorsed by Admiral Cunningham, there was no choice but to accept General Eisenhower's arrangements for preserving local and interim equilibrium and for securing vital positions in Tunisia.

#### Effect of Delay

Review No.22  
from C.-in-C.  
to C.C.S.

The brief but fatal delay in arriving at an arrangement had allowed the Germans to land in Tunisia; and the French having admitted them were unable to oppose them effectively with the weak and poorly equipped units at their disposal. It was obvious that the defeat of the Axis in Tunisia had to be accomplished by the Allied forces. The French were

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(1) Commanding General Western Task Force.  
(2) The underlining is the Allied C-in-C's.

Signal  
C.G. E.T.F.  
16 Nov. 1942

scarcely fighting the Axis. Their attitude was expressed by the remark of the Chief of Staff to General Juin to General Clark "We can better delay the Germans by parleying than by fighting."

C.A.S. 1763  
C-in-C to  
P.M.

As late as 5 December, the Allied C.-in-C. was writing to the Prime Minister, expressing his concern that the P.M. did not appear to be fully informed about the political situation in North Africa. He was aware that rumours were circulating that the American Military authorities had been dealing with Darlan on matters which had nothing to do with the local situation, and that they had been supporting him in his claims to a permanent authority rather than as merely the temporary head of the local government. He assured the Prime Minister that these rumours had no foundation in fact, and that he had taken great care to see that the British authorities on the spot, were kept fully informed on all aspects of American dealings with Darlan.

The Allied C.-in-C. had at every meeting at which Darlan was present made it perfectly patent that Darlan was the head of a local de facto organisation, through which the Allies were enabled to secure the co-operation, both civil and military which they needed for the prosecution of the campaign. Darlan knew that Eisenhower had no authority to go further than this.

The Allied C.-in-C. went on to describe the length of his lines of communications, how they extended for five hundred miles from Algiers through mountainous country to Tunisia, and how the local French could, if they so wished, sabotage them to such an extent that the Allies would have no option but to retreat to the ports, from which they could supply themselves by sea. General Giraud had quickly given up trying to help, and it was only through Darlan's assistance that the Allies were fighting the Axis in Tunisia, instead of somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bone.

Governor Boisson and Admiral Darlan had committed themselves to an Allied victory. That very morning conversations with them had dealt with their desire to get the French naval forces at Dakar into the fight against the Axis. They were also convinced that Admiral Godfroy<sup>(1)</sup> would soon be brought round through the medium of the French emissaries, which Admiral Cunningham had sent from Algiers to Cairo. Governor Boisson,<sup>(2)</sup> General Eisenhower felt was an honest man, and that he really hated the Germans; but he could not very well go back to Dakar unless he had some concrete proposals to put before the governors of the nine provinces that were under his control. There is no doubt that the Allied C.-in-C. was unable to give his undivided attention to military affairs and the political background acted as a drag on the speed of the Allied advance. The constant necessity to guard against any possible fifth column activity had to be taken into account when any operations were planned. Pro-Ally Frenchmen were alienated when 'Vichyites' were retained in office under the new regime, but these were necessary to enable the Allied advance to continue. It must be remembered too that General Eisenhower was in the position of an Air Officer Commanding both the Twelfth Air Force and Eastern Air Command. The effect of these other commitments on his

(1) French Naval C.-in-C. of the French Fleet (or Squadron) remaining at Alexandria.

(2) M. (Monsieur) Boisson was Governor of French West Africa.

duties on the air side cannot be measured in exact terms: but they must have been prodigal in the demands on his time.

The situation was clarified on 24 December. Darlan was assassinated. Instead of watching Darlan for possible traitorous moves, the Allied C.-in-C. could devote himself to his primary task of driving the Axis out of Tunisia. The military promenade to Tunis, which the Allies had anticipated became a "soldiers' battle" reminiscent of World War I. The great conception had been ruined by political delays; delivery had come too late.



# ARRIVAL OF E.A.C. SQUADRONS NOV. & DEC. 1942

No. 600 BEAUFIGHTER (N.F.) SQDN. ARRIVED 18.11.42 & MOVED TO MAISON BLANCHE 7.12.42  
No. 326 (L.B.) WING H.Q. ARRIVED 13.11.42 & MOVED TO SETIF 2.12.42  
No. 18 BISLEY SQDN. ARRIVED 11.11.42 & MOVED TO CANROBERT 30.11.42  
No. 114 BISLEY SQDN. ARRIVED 15.11.42 & MOVED TO CANROBERT 5.12.42  
No. 13 BISLEY SQDN. ARRIVED 15.11.42 & MOVED TO CANROBERT 1.12.42  
No. 614 BISLEY SQDN. ARRIVED 18.11.42 & MOVED TO CANROBERT 3.12.42

No. 142 WELLINGTON SQDN. ARRIVED 18.12.42  
No. 150 WELLINGTON SQDN. ARRIVED 18.12.42

No. 323 (F.) WING H.Q. ARRIVED 8.11.42  
No. 253 HURRICANE SQDN. ARRIVED 10.11.42 & MOVED TO PHILIPPEVILLE 21.11.42  
No. 43 HURRICANE SQDN. ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO JEMMAPES 9.3.43  
No. 4 P.R.U. ARRIVED 13.11.42

No. 322 (F.) WING H.Q. ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO BONE 18.11.42  
No. 154 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO DJIDJELLI 12.11.42  
No. 81 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO BONE 13.11.42  
No. 242 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO DJIDJELLI 14.11.42  
No. 225 HURRIBOMBER SQDN. ARRIVED 14.11.42 & MOVED TO BONE 17.11.42

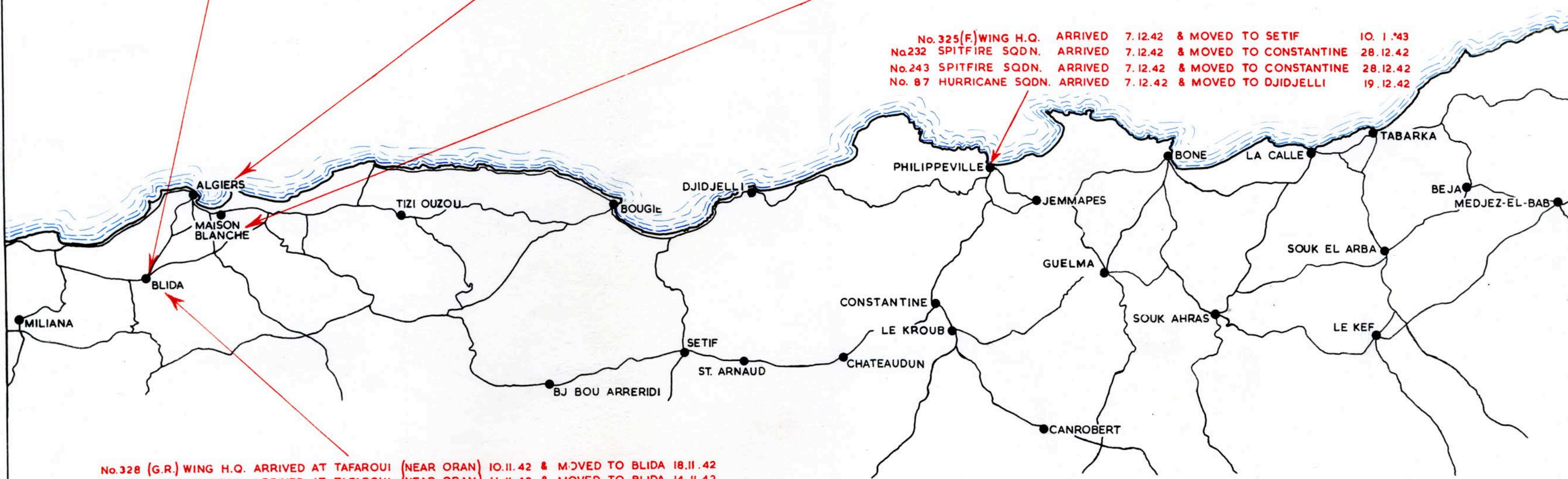
No. 324 (F.) WING H.Q. ARRIVED 13.11.42 & MOVED TO SOUK EL ARBA 17.11.42  
No. 93 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 13.11.42 & MOVED TO SOUK EL ARBA 21.11.42  
No. 152 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 14.11.42 & MOVED TO SOUK EL ARBA 24.11.42  
No. 72 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 16.11.42 & MOVED TO BONE 18.11.42  
No. 111 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 11.11.42 & MOVED TO BONE 14.11.42  
No. 255 BEAUFIGHTER (N.F.) SQDN. ARRIVED 15.11.42 & MOVED TO SETIF 16.12.42

No. 32 HURRICANE SQDN. ARRIVED 10.12.42 & MOVED TO PHILIPPEVILLE 10.12.42  
No. 241 HURRIBOMBER SQDN. ARRIVED 29.11.42 & MOVED TO CONSTANTINE 14.12.42  
No. 153 BEAUFIGHTER (N.F.) SQDN. ARRIVED 20.12.42

AIR HEADQUARTERS ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO MAISON CARREE 14.11.42  
No. 242 GROUP H.Q. ARRIVED 8.11.42 & MOVED TO JEMMAPES 20.11.42

No. 325 (F.) WING H.Q. ARRIVED 7.12.42 & MOVED TO SETIF 10.1.43  
No. 232 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 7.12.42 & MOVED TO CONSTANTINE 28.12.42  
No. 243 SPITFIRE SQDN. ARRIVED 7.12.42 & MOVED TO CONSTANTINE 28.12.42  
No. 87 HURRICANE SQDN. ARRIVED 7.12.42 & MOVED TO DJIDJELLI 19.12.42

No. 328 (G.R.) WING H.Q. ARRIVED AT TAFAROU (NEAR ORAN) 10.11.42 & MOVED TO BLIDA 18.11.42  
No. 500 HUDSON SQDN. ARRIVED AT TAFAROU (NEAR ORAN) 11.11.42 & MOVED TO BLIDA 14.11.42  
No. 608 HUDSON SQDN. ARRIVED AT BLIDA 24.11.42



SCALE 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100 MILES



## CHAPTER 7

THE OPENING PHASES OF THE TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN

No. 333 Grp.  
files passim.

In the planning stage Torch, the planning staffs realised that the early occupation of Tunisia was fundamental to the success of the operation. To this end plans were prepared to meet the possible situations with which the Allied Expeditionary Force might be faced with when they got ashore. Whatever the opposition the French offered it was of the utmost importance that measures should be taken immediately on disembarkation to seize any opportunity to move rapidly eastwards.

H.Q. No. 333 Grp.  
Operation  
Order No. 1

The principal objectives in the drive to Tunis were the occupation of ports and airfields. All available means of transport, by road, by air or by sea were to be employed to send forward fighter squadrons with the army. The airfields on which these fighter squadrons were to be stationed initially were at Djidjelli, Bone, Bizerta and Tunis.

Ibid  
Appendix 'B'

Plans for the Occupation of Djidjelli and Bone

The immediate objectives, however, were limited to the occupation of the aerodromes Djidjelli and Bone; and it was intended that this should be accomplished by D plus 2 (10 November). The forces detailed for the occupation of Djidjelli were:-

- 1 Squadron of fighters
- $\frac{1}{2}$  Servicing Commando
- 1 Advanced Landing Ground Signals Section;

Ibid  
Appendix 'C'

for Bone

- 1 Fighter Squadron
- 1 A/A Flt. R.A.F. Regiment
- $\frac{1}{2}$  Servicing Commando
- A detachment of H.Q. Signals Section

These Units were to come from No. 322(F) Wing. Defence arrangements at Djidjelli were to be the responsibility of No. 36 Brigade Group which, it was intended, would have captured Djidjelli before the arrival of the R.A.F. Units. As soon as these units were established at Djidjelli and the airfield was reported ready to receive aircraft one Squadron of Spitfires was to be flown to Djidjelli on D plus 1. But on no account was it to leave Maison Blanche until the executive order was received.

The occupation of Bone was dependent upon a sufficient number of U.S. transport aircraft being available, and the number and time of their availability could not be forecast accurately. The occupation of the airfield at Bone depended, too, on the military occupying it prior to the arrival of R.A.F. units. It was hoped that this could be done by D plus 1.

The capture of Djidjelli and Bone Airfields

Without waiting for the successful conclusion to the Allied operations at Oran and Casablanca, the General Officer Commanding First Army arrived in Algiers on 9 November, (D plus 1) to take charge of the advance to the East. On the following day, information was received that small numbers of Axis troops had arrived in Bizerta and Tunis by air. It became all the more imperative for the advance eastwards to be accelerated and for the aerodromes at Djidjelli and Bone to be seized without delay, in order that

G-3  
report  
IIJ/90(A)

the necessary air cover for the assault forces moving by sea and by road could be provided.

On the 10 November (D plus two) a convoy left Algiers carrying the 36th Army Brigade for the capture of the port of Bougie. With this convoy the s.s. Awatea left Algiers carrying one battalion of the 5th Buffs, half of No. 3202 Servicing Commando, with sufficient Stores and R.A.F. equipment, and five-hundred tons of petrol. The 5th Buffs and the Servicing Commando were to capture Djidjelli.

The Awatea reached Djidjelli at 0200 hours on the morning of the 11th. There was a strong north-easterly breeze and the Senior Naval Officer on board decided that the surf was too heavy to risk a landing, although some of the R.A.F. and Army Officers favoured an attempt. Instead of sailing round the headland to the harbour of Djidjelli where the troops could have been landed unopposed, the Awatea was diverted to Bougie to join the force scheduled to land there. In company with the Bougie convoy, the Awatea waited for several hours while parleyings went on with the French civil authorities.

In the meanwhile, the news that the capture of the airfield had not been achieved as planned was received by S.A.S.O., Eastern Air Command. He was placed in a difficult position. With him on the Headquarters ship H.M.S. Bulolo were G.O.C., First Army and Naval Commander, E.T.F. The S.A.S.O. decided that he must take the risk of sending a squadron at first light on the 12th in order that it could provide air cover for the troopships in Bougie harbour and so that it would be there ready to refuel and go into action as soon as petrol had arrived. For it was understood that petrol would be sent to the airfield by road from Bougie on the afternoon of the 11 November.

The arrangements for the protection of the assault convoy were that the Navy would be responsible by means of aircraft from H.M.S. Argus until 1200 hours on 11th. Unfortunately the Argus was damaged on the morning of the 11th and although the squadron of R.A.F. fighters had not been established at Djidjelli, the Carrier was withdrawn as the N.C.X.F. did not relish the idea of Carriers working within range of Axis shore-based aircraft. Attempts were made by squadrons at Maison Blanche to provide patrols over the port but owing to the distance at which they were operating they could only remain over the patrol area for a few minutes of their flying time; the journey to the convoy involving a flight of over four-hundred miles. Thus apart from these short appearances the enemy were given ample opportunity to bomb.

During the morning, Axis photographic reconnaissance aircraft had reconnoitered the convoy, and it was not long before enemy bombers appeared. At 1300 hours the first wave of enemy bombers attacked. This was followed by a heavy raid at dusk during which a number of vessels were sunk. Early on 12 November, heavy enemy bombing again occurred, with a consequent dislocating effect upon the off-loading of the convoy.

Meanwhile No.154 Squadron arrived at Djidjelli airfield early on the 12th. The aircraft were serviced by the advanced party of No.3202 Servicing Commando which had arrived early on 12th. The squadron then made one sortie with six aircraft which were refuelled by draining the tanks of the rest of the squadron. Thereafter the squadron was immobilised until the arrival of petrol. This was to have been sent by road on the morning of the 12th but owing to lack

C.M.H.  
Operation  
Torch Vol.II  
Adm/Report  
M.O./43

Admty. Report  
M.O.  
Signal from  
N.C.X.F. to  
N.C.E.T.F.

O.R.B.  
No. 43 Sqdn.

O.R.B. No.154  
Squadron



of transport was sent by sea. It did not arrive till midnight 12th/13th.

Once petrol was received at Djidjelli airfield, No.154 Squadron began operating. By that time, however, the 36th Brigade had lost much of its equipment.

The capture of the airfield, deemed so essential to the advance in Tunisia, was more successful. The plan for seizing Bone airfield was dependent upon the number of U.S. transport aircraft available. It was hoped the airfield would be in allied hands by 10 November (D plus one). Two companies of British paratroops were to be dropped on the airfield. At the same time No.6 Commando was to land by sea and secure the port of Bone.

O.R.B. No.43  
Group

O.R.B's No.81  
and 111 Sqdn.

As it was, this attack could not be mounted till the 12th.(1) At dawn on that day, six Hurricane IIC of No.43 Squadron escorted thirty C-47's of the XII Transport Command to Bone, where two companies of No.3 parachute battalion were dropped successfully. The following day No.81 Squadron was sent to Bone and the next day was joined by No.111 Squadron. They both received a rough reception being continually attacked by J.U.88's, He 111's, Me 109's and Macchis and Bredas.(2)

#### Air Support of First Army

After the capture of Algiers and Bougie, the 78th Division moved East to capture Bizerta and Tunis before the enemy could build up sufficient strength to stop them. With the Divisional Commander was an R.A.F. Officer (Wing Commander) with experience of Army Co-operation. Along with the Divisional Headquarters was advanced Air Signals Corps (A.A.S.C.).

C.P.S./87/Air  
IIA1/25/1/69

From the first it had been doubted if Tunisia could be taken as an immediate sequel to Torch, but it was felt that an all out effort must be made. Soon after the departure of 78 Division, G.O.C. First Army moved forward with a Command Post. He had informed No.333 Group of his intention during the planning stage and a small R.A.F. Command Post (C.P.) Unit had been established to accompany him. It had been foreseen that it would at some stage be necessary to form the units supporting the Army into a group and an officer had been appointed (Air Commodore G. M. Lawson) to the Command Post to take command of the Group when required. This was to be No.242 Group.

#### The Army Advance

C.S.21833

G-3 report  
11J/90(A)

The Allied ground movement eastward was undertaken by under strength Army Units with inadequate motor transport. Yet by 15 November Tabarka was taken and on the 18th the British paratroopers who had been dropped at Souk-el-Arba had come into contact with the Germans. About the same time the U.S. paratroopers dropped at Youks-les-Bans occupied Gafsa airfield, and had come up against Italian patrols. By this time the Tunisian French forces under Edmond Barre had come over to the Allied side and formed a screen between the Axis troops and the gathering British-American forces. During the last days of November a gallant allied advance was made on Mateur, Taboura, and Medjez-el-Bab. On the

(1) See appendix 5.

(2) Eleven men of the Squadrons ground crews were killed.

28th Djedeida was reached, only twelve miles from Tunis. But there the advance stopped.

#### British System of Air Support

The position when 78th Division who were fighting the battle, first experienced air attack and required air support was as follows:-

C.P.S./S19/Air  
IIA1/25/1/17

With the Divisional Commander was the A.A.S.C. by which tasks could be passed to the Bisley Wing at Canrobert and to the fighter wings at Souk-el-Arba and Bone. But the primary duty of the Wing at Bone was to protect the port and convoys, and with the best will in the world the Wing Commander was often unable to meet the 78th Division's demands.

A/C Lawson's  
Diary

Air Commodore G. M. Lawson, had been responsible for the operation of forward squadrons since he joined the Army Support Group Command Post at Jemappes on November 20. The intention had been that the command post should function as a small mobile headquarters, to provide the Officer Commanding with the means of controlling air operations. But the constant movement of the headquarters from one place to another - at the instance of the Army - and the fact that the only means of communication with the forward airfields was through the Army close support signals organisation, made it very difficult for him to exercise any control at all over his Air Forces. He summed up the situation in which he was placed in a letter addressed to the E.A.C. and written on the 23 November.

IIJ.15/53/7.  
Encls.7A

"At present communications are in a chaotic condition. Advanced A.F.H.Q.s. Command Signal Section is working but cannot get communication with any of the forward aerodromes or A.H.Q. The Signal personnel here are convinced it is due to the fact that the receiver stations have not been told of the existence of Command Post or of the frequencies on which they are working and above all of the necessity of maintaining permanent listening watch and clearing any traffic originated. Quite candidly I am astonished at every point I have visited of the lack of knowledge of the operational set-up and of the urgency for drive in getting proper communications established. This low flying attack is a menace and is the Huns counter to our build up. I have issued instructions regarding the essential need for dispersal and alertness of A.A. Patrols are being maintained over aerodromes. Apart from that the only other action is to reply in the same manner. We are handicapped in attempting this by the lack of fighters capable of carrying bombs located in the forward area. If it continues, and if Souk-el-Arba have the fighters to spare I shall try and lay on a Squadron Straffe, but my main duty is to conserve fighters, at least at present, to sweep over the battle area when the move forward commences. The General is continually emphasising the need for sustained bombing, both day and night, on Bizerta and Tunis. I have told him on every occasion that this is realised and is actually taking place. It has developed into a slogging match with aerodromes and aircraft as the main objective on both sides. We see and feel our losses; the enemy's are not so obvious or apparent, but are I am sure nevertheless heavy."

An attempt to remedy this state of affairs was made on 6 December, when No.242 Group was formed at Algiers. The Group moved to Ain Seymour on the 15th of that month.

H.Q. 242 Group.  
Org. Memo No.1  
(File-  
EAC/280/1/Air)

It was intended that the Group should assume responsibility for duties formerly carried out by the Command Post, and would take over the planning for and operational control of Nos.322(F), 324(F) and 326(L.B.) Wings. The administrative control of these Wings was to remain with the Headquarters of Eastern Air Command. Air Commodore Lawson was appointed in command, his Senior Air Staff Officer being Group Captain T. C. Traill.

#### E.A.C. Situation at end of November

Signal 2.12.  
E.A.C. -  
Air Min.  
(Encl.15A)  
(E.A.C. Signals  
(out.)

By the end of November, Eastern Air Command became seriously worried about their supply of fighters. The average serviceability in the Spitfire Squadrons was only nine aircraft. On the 2 December in a signal to the Air Ministry it was pointed out that the Squadrons were still operating on a Commando basis, and from ill-prepared airfields, and that wastage had been exceptionally heavy - approximating to 100 per cent. That until the Squadron's ground echelons and R.S.U's arrived in the forward area no improvement in this rate could be expected. The Army was now preparing an offensive. Air Marshal Welsh visited General Anderson at his Command post at Ain Seymour to discuss air support of the 78th Division in its advance on Tunis. General Anderson asked that in the meantime, and to coincide with his attack, the maximum bombing effort should be made upon the airfield at Tunis. It was agreed that the Air Force should occupy the landing ground at Medjez el Bab by the 2 December.

O.R.B.  
E.A.C.  
November, 1942

#### Dissatisfaction of First Army with Air Support

The Army were very dissatisfied with the support given by the Royal Air Force. A situation report issued by the First Army Command Post on the 3 December is typical of their attitude at this time:-

C.P. 1st Army  
Sit. Report.  
3 and 4 Dec.  
1942. (File -  
EAC/211/3/  
air ops.)

"Enemy Air Forces still active against ground troops, but our Air Force made at least one successful attack on Ju.87's forcing them to jettison bombs. Unusually heavy dive bombing in the morning. The attempt will definitely be made tomorrow to operate fighters from Medjez el Bab aerodrome in the hope of alleviating the burden this continued dive bombing places on very tired troops whom I cannot relieve for at least another three days. Until this air threat can be properly dealt with there seemed no possibility of lessening the effort which I must demand from the R.A.F. and U.S. Squadrons now supporting me."

A.F.H.Q.  
67/17  
outgoing  
C.-in-C. review

#### Allied Commander-in-Chief's Opinion

On the 3 December General Eisenhower had summed up the situation in these words:-

"In pell mell race for Tunisia we have gone beyond sustainable limit of air capabilities in support of ground forces, result is that although Air Forces have been working at maximum force without even minimum repair and supply and maintenance facilities, the scale of possible air support is not sufficient to keep down the hostile strafing and dive bombing that is largely responsible for breaking up all attempted advances by ground forces. Air Commanders report that from two days to one week more of present scale air operations under existing conditions will leave them near or at complete breakdown, and yet this scale of air effort is not sufficient to provide reasonable conditions for air operations. We must arrange at once for advanced



operating airfields, air maintenance troops well forward, stocks of spare parts and supplies in advanced 'dromes warning devices and A.A. To do these we need a breathing space as well as proper air cover over land and sea routes of communications in rear areas.

Deliberate undertaking of this purpose will cut down air operations in forward areas, to bomber attacks on ports and hostile lines of communication, with occasional fighter attacks against existing airfields. This will reduce our ground operations to consolidating principal gains I am arranging for additional heavy bombers to help us for a few days in this critical problem. These may come from the Middle East if Tedder approves, otherwise I will take a U.S. Group from the United Kingdom. This will be a temporary mission only."

#### Discussions on Air Support

The Army had intended to open an offensive on the 2 December, but had been forced to postpone it because of a German attack on that date. The Eastern Air Command sent a signal to the First Army in which this decision was noted, and continued "you asked for maximum bombing effort to be timed with your offensive on 2/3 December. Is this also to be postponed? Must warn you maximum effort cannot be sustained indefinitely".

On the 3 December a Commander-in-Chief's conference was held in Algiers, at which General Spaatz, Air Marshal Welsh, General Craig, General Doolittle and Air Vice Marshal Robb, were present. It was decided that the target date for the resumption of offensive operations on a large scale against Tunis should be 9 December and that the intervening period should be used to consolidate and build up the Bomber and Fighter Forces. Certain changes were also to be made in the then existing distribution of Squadrons in the forward area in order to prevent aircraft being destroyed on the ground between then and 9 December. It was agreed that the maximum bomber effort should be directed against airfields, and that the period between dawn and the arrival of the bombers should be filled in by low flying attacks by fighters.

The next day a message was sent to A.O.C.-in-C., M.E. Air Chief Marshal Tedder, stating that all E.A.C. fighters had been employed at maximum intensity during the past ten days, that their losses, mostly on the ground, had been very heavy, and requesting the loan of any single seater fighters which could be spared. He replied that he regretted that no Spitfires were available, but that a limited number of Hurricanes could and would be sent as soon as they were demanded.

On the same day the Air Officer Commanding, E.A.C., sent a letter by hand to Air Commodore Lawson at the command post ordering him to withdraw immediately four of his squadrons from active participation in the operations which were then being executed. To this Lawson replied that the Army were most concerned at the effect of enemy dive-bombing on their forward troops, that the 78 Division was urging him to provide more and more support, and that the Army considered the withdrawal of four squadrons at this juncture quite impracticable.

He went on to say that the Brigadier General Staff had spoken to G.O.C., First Army, who had certainly agreed at the conference to the withdrawal of the four squadrons, but he had said that he now felt that, in view of the recent reverses in the field, unless the troops were to get adequate support

against dive-bombing there might not be a "D" day and that there might have to be a considerable withdrawal, which might possibly endanger the forward airfields. Air Commodore Lawson ended by asking the Air Officer Commanding to take the matter up personally with the Army Commander.

On the 9 December, General Anderson sent a personal signal to Air Marshal Welsh "Have just heard all aircraft at Youks tomorrow being employed special tasks. Thus completely removing them from task of supporting Fifth Corps. As this special task presumably connected with operation First Army would much appreciate being at least informed of nature of task if not consulted beforehand. Co-operation not easy when kept in the dark".

The Air Officer Commanding replied on the 10th "I failed to get you on the telephone yesterday. E.A.C. Command post was instructed to inform you of this operation, details of which could not be given on the 'phone. Attack on Sfax - Sousse - Tunis railway communications most desirable. In view of your SITREP No.15 and of weather over Fifth Corps area, I ordered this attack to take place today. It is proposed to continue these attacks unless situation in Fifth Corps area necessitates the aircraft. Lawson has authority to call the aircraft whenever he considers necessary". This signal bore the date 10/12 and the originator's number was A.119.

A signal bearing the number A.118 addressed to the Command Post (Lawson) was sent on the same date. It read "In view of the situation in Fifth Corps area, U.S. Squadrons at Youks Les Bains have been instructed to carry out attacks on the Tunis - Sousse - Sfax railway and road communications. The aircraft are at your call should conditions in Fifth Corps area demand it. Five hours' notice however will be required before the Squadrons will be available on account of other operations".

General Anderson replied "I have established my H.Q. at Constantine using present Command Post as a permanent signal and advanced report centre. I most sincerely hope you too will come to Constantine. The present lack of liaison is hopeless and affects many matters between us both "G" and "Q". E.T.F. area is by no means confined to Fifth Corps area. There was a heavy enemy attack this afternoon and certainly Lawson would have welcomed extra help had it been possible. But close support at five hours' notice is farcical. Spitfires did succeed for first time in carrying out successful planned ground strafing in land battle. We want more of this on a larger scale. I agree that other tasks may often be essential, but please let us plan them together for whole Eastern theatre".

Ibid

As a result of this communication, the matter was discussed on the 11 December, at a meeting at which the following officers were present, General Eisenhower, General Spaatz, Air Chief Marshal Tedder, Air Marshal Welsh and Air Commodore Lawson. It was decided to call General Anderson back to Algiers for a Conference. No record of the proceedings at this conference can be traced, but a note in the relevant file merely states that General Anderson attended the conference with the officers previously mentioned, plus General Beddell-Smith, the Chief of Staff and General Clark the Deputy Commander in Chief. The date being the 12 December. It was agreed that General Anderson situated at Constantine was not fully in touch with the activities of Allied Force Headquarters nor closely in touch with Fifth Corps. No useful purpose could be served

by Air Marshal Welsh transferring his Headquarters to Constantine. Relations between the two Services were little better after this as is evidenced by a signal sent on the 19 December from the Command Post. Yanks objective for 20th/21st are two sorties on 09394" (target map reference). "request confirmation that this programme will not be interrupted as happened today without previous arrangements with Fifth Corps and No.242 Group." Shortly afterwards orders were issued that in future co-ordination of bomber effort was to be undertaken by A.F.H.Q., and that bombing requests were to be addressed to A.F.H.Q. not to E.A.C. But as no direct communication existed between the First Army and A.F.H.Q. requirements had still to be passed to A.F.H.Q. through E.A.C. signal channels.

On the 23 December the proposed Army general offensive was postponed for 48 hours, and on the 25th postponed until further orders.

Despite the time the bad weather gave for re-organisation the system was not improved. In early January, the Fifth Corps were about to stage an operation on the 36 Brigade front, which would have required strong fighter support. A few days before it was due to start it was discovered that neither Lawson nor the Air Officer Commanding had been informed of the intended operation. At the last minute, previously arranged co-operation with the Americans and French had to be cancelled, in an attempt to provide for the needs of the Fifth Corps. To make matters worse, Bone was heavily attacked during the early days of January and the E.A.C. had to tell the First Army that support could not be given as the defence of the port had the highest priority.

An attempt was made to provide some units of the Twelfth Air Force operating from Youks, who were placed at Lawson's disposal for one day (4 January 1943) but the operation was postponed owing to bad weather. On the next day the Americans failed to execute their allotted task as the bombers had arrived late and the fighters had to refuel. When asked to attack the target at about noon instead, they replied that they must first get permission from the U.S. A.H.Q. Air Marshal Welsh was obliged to bring this incident to the notice of General Spaatz.

IIJ.1/228/8  
Box.1

Another difficulty caused by the Americans was in the use of airfields. It had been previously arranged that a maximum of two transport squadrons only could be based on Blida at one time. On the 9 January between sixty-five and seventy C.47s were reported to be congesting the airfield. This had been going on for some time and persisted long after the Air Officer Commanding had made urgent representations to General Spaatz for their removal.

IIJ.15/45/2

These few instances are typical of the difficulties encountered and the clash of personalities. General Anderson, impressed by the local successes of the German dive-bomber against his untried troops, wished Lawson to employ similar tactics. Lawson was reluctant to adopt them, indeed he had been forbidden to do so by his Air Officer Commanding who in a signal sent on the 3 January, 1943, had said "the primary role of the fighter is to destroy enemy aircraft. It should only be used as a long range gun on ground targets in exceptional circumstances".

#### The Allied Advance Halted

Meanwhile on the 5 December six aircraft of No.93 Squadron were detailed to land at Medjez el Bab. When they



O.R.B. 93 Sqdn.  
Dec.1942

A/C Lawson's  
Diary  
Dec.5, 1942

323 Wing 5 Dec.  
"Instruction to  
pilots on arrival in  
North Africa" (File -  
EAC/280/1/Air)

242 Group Org.  
and Memoranda

E.A.C. Ops.  
Summary No.31  
11 Dec.1942

E.A.C. Ops.  
Summaries  
Dec.1942 (File -  
EAC/211/1/1/  
Air)

O.R.B. 225 Sqdn.  
24.12.42

arrived they found the enemy had established a standing patrol of F.W.190's overhead. Two Spitfires were shot down, and the remainder got back to Souk el Arba in a badly damaged condition. Air Commodore Lawson, was convinced that the enemy were obtaining information as to the First Army's intended movements, and ordered the immediate withdrawal of all R.A.F. personnel from the landing ground at Medjez el Bab.

It is necessary to have a clear picture of the situation and availability of the forward airfields in North Africa, in order to understand the difficulties of the R.A.F. Commander. One hundred and forty miles east of Maison Blanche, situated on the coast, was the airfield at Djidjelli. The landing ground was small and became very soft after rain. A Sommerfeld track was being laid, so that the Squadron in occupation was compelled to use an even more unsatisfactory landing ground at Taher, ten miles to the eastward. Seventy miles east of Djidjelli, also on the coast, was Philippeville, where Sommerfeld track was being laid, as the airfield became unusable after heavy rain. Bone, fifty miles east of Philippeville, about one mile from the sea, had only one runway completed, and the landing ground also became unusable after rain.

The most forward airfield was situated at Souk el Arba, sixty miles east south east of Bone - and a Sommerfeld track was in process of being laid. The airfield became unusable after rain, and was continually bombed by the enemy at night. Distribution of the Fighter Squadrons in the forward areas on the 11 December was as follows:-

At Djidjelli: No. 154 Squadron

At Philippeville: No.253 Squadron

At Bone: Squadrons Nos.81, 242 and 225

At Souk el Arba: Squadrons Nos. 72, 255, 89, 93, 152, 111 and a detachment of 225.(1)

Thus the greater part of the British Fighter strength was concentrated on one airfield, and that situated approximately one hundred miles from Tunis. The airfield itself was unsatisfactory in that it was liable to become unserviceable at very short notice after heavy rain. The maintenance of the aircraft was difficult, as the squadrons were still operating under commando conditions, and without their regular ground crews. The whole position was extremely unsatisfactory. The policy at this time seems to have been to attempt to provide continuous fighter cover over any forward area which was being continually dive bombed. Thus protective patrols were constantly maintained over Algiers, Djidjelli, Philippeville and Bone. Originally Hurricanes on tactical reconnaissance had been sent out unescorted - this had led to such heavy losses that the practice had grown of providing Spitfire escorts in ever increasing numbers, with the result that very little tactical reconnaissance could be undertaken. Attacks were made on the enemy airfield at Mateur. Hurribombers seldom more than six in number attacked enemy gun sites. Spitfires sometimes up to squadron strength escorted American bombers over Tunis, and sweeps consisting of from six to eighteen aircraft were made over enemy occupied territory. At night, Beaufighters were operated most successfully, causing very heavy losses among enemy aircraft.

(1) For a comparison of the distance of British and Axis aircraft from front line see Map No. 8.

Gen. Anderson's  
Despatch  
C.S. 21833

The Army, after prolonged heavy fighting, had made progress as far as the outskirts of Djedeida, and this was to prove the nearest point to Tunis that was to be reached until the final stage of the campaign. Indecisive fighting continued until the 23 December, when as a result of very heavy rain over a period of three days, the ground was turned into a quagmire and the attack on Tunis had to be postponed. On the same day nearly all the forward airfields were reported unserviceable.

C.A.S. File  
No. 1763 C.-in-C.  
to P.M.

Gen. Eisenhower had written to the Prime Minister that the Military outlook depended upon several factors, of which the most important was his ability to build-up fighter cover over his ground troops. This, in turn, depended upon getting supplies, establishing forward airfields and keeping up a rapid flow of fighter aircraft until the battle was won. Weather was also important until all airfields could be provided with hard surfaced runways. It was of paramount importance that the lines of communication should be working so well that all ground and air troops should be assured of adequate cover when more intensive fighting began again. He mentioned also that the airfields used by his bombers, were so far away from their targets, that the scale of air bombing was not nearly as heavy as was desired.

E.A.C. Ops.  
Summaries  
Dec. 1942  
(File -  
E.A.C./211/1/1/  
Air)

On Christmas day the airfield at Souk el Arba was reported as "serviceable for light aircraft in emergency only". What the Squadron personnel at Souk el Arba thought about the conditions is best illustrated by the examples taken at random from Operation Record books No. 111 Squadron records:- "A pretty miserable day, raining all the time and bogging the aircraft. The pilots spent the day trying to get them out, and came back at dusk dead to the world". No. 152 (Hyderabad) Squadron states:- "Rained most of the day, kites bogged, pilots spent most of the day trying to unbog them .... in fact a shambles for Xmas day". So, as in the 1914-18 war, mud proved a greater obstacle to success, than any operation of war on the part of the enemy.

#### Reasons for the Halt

IIJ/15/34

The weather had worsened and turned the Medjerda Valley into a sea of mud. Armoured vehicles were bogged down and all motor transport had difficulty in moving. Supplies and reinforcements were greatly hindered by the mud. Of equal importance was the fact that the ground forces had emerged beyond the effective range of their own fighter cover for Allied fighters could only fly over the lines for a short time and the few P-38s (Lightnings) available, were insufficient to provide continuous patrols and had besides other equally important commitments. The result was that German aircraft avoided combat when Allied fighters appeared only to return when the Spitfires had disappeared. So close were the Ju.87s to the front that air support was furnished within five or ten minutes after the requests were made. (1)

#### Bomber Operations in Support of First Army

The advance of the Army into Tunisia proceeded much faster than had been expected and units of No. 328 (G.R.) Wing, Nos. 608 and 500 Squadrons, Hudsons and some Swordfish of No. 813 Squadron, which had moved from Tafaraoui, were stationed at Blida. To add to the confusion, an advance party of No. 2771 R.A.F. Regiment Squadron with six armoured cars arrived, and Nos. 60 and 64 Groups, American Transport Aircraft (C.47s) with about seventy C.47s (Dakotas) on the

O.R.B.  
326 Wing

(1) See Chapter 13 and also Map No. 8.



airfield from day to day. Information was then received that Wing was likely to move forward and use Setif as a base and Ain Beida as an advanced landing ground. Consequently the administration of Blida station was handed over to No.328 (G.R.) Wing.

O.R.B.  
326 Wing

An advance party from the Wing found that Setif was not really fit for operational night flying, and that the airfield lighting arrangements had been destroyed. The buildings were dirty and in occupation by an American Bofor unit. The advance party of No.13 Squadron went to Ain Beida and found that the landing ground was unsuited for use by Bisleys as it was small, stony and had a very rough surface. They found, however, a suitable landing ground at Canrobert, but there were no buildings of any kind on it. Between 1 and 5 December the Squadrons Nos. 13, 18, 114, and 614 moved into Canrobert, arrangements being made to take over various buildings in Canrobert village for aircrew accommodation. The organisation of the Wing was then decided upon as follows:-

Wing administration forward at Setif

Operational staff at Canrobert.

All maintenance of aircraft was to be done at Setif. It was decided that the landing ground at Setif was unfit for operational use at night. On the 15 December No.2771 (D) Squadron was sent to Canrobert to take over defence duties at that airfield.

O.R.B.  
All Squadrons

O.R.B.  
13 Squadron

The Squadrons had arrived at Blida in the following order; No.18 (Burma) Squadron on the 11 November; No.114 on the 10th and Nos.13 and 614 on the 18th; most of the Squadrons lost aircraft on the long flight from England via Gibraltar to Blida, (No.18 Squadron losing seven from various causes, en route). They arrived to find only one Squadron's ground personnel were available to service the four Squadrons.

O.R.B.  
18 Squadron

O.R.B.  
18 Squadron

No.18 Squadron made the first operation within seventeen hours of the aircraft arriving at Blida. On the night of the 11th, six Bisleys attacked El Aouina airfield at Tunis; only one aircraft was successful. Another night attack was made on the 14th - on the airfield at Sidi Ahmed at Bizerte; only three succeeded in making successful attacks. By day, on the 15th, a little better effort was made in which four aircraft were able to bomb the target at Bizerte. On the same date, a night attack was also made on this target, which resulted in three aircraft bombing Sidi Ahmed airfield. On the 17th an attempt at a low level bombing attack on this target was made by twelve aircraft in formation at a height of about one hundred and fifty feet. Eight attacked successfully and four aircraft were lost. On the night of the 19th a combined raid by all four Bisleys Squadrons (19 aircraft in all), led by the Officer Commanding (G/C. Sinclair) in person, attacked the docks at Bizerte. Opposition was slight, and direct hits were seen on ships and on the docks. By the night of the 20th, No.18 Squadron were having to borrow four aircraft from other Squadrons to make up a flight of six aircraft to attack the docks at Bizerte.

O.R.B.  
18 Squadron

O.R.B.  
614 Squadron

During the rest of the month of November the Wing made attacks on Tunis and Bizerte, but after heavy rain Blida airfield became unusable at times and the lack of maintenance resulted in an ever decreasing bombing effort being expended. An extract from one of the Squadron's O.R.B. gives a true picture of the state of things on the ground: "only about 10% of the unit equipment was found, but no camp kit belonging to the officers. The Squadron is operating without either



SECRET

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an Adjutant or an orderly room. The Squadron is finding difficulty in the operating of its aircraft and maintenance thereof, due to lack of transport. This is shown in the trouble experienced in bombing up aircraft. The Group Captain states that all transport must be pooled in future".

O.R.B.  
614 Squadron

By the 5 December, all four squadrons had moved from Blida to Canrobert, many of the officers and aircrew being accommodated under canvas. Some officers slept in the local school buildings. There was some sickness among the units. One O.R.B. reads: "Important note. Places must be found for sick personnel three sick cases in Squadron require hospital attention. This is not available due to lack of organisation".

Tactical Operations

O.R.Bs  
All Squadrons

At this period most of the squadrons were employed on tactical reconnaissance for the Army. The procedure was to fly from Canrobert to the landing ground at Souk el Arba, where the majority of the fighter Squadrons were stationed, and from there proceed - often heavily escorted by Spitfires - on their various tasks. Targets such as enemy columns on the road between Mateur and Jefna, Djeida railway junction and the village of Tebourba. By night small attacks were made on the docks at Tunis and Bizerte, and on one occasion five aircraft of No.114 Squadron made an attack on the docks at Bizerte to provide a diversion while Swordfish of 813 Squadron were attacking shipping at Ferryville with torpedoes.

O.R.B.  
114 Squadron  
14 Dec.1942

O.R.B.  
18 Squadron

On the 4 December No.18 (Burma) Squadron were virtually wiped out. Eleven Bisleys, under their Commanding Officer, Wing Commander H. C. Malcolm, left Canrobert for Souk el Arba. At about 0915, six aircraft left "to look for troop concentrations or any suitable target in the Chouigui area". An airfield ten miles north of Chouigui was located and successfully bombed. The aircraft returned to Canrobert, refuelled and went forward again to Souk el Arba. In the afternoon nine Bisleys took off again to bomb the same enemy landing ground at Chouigui. Their Operation Record book states - "No fighter escort was provided but two sweeps of Spitfires operating from Souk el Arba and a third operating from Bone took off ten minutes before the Bisleys to patrol the target area. Shortly before reaching the target, the Spitfires were seen high up engaged in dog-fights with Me.109s. At that moment the hill, which was the map reference given for the aerodrome to be attacked was reached. The formation circled the hill but were unable to locate the landing ground. Some flak was then experienced and attacks by more than fifty Me.109s developed from all sides; consequently bombs were jettisoned in the target area. Only three crews survived the attacks of the fighters. Of these, three officers and one N.C.O. were injured and each of the three aircraft was shot down and destroyed. A fourth plane was also shot down in our own lines, all the crew being killed, while the remaining five are missing".

O.R.B.  
18 Squadron  
4 Dec.1942

As a result of this action,(1) the airmen of the Squadron were withdrawn to Setif, while the unit was reconstructed. The next serious operation was undertaken on the night of the 28 December, when three Bisleys and one Blenheim Mark IV patrolled the roads Pont du Fahs - Tunis - Massicault to bomb suitable targets. One aircraft was lost in this operation.

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(1) W/Cdr. M. C. Malcolm was (posthumously) awarded a Victoria Cross for his part in this action.

O.R.B.  
13 Squadron

No further operations were possible that year. Nor were the other three Squadrons in any better state; the number of aircraft serviceable steadily dropped, until in the case of No.13 Squadron the average was never higher than six aircraft per day available for operations.

EAC/202/5/Air  
Encl.4A and 5A

A record exists of a telephone conversation between the S.A.S.O., E.A.C. and the G.C. commanding No.326 Wing on 6 January, 1943, in which Sinclair states that he has only twelve aircraft serviceable in the whole Wing, and that half his pilots are unfit to fly on dark nights, and suggesting that he conserve his resources for use on moonlight nights. H.Q. E.A.C. Command concurred with this procedure in a signal dated 12 January 1943.

O.R.B.  
326 Wing

Meanwhile changes had been occurring at Setif, the H.Q. of No.326 (L.E.) Wing. On the 12 December Beaufighter aircraft of No.255 Squadron arrived from Bone and Souk el Arba, without orders and with no explanation of their sudden appearance. Not until the 24th was it disclosed that the intention was that Setif was to become a night fighter base (325 Wing G/C Atcherley). On the 31 December No.253 (Hurricane) Squadron fitted with long range tanks, arrived to operate from Setif, as their own airfield, Philippeville had become unserviceable owing to rain. On the 4 January 1943, a conference was held at Setif to discuss the re-organisation of the systems of aircraft maintenance in the Wing (326). "It has been found that the present maintenance system was not wholly satisfactory and that the Squadrons being split up led to difficulties." On 10 January orders were received from E.A.C. that Setif was to be handed over to No.325 Wing and No.326 Wing was to become a lodger unit on that Station. As a result of this, it was decided to move 326 Wing out of Setif altogether and locate all forward at Canrobert, Ain Beida being the new location of No.326 Wing Headquarters. By the 21 January this move had been completed. No.109 R. and S.U. were located at Le Kroub airfield.

EAC/300/5/Air  
3A

EAC/300/15/Air  
16A

The situation which had arisen in the Bisley Wing (326) was typical of the method adopted by the Eastern Air Command, and is worth examination. On the 3 December the Command sent a signal to the Air Ministry stating that the deficiency in Bisley aircraft was thirty and asking for immediate replacement by flown out aircraft. This was followed up by a personal signal from Air Marshal Welsh to Air Vice Marshal Slessor (A.C.A.S.(P)) stating that 326 Wing had been operating from the 12 November and had proved quite unsuitable for day operations - and only capable of operating at night when conditions were very favourable. He went on to say that as he had received only twenty three replacements of aircraft, in spite of repeated requests for greater numbers, and that at the moment the strength was only twenty four he had therefore decided to disband three out of the four Squadrons. He considered that the Wing should be equipped with more modern types of aircraft immediately.

Ibid 30A

O.R.B.  
114 Squadron  
19 Feb.1943

There followed a great deal of correspondence, and signals. Various quite impracticable suggestions were made until at last on the 19 February, a letter was received from the Air Ministry in which the proposal was made to send the crews of one Squadron home to take over eighteen Bostons from No.2 Group and bring them out. No.114 Squadron were selected for this duty. It was also proposed that another squadron should go to the Middle East and fly back the aircraft of one of the Middle East's two Boston Squadrons.

Before these proposals could be implemented, the



American  
Sitreps 18-25  
Feb. 1943

EAC/300/Air 7A

Ibid 17A

American Forces had suffered a reverse in Central Tunisia. The enemy broke through the Kasserine Pass and advanced on Thala and Tebessa. The attack was stemmed by Allied Forces and the enemy retreated again through the Kasserine Pass. No. 114 Squadron was again issued with a few Bisley aircraft and ordered to resume operations. Eastern Air Command had pursued the same procedure in obtaining two Wellington Squadrons from England. As early as the 28 November, the Command was signalling the Air Ministry and asking for the despatch of the two Wellington Squadrons which had been earmarked for the Torch operation. The Air Ministry in reply doubted the necessity of sending these units as they considered the need could be supplied by the American bombers, which were already in the theatre, and questioned the ability of Eastern Air Command to administer and supply such squadrons.

Ibid 22A

Ibid 49A

O.R.Bs.  
142 and 150  
Squadrons

However, Eastern Air Command managed to induce General Eisenhower to endorse their request for two Wellington Squadrons and in the end the Squadrons were sent from England, beginning operations from Blida on the 28 December 1942. These two Squadrons, Nos. 150 and 142, operating at night and carrying a greater weight of bombs, during January 1943 delivered a succession of attacks on Bizerta town, docks and airfield. The weather was very bad, and operations were frequently cancelled. On the average six aircraft per Squadron took off on each raid. In February, in addition to the Bizerte target, the Squadrons were employed on bombing enemy airfields in Sardinia, the object being to protect coast crawling convoys from attack by torpedo bombers based on Sardinian landing ground. One aircraft was also left constantly standing by on call for an emergency anti-submarine strike.

Occasional raids were made on Trapani, an important Axis supply port in Sicily.

O.R.B.  
142 Squadron

Casualties were very light. An aircraft of No. 142 Squadron failed to return from an operation over Bizerte on the night of the 22 February, 1943. This was the first loss due to enemy action which had occurred since the Squadrons landed in North Africa.

#### The War at Sea

C.S. 16228

From the earliest stages of the planning, it was clear that the Torch operation would produce intensive U Boat warfare. It was to be expected that as soon as large assault convoys were discovered, the enemy would concentrate every available submarine along the convoy routes. It was clear too, that even after the assault a G.R. force would be required to provide anti-submarine cover for the Allied shipping passing through the Western Mediterranean to the North African ports. Therefore No. 328 G.R. Wing was formed as part of the Torch force. This wing consisted of:-

A Wing Headquarters (including Beaufort Servicing Units and Mobile Torpedo Unit)

No. 500 Squadron (Hudson)

No. 608 Squadron (Hudson)

No. 107 R.S.U.

No. 134 A.S.P.

Besides these squadrons there were available at Gibraltar,



No.202 and No.210 Flying boat Squadron (Catalina) and No.233 Squadron (Hudson).

#### G.R. Operations by No.328 Wing

The A.O.C. Gibraltar was responsible to the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command for all reconnaissance, convoy escort and anti-submarine searches inside and outside the Mediterranean. But, basing squadrons on Gibraltar involved a large amount of uneconomic flying to and from the areas of patrol. It was therefore important to move to bases in North Africa as early as possible.

#### Arrival of the Squadrons

O.R.B.'s 500 and  
608 Squadrons

See also O.R.B.  
E.A.C. (Air  
Staff)

O.R.B.  
328 Wing

Nine aircraft of No.500 Squadron had arrived in Gibraltar on the 5 November and a further ten on the 6th. On the 9th twenty three Mark V Hudsons of No.608 Squadron flew from Exeter to Gibraltar without incident. The activities of No.500 Squadron before and on D-Day have already been described, with the exception of one sortie on the 9 November, when General Giraud was flown to Blida in an aircraft specially painted in French colours and stripped of all special equipment. An escort of six Spitfires was provided. On landing, the French were found to be still in possession of the airfield and although there were a few British troops there, the attitude of the French was still undecided. On the 10, Wing Commander D. Finlay, Squadron Leader M. Abbott, four cypher sergeants, a W/T pack and three ratings for its maintenance, were flown from Gibraltar to Tafaraoui where they proceeded to set up an advance G.R. operations room for No.328 (G.R.) Wing.

#### No.500 Squadron at Tafaraoui

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

Ten aircraft of No.500 Squadron arrived at Tafaraoui airfield that day, leaving seven behind to operate from Gibraltar. The airfield proved to be large and well constructed; it had two runways each approximating twelve hundred yards in length. Here the Squadron found half of its ground crews, the other half were coming on a later convoy and being landed in Algiers. These ground crews who had landed at Oran must have been the first body of R.A.F. ground troops to set foot in North Africa. They had been put ashore on Arzeu beaches from invasion barges on the night of the 8 and 9 November. French opposition and the presence of snipers inland, had compelled them to spend two nights in the open, without either food or water. The same evening, at dusk, six Swordfish of No.813 Squadron (naval squadron) under Lt. Hutchinson, R.N. flew in from Gibraltar. Orders were received overnight for continuous A/S sweeps to be carried out between the Bay of Arzeu and Cape Sigale. The Swordfish on the next day began these patrols and continued them day by day during the time the Squadron was based at Tafaraoui. The Squadron had been reinforced by six more aircraft on the 11th, but on the 12th six of them were ordered away to Blida, where they performed patrols over Algiers harbour and Bay.

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

No.608 Squadron and half of No.500 Squadron were still operating from Gibraltar, both Squadrons were employed on A/S sweeps with very satisfactory results. A great many

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

submarines were seen and a few destroyed<sup>(1)</sup> One engagement, typical of many, deserves description. On the 14 November, a U-boat had been attacked by a Hudson of No.608 Squadron off Oran and had been so badly damaged that it was unable to submerge. Three aircraft of No.500 Squadron setting out on a sweep, observed the submarine and proceeded to attack it. Very fierce fire from the U-boat was encountered and most of the attacking aircraft were hit. In spite of almost continuous attack with depth charges and A/S bombs, the U-boat fought back with continuous and accurate anti-aircraft fire, until it eventually beached itself. Forty-four prisoners were taken.

O.R.B.  
608 Sqdn. O.R.B.  
328 Wing

On the same day the ground personnel of No.608 Squadron arrived and were stationed at Blida. No.700 (Walrus F.A.A.) Squadron took over the Air France Seaplane base at Quai de Dieppe (Algiers). The Squadron was made up of aircraft from H.M.S's Renown, Duke of York and Bermuda.

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

On the 15th No.608 Squadron made six U-boat sightings of which four developed into attacks. The advantage was not always with the attacking aircraft, for on the same day No.500 Squadron, operating from Tafaraoui had a most unfortunate experience. A fully surfaced U-boat was observed when the aircraft was at seven thousand feet. The pilot immediately dived to fifty feet and delivered an attack, the U-boat still being on the surface. One of the depth charges made a direct hit. There followed an enormous explosion, the U-boat's gun was flung into the air, and the conning tower was ripped open. The aircraft was shattered by the blast, and the rudders, elevators and trimming tabs were blown off. The turret and cabin floor were blown in and six feet of each wing tip was bent vertically upward. The aircraft became uncontrollable, but by using the crew as movable ballast, the pilot managed to climb to fifteen hundred feet, when he ordered the crew to bale out. One parachute failed to open, another of the crew was knocked unconscious as he left the aircraft, the other two, including the pilot fell into the sea in Algiers Bay and were picked up.

#### Sinking of a Submarine Captured by a Hudson

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

On the 17th, a U-boat was attacked by three aircraft of No.500 Squadron. Depth charges blew the bow of the U-boat out of the water and some of the crew emerged from the conning tower. These were machine gunned, and an A/S bomb was dropped among the crew struggling in the water. The boat was successively attacked by two more aircraft and shortly afterwards black smoke was observed coming from the stern of the U-boat and several of the crew came on deck waving white objects in token of surrender. A Hudson flew to Maison Blanche to inform the Naval authorities, who promised to send a destroyer to the scene of action. A Hurricane which flew over to confirm the surrender, saw the U-boat crew sitting on boxes on the deck, obviously waiting to be rescued. Suddenly, in spite of frantic signalling and firing of very lights, a Martlet appeared and started machine gunning the boat, then an Albacore dropped a torpedo and the U-Boat was

O.R.B.  
328 Wing

- (1) During the month of November 3,915 flying hours on the anti-submarine offensive patrols, both east and west of Gibraltar produced 103 sightings of U-boats of which 62 were attacked, resulting in the destruction of U.595, U.259, U.98 and U.331 (the latter being shared with a Naval aircraft) and damage to 18 others. Convoy escort a further 1,885 flying hours during which 6 U-boats were sighted, three of this number being attacked.

completely destroyed. A few survivors were picked up by a Walrus, but the great majority of the U-boat crew perished.(1)

Owing to the indifferent communications, detailed control of detachment at Tafaraoui was not possible from Area Combined Headquarters at Gibraltar, and it had to operate largely on a general directive. During the eight days on which it operated from Tafaraoui the Hudson and Swordfish aircraft flew forty-two and thirty-three sorties respectively. They sighted twenty-three U-boats of which twenty-one were attacked. One of these was driven ashore. On the 18 November the whole attachment moved by air to Blida and local anti-submarine protection for shipping lying at Oran was undertaken by the U.S. Twelfth Air Force.

#### Arrival of G.R. Wing at Blida

O.R.B.  
328 Wing

On the 19th, No.328 (G.R.) Wing's advanced operations room and staff, together with all aircraft operating from Tafaraoui, were transferred to Blida. No.328 Wing Headquarters was installed in Algiers close to the Navy Headquarters. Here they were able to obtain first hand information as to the movements of convoys, the presence of U-boats and Allied Naval movements. From this Headquarters, orders and information were transmitted by tie line to the operations room at Blida. The method of control was exactly the same as that used by a Coastal Command Group in the United Kingdom. The forces available were Nos.500 and 813 Squadrons at Blida, and the Walrus of No.700 Squadron operating from the Dieppe basin in Algiers. No.608 Squadron was still in Gibraltar, although most of their ground crews were at Blida. No.500 Squadron were employed on A/S sweeps extending from 7° E to 1° W and on convoy escorts. There were no signal facilities, aircraft having to pass their messages to Gibraltar. No.700 Squadron provided air cover to some cable repair operations fourteen miles north of Algiers, and No.813 Squadron were on patrol over Algiers Bay. Blida was not nearly such a good airfield as Tafaraoui. There were no runways and the surface was hard mud and liable to become very soft in wet weather. The aircrew quarters resembled those of an American prison and the ground crews had to live in a large hangar. Lice were plentiful and sanitary arrangements primitive.

O.R.B.  
328 Wing

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

On the 22 November, No.500 Squadron escorted convoys bound eastward for Bougie and Bone. Heavy rain started to fall at Blida on the 24th and the airfield became unserviceable. The rest of the squadrons ground crews made their appearance two days later, having spent their first night in Algiers in a shed, and their second in cattle trucks, which had just been handed over from the cattle! During the air raids on Algiers, the squadron stores had been lost in sunken lighters and the ship carrying the incoming mail was torpedoed off Algiers and sunk.

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

On the 28th the airfield was fit for flying again. Three aircraft of No.500 Squadron were escorting a six boat

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

- (1) On the 22nd No.500 Squadron received the following message from the Admiralty:- "Request you convey the congratulations of their Lordships to 500 Squadron (G.R.) on the successful destruction of three U-boats on the 14, 15 and 17 November. The work of the Squadron entailing long hours of flying over the sea can be at times extremely tedious. It is, however, vital and I am glad it has been crowned with such success and I know that more will come."



convoy on its way east; while off Bougie the convoy was attacked by six Ju.88's which bombed it from five hundred feet and destroyed one ship. As a result, fighter protection for all eastbound convoys was increased.

#### The Work of No.700 Naval Squadron

On the 13 November, No.700 Naval Squadron moved into the Air France Seaplane base in Algiers. From here they shared the work of the Swordfish of No.813 Naval Squadron in the daily anti-submarine patrols covering the shipping in Algiers bay.

Towards the end of January the need for harbour patrols had almost disappeared and it was decided to dispense with No.700 Squadron. Three Walrus aircraft left for Gibraltar on the 27 January. The remaining three aircraft were left at Algiers to form the nucleus of an Air/Sea rescue squadron, manned by R.A.F. personnel.

#### General Reconnaissance Policy

On the 9 December the control of Operations was transferred to a new Combined Operations room in the Hotel St. George in Algiers. The Naval Commander had also set up his headquarters there. This new Combined Operations room amounted to an Area Combined Headquarters, controlled all G.R. operations in the Mediterranean, east of the Greenwich Meridian.

As soon as the Wing organisation was complete, and the squadrons installed at Blida, anti-submarine operations became almost a matter of routine. The general policy was to give continuous escort by day to all convoys, to provide escort by night to large or important convoys and if further aircraft were available to make offensive sweeps. The purpose of the night escort was to force U-boats to submerge during the passage of a convoy. It was known that the enemy was reading the A.S.V. and therefore all aircraft kept their A.S.V. switched on at night. This produced numerous disappearing contacts. One of the difficulties of night escort was that the presence of the Hudson aircraft frequently confused the anti-aircraft defences. The Mark II I.F.F. carried in the Hudsons did not always show on the G.C.I. and could not be read by the A.I. in the night fighters. As a result it often happened that the night fighters under G.C.I. control were directed on to Hudsons providing anti-submarine escort. After some narrow escapes the anti-submarine aircraft was ordered to fly constantly twenty miles ahead of the convoy, and a system of resin lights was arranged.

#### December Operations

On the 12 December, eight Swordfish of No.813 Squadron equipped for dropping torpedoes were despatched to Bone for a special shipping strike. They returned on the 14th, having attacked shipping in Ferryville setting a tanker on fire and hitting another M/V twice with torpedoes.(1)

On the 15 December three Swordfish went again to Bone; on the 17th they found targets in the Lac de Bizerte, but the torpedoes failed to run - it was thought, afterwards, that the water was too shallow. No.608 Squadron joined

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

No.500 Squadron at Blida, and carried out their first operation from there on the 20 December. Two other new squadrons had also arrived, Nos.142 and 150 (Wellingtons) for night bombing operations. No.500 Squadron had had a busy day on the 17th. One aircraft delivered an attack on a large Italian submarine of the "Ballila" class. The vessel was on the surface, and four depth charges were observed to straddle it. Nevertheless, it continued on its course, and submerged very slowly. The pilot of the aircraft was convinced that the depth charges were not effective against a vessel of such solid construction. Another aircraft attacked and destroyed a Cant.1007B three-engined bomber on the same day. Two days later a small German submarine was attacked, just as it was submerging, but no results were observed.

O.R.B.  
A.C. G.Q.  
Algiers

On the 21st, both Nos.608 and 500 Squadrons provided escort patrols to the torpedoed liner Strathallan. She was seen to be on fire from stem to stern; the ship had to be abandoned. She was carrying 4,500 troops including 253 women members of the forces. The sea was crowded with lifeboats and rafts.

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

On the 27 December a Hudson of No.500 Squadron glew to a position where a U-boat had been previously reported. The U-boat was sighted in the position given, fully surfaced. The aircraft attacked with four depth charges which straddled the boat. Although she was submerging her guns were manned and still firing as she went under. So accurate was their fire, that the aircraft became unmanageable and landed in the water. The crew took to the dinghy. A Wellington from Gibraltar picked up their S.O.S. signal, and a Hudson of No. 608 Squadron and a Walrus of No.700 Squadron were sent to look for survivors. The dinghy was found by the Hudson in position 37°18'N 01°00'E with four occupants, one of whom was injured. The Walrus took the injured man and one other back to Algiers, and a second Walrus was sent out to bring in the other airmen.

O.R.B.  
608 Sqdn.

On the same day, another Hudson of No.500 Squadron, which was making an A/S sweep on a line approximately from 70 miles S.W. of Sardinia towards the Islands of Majorca and Iviza, failed to return. Search was made, but nothing was found.

#### Change in Hudson Armament

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.

On 31 December an improvement was inaugurated in the bomb load carried by the Hudsons. Instead of carrying four 200 lb. depth charges, all aircraft were required to take one 250 lb. G.P. bomb with instantaneous fusing, and three 250 lb. torpex depth charges. It was thought that these heavier weapons, would prevent U-boats from fighting back when surfaced.

#### Anti-Submarine Operations in January 1943

O.R.B.  
500 Sqdn.  
17 Jan. 1943

Anti-submarine sweeps and escort duties had become somewhat standardised by January 1943, being generally referred to by their code name such as Mascara, Queerspot, Baffle (East and West) and Calmspot, this latter being a patrol between Majorca and Sardinia. These duties were undertaken by night as well as by day. The first attack on a U-boat at night occurred on the 17 January 1943. An aircraft of No.500 Squadron attacked a U-boat, seen in the moonlight, with depth charges, bombs and machine gun fire, "no serious damage was observed, but the U-boat's speed had decreased after the bomb attack". A No.608 Squadron aircraft received

a message to proceed to the site of the attack, but had to return to base before reaching the target. At one in the morning, another aircraft of No.500 Squadron crashed while taking off on the same errand and was burned out. At 0730 hours yet another of No.500 Squadron's Hudsons took off, found the U-boat and again attacked the submarine "but did not noticeably damage it". This aircraft was attacked by a Ju.88 and was driven off, leaving the submarine still on the surface. Another aircraft of No.608 Squadron later attacked the U-boat, and was joined by a Wellington of No.150 Squadron, which dropped sixteen 250 lb. G.P. bombs. At 1442 hours "a dark shape in the sea that was assumed to be a surfacing U-boat" was seen. At 1550 hours all aircraft had left the scene of action and the contest was adjudged to have been inconclusive.

O.R.B.  
500 Sqn.

By the end of January 1943, the squadrons were beginning to feel the strain; No.500 Squadron had completed 1195 hours of operational flying, and the average serviceability in aircraft was down to twelve. The U-boat attack still continued in full force. On the night of the 6/7 February a convoy was continually attacked. M/V Fort Babine was torpedoed from the air and sunk. M/V Empire Banner was torpedoed by a U-boat and from the air and sunk and the M/V Empire Webster was also torpedoed by a U-boat but managed to reach harbour in tow of another vessel.

O.R.B.  
A.C.H.Q.  
Algiers and  
Blida

Generally speaking, the G.R. operations made by the Torch squadrons were successful. In spite of the great tonnage of shipping which had to travel along a very restricted route through the Western Mediterranean, less than 2½ per cent. was lost through U-boat action. From the time the operation began until the Wing was merged into the North West African Coastal Air Force, No.328 Wing flew some 1450 sorties, totalling approximately 9000 hours flying. They sighted 65 U-boats of which 51 were attacked.

#### The Defence of Ports and Shipping

A.H.Q.  
S/63/Air

During the planning stage of Torch the staffs of No.333 Group and Naval Commander, Expeditionary Force had worked out a large and comprehensive scheme of air defence for ports and shipping under the title of Torch, Combined Navy/Air Orders. Enemy air attacks were not expected west of Algiers but fighter protection was to be given to the convoys between Gibraltar and Cap Tenez by the Twelfth Air Force. The heaviest weight of enemy attack was anticipated to fall on shipping and ports, east of Algiers. The fighter defence of convoys at sea and in harbour, as well as protecting the ports from air attack in this area was the responsibility of Eastern Air Command.

#### Early Defence

Admty. Report  
M/053475/43

The defence of ports and shipping in the early days of the operation fell largely upon the Navy. At night the air defence of Algiers was entirely by anti-aircraft fire from ships in the harbour and bay and from shore batteries. Soon, however, fighter defence of ports was established. Immediately after the initial landings had been made and air-fields at Algiers, Djidjelli, Philippeville and Bone had been occupied, and squadrons based on them, fighter cover was provided for convoys moving along the coast and air defence of the ports established.

O.R.Bs.  
No.323 Wing  
No.43 Sqn.

A.M. Welsh to  
Sec. of State  
20 Feb. 1943

In the early stages of the operation the air protection afforded to the convoys was not as efficient as was developed later on, but this was due in the main to the extremely poor



and in some cases non-existent communication system, to the crude state of the airfields, and to the serious handicaps under which the squadrons were forced to operate. Moreover no adequate warning system could be provided for approximately a month as sufficient R.D/F facilities were not available, and the limitations of shipping space prevented the inclusion of this bulky equipment in the first assault convoys. Convoys had to rely on fighter cover from the squadrons operating from Algiers and Bone - which were constantly under attack by enemy aircraft - this involved heavy flying hours since standing patrols were necessary because of the absence of a proper warning system.

Ibid para.5

For the first two weeks, the most vital in the operation until wing and squadron maintenance and personnel arrived, the maintenance of the squadrons was difficult. In the Bone area, four squadrons were maintained by half a Servicing Commando. Most of the squadrons were within easy reach of enemy long range bombers, based on Sardinia and Sicily, and in the case of Bone, fighter escorted long range bombers and the latest types of short range fighters<sup>(1)</sup> operating from Tunis. The state of the forward airfields made adequate dispersal impossible with the result that losses on the ground were heavy and unavoidable.

O.R.B.  
323 Wing

Yet, despite all the difficulties besetting them efficient fighter protection was given to convoys after the first month. In it No.43 Squadron (Hurricane II) mauled an enemy force attacking a convoy on the 12th, when one Ju.88, one He.111, one Do.217 and a Savoia were claimed as destroyed.<sup>(2)</sup> Apart from a few such brushes, the work of convoy escort settled down to mere routine.

A.M. Welsh to  
Sec. of State  
20 Feb. 1942  
O.R.B. No.323  
Wing

#### Enemy Tactics

The tactics adopted by the enemy in the first place were high and low level bombing of ships at anchor in the harbour and bay. At Bougie and at Algiers, he had some measure of success; but as it became possible to provide stronger fighter patrols, and as communications gradually improved he was forced to change his tactics. His next step was to use torpedo aircraft<sup>(3)</sup> to attack ships in harbour. These attacks, however, were sporadic, and met with very little success. The enemy then turned to night attacks<sup>(4)</sup> but when the night fighter organisation had been built up this proved to be too costly. This final form of attack was a combination of high-level bombing and torpedo attacks, delivered at dusk and dawn. These were countered by the use of Mark VII A.I. Beaufighters and Hurricanes, the patrols of the two types overlapping by an hour on either side of the darkness.

R.A.F. Monograph  
R/DF in World  
War II

#### Obsolescence of Hurricane II

The squadrons engaged in convoy protection were equipped with the Hurricane IIB or IIC either of which was no match for the Ju.88 unless they were in a superior tactical position when they first met. Their presence over the convoy, however, had a deterrent and protective affect. Approaching

(1) Me.109G. and FW.190.

(2) See Chapter 13.

(3) See infra Chapter 13 Fliegerfuhrer Tunis.

(4) See infra 'Night Fighter Defence'.

O.R.B. 323 Wing  
O.R.B. 43 Sqn.  
Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T8

enemy aircraft often turned away, on sighting the escorting Hurricane. At the same time the lack of combat, and their failure to catch the enemy had a depressing effect on the pilots. Moreover owing to the obsolescence of the Hurricane it was impossible to change them round with squadrons in the forward area.

Yet the operations of these squadrons at sea for the period 8 November to 8 February paid a rich dividend. The number of ships sunk at sea by enemy aircraft was 1 per cent of the total convoyed, those damaged at sea 2 per cent and those sunk in harbour 1.4 per cent.(1)

#### Night Fighter Defence

CS.17571

It had been decided in the planning stage of Torch that night fighter facilities could not be provided early in the operation, owing to the demands on shipping space for equipment, both Army and R.A.F. which was more essential and necessary for a rapid advance eastward. It had also been agreed that the defences of ports by night should be provided solely by anti-aircraft guns, until a proper air-raid warning system could be developed and night fighters provided.

A.O.C. Signals  
Out II J/15/

Ibid

O.R.Bs 255  
and 600 Sqdns.

The rapid advance of the First Army and the difficulty of securing forward airfields, led the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command, to consider that he would require his two Beaufighter squadrons. Accordingly he called them forward much earlier than the planned date and they arrived in North Africa on the 15 and 19 November. On 22 November the First Army's advance came to a halt and the Beaufighters were held in reserve at Algiers.

#### Original Plan for the use of Beaufighters

C.S.17571  
Enclosure 23A

The original plan for the use of the two Beaufighter squadrons required them to be in the theatre of operations by D plus twenty-eight i.e. 6 December. That date was the earliest that A.I. equipment could be delivered in North Africa.(2) Security reasons prevented this secret device being flown out in the Beaufighters and the Beaufighters had to have this equipment removed before setting out for North Africa. It was planned to send the equipment by sea and install it in the aircraft on arrival in North Africa.

#### Night attacks on Algiers

A.F.H.Q. G - 3  
reports  
20-27 Nov.

A.M. Welsh to  
C.A.S. Microfilm  
Reel No.12

The enemy made his first night attack on Algiers on 20 November with about thirty aircraft. Attacks continued for the next five nights around the full moon. These attacks were comparatively light, most of the bombs falling in the sea. They must, however, have appeared impressive to the inexperienced Americans and to the civil population to whom these attacks were the first taste of war. A significant feature of the defence was the indiscriminate use of anti-aircraft guns, both by the Army and the Navy; and this contributed in some measure to the confusion.

(1) See Appendix (G) 'Summary of Shipping Losses' (in E.A.C. Area of Responsibility).

(2) Indeed it was only on 28 October 1942 that Air Ministry permission was given to allow E.A.C. to use A.I. equipment.

Ibid

R.A.F. Monograph  
R/DF in World  
War II

As yet the R/DF warning system on land had not been fully developed, and the only warnings of the approach of enemy aircraft were obtained from R/DF ships. Nor was a G.C.I. station operating in these early days. Attempts to use both Hurricanes and Beaufighters by night without direction proved abortive. Even when a G.C.I. station had been installed near Algiers on 22 November, attempts at interception failed.

The Chief of the Air Staff and the Air Ministry were fully informed of these facts by E.A.C. and at once arrangements were made to transfer one flight of Beaufighters from the Middle East to the Torch area; twelve sets of A.I. equipment were rushed to North Africa by flying-boat, carefully routed to prevent any chance of its cargo falling into the hands of the enemy.

#### First Night Operations by Beaufighters

O.R.B.  
E.A.C.

One flight of Beaufighters from No.89 Squadron arrived from the Middle East, via Malta, on 24 November. On the night of 27/28 they destroyed five He.111s over Algiers. In December, operating from Maison Blanche, the detachment destroyed a total of seventeen enemy aircraft and returned to their base at Abu Sueir, on 6 January 1943.

O.R.B.  
255 Sqdn.

Earlier, however, No.255 Squadron had operated in the "big raid" on 20 November, but were unable to engage the enemy, as there was no A.I. to guide them. Five Beaufighters were lost on the ground that night. No.600 Squadron which was stationed at Blida flew over to Maison Blanche the following morning with the intention of operating therefrom but found the airfield so severely damaged that they were sent back to Blida.

#### The Arrival of Radar Equipment

O.R.B.  
153 and 600  
Squadrons

By the 25 December No.153 Squadron (Beaufighter) which had arrived at Maison Blanche on the 19th from England, had received its Radar equipment and was able to operate at night for the first time. On the 28th No.600 Squadron received a further eight A.I. sets which had been flown out from England by Fortresses. These sets had been stripped from aircraft lying at Predannack and Exeter, and on arrival had to be fitted into the squadron aircraft by unqualified personnel. Nevertheless by the next day one aircraft of No.600 Squadron was ready to undertake night operations.

#### Operations by No.153 Squadron

O.R.B.  
153 Squadron

On 7 January 1943, a flight of No.153 Squadron was detached to operate from Setif with the object of protecting a newly arrived convoy off Djidjelli, which had been attacked by twenty-four torpedo bombers but did not succeed in obtaining any contact with the enemy aircraft.

On the night of the 13th the squadron at Maison Blanche achieved its first successes, by the destruction of a four engined Condor and a Piaggio 108. On the same day four aircrews were sent to Tebessa as a forward detachment for a few days. When the detachment arrived over Tebessa airfield one Beaufighter was shot down in flames by an American Kittyhawk. The pilot landed unhurt, but the Americans, in order to call off their fighter, had used their R.T. saying that this was a British Beaufighter which had come to defend their airfield at night. Presumably this message was picked



up by the enemy and the whole element of surprise which had been intended was destroyed.

As no operations were being undertaken from Tebessa the detachment moved on to the airfield at Youks Les Bains where an attack by F.W.109s on the 15th damaged all the aircraft save one, which was flown back to Tebessa. On the 19th the whole detachment was withdrawn from Youks, having found the G.C.I. facilities too poor for successful night operations.

At Maison Blanche the squadron was mostly employed in the protection of important convoys and by the end of the month of January 1943, had destroyed thirteen enemy aircraft. But in February, the enemy altered his tactics and made a point of coming in at a very low altitude. This made things very difficult for the G.C.I. and as the weather too was poor, very little was accomplished. The month ended with only one enemy aircraft to the credit of the squadron.

#### Operations by No.600 Squadron

O.R.B.  
600 Squadron

On 7 December 1942, fourteen Beaufighters flew to Maison Blanche from Blida and took over the night defence of Algiers from No.255 Squadron. They brought with them some ground crews of No.608 Squadron to service the aircraft until their own crews, which had been brought to Bone in a convoy, could rejoin their squadron.

Routine night patrols were flown over Algiers Bay under the control of Surcourt G.C.I. On the 21st an He.111 was destroyed, and on the next day a Ju.88 was shot down. But on the whole the weather was bad at night and the Radar control experienced difficulty in distinguishing between hostile and friendly aircraft.

Ibid

On 8 January 1943 a detachment of the squadron left for Casablanca in order to act as a night guard for the important conference of Allied chiefs which was being held there, but only false alarms caused any activity at Casablanca.

On the 15th the rest of the squadron left for Setif, where working with Philippeville G.C.I. and operating from Tingley airfield, the squadron accounted for four enemy aircraft during the month.

In early February the squadron started to operate from a new airfield near Souk El Khemia (Paddington) under the control of Bone G.C.I. and many sorties were made in defence of the port of Bone. A change was made on the 16th whereby patrols from Paddington operated under the control of G.C.I., at Cape Serrat, but this only lasted until the 28th when the Cape Serrat position had to be evacuated as the enemy had forced the Army to give ground in that vicinity. But in spite of these handicaps the squadron destroyed five enemy aircraft during the month.

#### Operations by No.255 Squadron

O.R.B.  
255 Squadron

After the losses sustained by the squadron on the night 20 November aircrews were flown to England to bring back twelve new Beaufighters. Such aircraft as were serviceable at Maison Blanche were equipped with Mark IV A.I. and sent forward to operate from the airfield at Souk El Arba.

Standing patrols under the control of Bone G.C.I. were started on 5 December at dusk. For the first five and a half hours nothing happened, a little later two He.111s were

destroyed, and later still one pilot shot down another three aircraft of the same type, within a space of half an hour. The next night two more He.111s were shot down together with two Cant A.1607s and on the 12th an He.111 and a Ju.88 were destroyed.

Ibid

In February the squadron's chief employment was on night patrols in the Philippeville area using Tingley airfield as an advanced landing ground. The weather steadily deteriorated and the first snow fell on the 10th consequently there was very little air activity and the squadron only destroyed one enemy aircraft during this period.

Author's  
comment

It is evident that as soon as the Beaufighter squadrons had been properly equipped for night fighting their success was immediate. But as the advantages of surprise disappeared and the enemy adopted new tactics the number of victories steadily decreased. Nevertheless their defence of the port areas proved effective, for enemy air attacks diminished, both in scale and intensity, after January 1943.

## CHAPTER 8

THE EARLY EFFORTS OF THE UNITED STATES TWELFTH AIR FORCE(1)The Role of the U.S. Twelfth Air Force

The Twelfth Air Force was almost three times as large as the R.A.F. Eastern Air Command. At least on paper it mustered 1244 aircraft against 454, but many of the aircraft of the Twelfth Air Force were only earmarked for the operation, and did not come into the area of operations until very much later. After its support tasks in the Assault Stage, (2) its role was by no means clear cut. General Spaatz, confessed as late as 30 October, 1942, that he had never understood 'what, when and where the Twelfth was to do'. Broadly speaking it had three main duties. Should the Western and Centre Task forces move on Spanish Morocco, the Twelfth Air Force would support their operation. Should the Western Task Force land near Tangier, the Twelfth Air Force would assist it in landing. If the Germans began to invade Spain, the XII Bomber Command would strike at bases in the Spanish peninsula. Finally the Twelfth Air Force might be called upon to move up into Tunisia to aid the advance of the First Army, to conduct operations against Rommel or to begin an air war against Italy. These latter functions, however, were dependant upon the rate at which air bases could be established and equipped.

Build-up of the Twelfth Air Force

According to the plan of 4 October, the units flown into the Oran area would be from fighter groups under XII Fighter Command and up to four heavy, two medium, and one light bomber group under XII Bomber Command. Once the French forces in Morocco had been subdued the fighter forces in the Oran area would be reinforced by the XII Air Support Command (3) in view of the likelihood of the greater weight of attack to be experienced in Tunisia from the Axis air forces. The heavy bombers were to be based on the Oran area on the premise that they could be used either against Spain or Tunisia.

By D plus eleven (19 November) the Twelfth Air Force had received the number of aircraft the plans had specified for that date. At this time there were in Algeria, four fighter groups, the 1st and 14th P.38 - (Lightning) and 31st and 52nd (Spitfire V), one light bomber squadron (DB-7-Boston) two troop carrier groups (C-47-Dakotas) and two squadrons of B-17's (Fortress) belonging to the 97th Group. A good many factors, however, limited that usefulness of this force. Its ground echelons were scattered. Airfields and all manner of supplies were limited; and it was not in an area of active operations. In Morocco the build-up of the Twelfth Air Force was not so impressive, chiefly because the aircraft with which

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(1) This chapter deals with Operations by the Twelfth Air Force which are not included in the Chapters dealing directly with the land battle.

(2) See Chapter 5.

(3) This was scheduled to land after the U.S. Forces had taken their objectives on French Moroccan Coast. It consisted, at that time, of the 33rd Pursuit Group which had been earmarked for Middle East.



it was to be equipped (P-39-Airacobra) still languished in the depots (maintenance units) of the Eighth Air Force.<sup>(1)</sup> Besides the 33rd Pursuit Group (P-40-Kittyhawk)<sup>(2)</sup> there were parts of the 62nd Troop Carrier Group and the 310th Group (B-25-Mitchells). With the cessation of hostilities with the French and no imminent danger from Spain, there appeared to be sufficient forces for that area.

#### The Move Eastwards of Twelfth Air Force

In the planning stage of the operations it had been intended to deploy the Twelfth Air Force mainly in the Western Area, i.e. west of a line due south from Cap Tenez. Plans were made to station U.S. Twelfth Air Force headquarters together with those of the XII Bomber and XII Fighter Commands in that area. The XII Air Support Command would be with the U.S. Fifth Army when it came into being.

D.O. letter  
Air Comm. Sanders  
to Air Marshal  
Welsh 16.11.42.  
in II J.15/53/14

By the 16 November the Twelfth Air Force was beginning to build up slowly. Among the squadrons soon to join it were a number of assorted bomber types. The Chief of the Air Staff, A.F.H.Q. informed the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command that he was considering requesting the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force, to organise a "small self-contained air striking force of bombers and long range fighters" to be based on an airfield in the Eastern Air Command area.

Memo. from C.in C.  
to C.G. Twelfth  
Air Force 12 Nov.  
in II J.15/45/38

Previous to this, however, as early as 12 November, the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force, had been requested to examine a plan, which the Allied Commander-in-Chief had caused to be drawn up, for the possible use of United States aircraft in the Eastern Task Force Area.

#### The Plan for the Build Up of Twelfth Air Force in Algeria and Tunisia

Ibid

The Allied C. in C. had caused a study to be made during the planning stage at Norfolk House to devise a plan whereby the Twelfth Air Force could be built up in the Eastern Task Force Area to aid the rapid developments of operations in the Western Mediterranean following the success of Torch. In the examination of this problem by the Air Section, A.F.H.Q. it was assumed that the Eastern Task Force met little opposition in accordance with Plan 'Y'<sup>(3)</sup> on the following timings:-

D plus four Bougie occupied

D plus twelve Philippeville and Bone occupied

D plus twenty-two Tunis and Bizerta occupied by advanced elements;

secondly, that the First Army would comprise two Infantry Divisions, one Armoured Division by D plus sixty.

(1) The Eighth Air Force had few or no experienced mechanics to service and modify these aircraft. An additional reason was probably that the Eighth Air Force was not very interested in servicing an aircraft which was outmoded by Japanese fighters in the Pacific.

(2) Later versions were known as Warhawk.

(3) See Chapter 3.

In the event of the above happening, study visualised a progressive build up of the Twelfth Air Force in the Eastern Area of operations. After examining the problem of transferring the Twelfth Air Force to the east it recommended that it might be possible to operate from the Eastern Task Force Area a force consisting of:-

three Fighter Groups (P-38)	180 aircraft
two Medium Bomber Groups (B-26)	90 aircraft
two Heavy Bomber Groups (B-17)	70 aircraft
one Transport Group (C-47)	42 aircraft

by D plus sixty provided that very early every effort to develop the airfield capacity was made and that satisfactory arrangements to maintain and supply the force could be arranged. When sufficient airfields in the Eastern Area had been developed and stocked, the above force could be augmented by:-

- two Fighter Groups
- three Heavy Bomber Groups
- one Medium Bomber Group
- one Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron

a. The study, however, recommended that provisional instructions should be issued to the Twelfth Air Force, R.A.F. Eastern Air Command and the 1st Army, covering the deployment eastwards of the Twelfth Air Force under the following general plan. No executive action was to be taken until a rapid preliminary survey of the airfield development had been made.

- Phase 1.
- (i) Three P-38 Fighter Groups to move from the Oran area to the Setif - Constantine area.
  - (ii) Two B-26 Medium Bomber Groups to move to the Algiers area.
  - (iii) Operations by two B-17 Heavy Bomber Groups to be conducted from the Oran area, using forward airfields in the E.T.F. area as necessary and practicable. These units to move to Eastern Algeria and Northern Tunisia as soon as possible.
  - (iv) One Transport Group to operate from the Oran area using forward airfields in the E.T.F. area as necessary.
  - (v) The necessary transfer of Twelfth Air Force Maintenance and Supply Echelons, and the co-ordination of Supply and Maintenance arrangements (Between the 1st Army, E.A.C., and 12th A.F.)

Subject to any limitations subsequently imposed by the rate of airfield development and by supply difficulties, co-ordinated plans to be based on the completion of this phase by D plus sixty.

Phase 2. Additional units, i.e.

Two Fighter Groups (S.E.)

One Medium Bomber Group (B-26)

Three Heavy Bomber Groups (B-17)

One Photo Recce Squadron

to move into the Eastern Task Force area as soon after phase one is completed as air-field development allows.

Phase 3. Forward planning to allow for the movement of the balance of the Twelfth Air Force into the Eastern Task Force area if necessary.

b. That G-4 study the effect of the additional commitment on the port and distribution facilities of the E.T.F. area, in order that:-

(i) The additional shipping and transportation requirements can be established, and proposals made for meeting them.

(ii) The effect on the build-up of the First Army can be fully established.

(iii) The changes which will be necessary in the existing shipping arrangements can be established.

c. That instructions be issued to the Twelfth Air Force and the DCE (Airfields) First Army, that a co-ordinated and rapid survey of the airfield development possibilities, with particular reference to the requirements outlined in recommendation a above, is to be undertaken immediately on arrival in the theatre, and a report rendered to the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Force as early as possible and not later than D plus fourteen, giving the broad outline of these possibilities.

d. After the examination as recommended in b above, the issue of a directive stating the action to be taken by all concerned in the event of:-

(i) The airfield position proving favourable.

(ii) The airfield position proving unfavourable for the completion of Phase one by D plus sixty.

EAC/212/Air/Ops.

Encl. 6A

A.H.B.No.II/

J.15/53/20

Evidently the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force, visited the Eastern Area and reported favourably to the Allied Commander-in-Chief for on 16 November the Allied C. in C. signalled to the A.O.C. Eastern Area Command that, "There are now 171 operational United States aircraft in Oran area with combat crews thirsting for action, including 84 P.38s (Lightnings), also several thousand ground personnel and a good stock of petrol, ammunition and bombs." This signal went on to suggest an outline plan for the "early beat up of Tunis and Bizerta airfields" for joint consideration by the two Air Commanders. All the B-17s (Fortresses) were to be concentrated at Tafaraoui where their servicing and maintenance were easier than at Algiers and where their long range would permit them to operate against Tunisian airfields. One or more groups of P-38s were to be based at Maison Blanche or on forward airfields if possible with adequate United States



servicing crews. Day bombing attacks by B-17s picking up their fighter escort east of Algiers were then to be made on airfields in the Tunis and Bizerta areas, followed at timed intervals - to allow Axis fighters to land - by low flying P-38 attacks.

Ibid  
Encl. 4

On the same day at a meeting between General Clark, Brigadier General Doolittle and Air Marshal Welsh the use of United States aircraft was discussed. The meeting agreed that all C-47 transport aircraft would be located at Blida. The half of a P-38 squadron at Maison Blanche would be increased to a full squadron, and ultimately as airfields became available to a full group. Similarly a squadron of B-17s also at Maison Blanche would gradually, as aircraft and maintenance personnel became available be increased to a Group. A squadron of DB-7s (Bostons) was to move to Blida from Oran while two United States squadrons of Spitfires (fifty aircraft) were to be held ready to move up to the Algiers area when called for.

On the 19 November, General Doolittle perceived that he had two responsibilities:-

- (i) to get his striking force into Eastern Algeria and Tunisia;
- and (ii) to be prepared to combat hostile moves jeopardising the safety of the line of communication and supply through Gibraltar.

He, therefore, planned to divide his area of command into districts and install in each a composite command, capable of operating either fighters or bombers as the exigencies of the situation demanded. These flexible commands were to be under direct control of U.S. Twelfth Air Force Headquarters and their Staffs were to be drawn from existing air force organisations; the XII Air Support Command was to be left near Casablanca, XII Fighter Command would remain at Oran, and XII Bomber Command was to be placed somewhere South of Bone. Twelfth Air Force units in the Algiers area would be administered directly by the Headquarters Twelfth Air Force, which moved to Algiers on 18 November.

#### XII Bomber Command at Constantine

The first of the two responsibilities which the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force considered he had, was brought a stage nearer fulfillment when on the 20 November Air Force Headquarters approved the use of Constantine as the Headquarters of the XII Bomber Command; it was the only Site available with communications to support such an echelon. At the same time the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command, who had been given the operational control of the 14th Group (P-38 - Lightning) and the 15th Light Bombardment Squadron (DB-7 - Boston) decided to use them in the Tebessa - Youks-les-Bains area. The airfield at Youk-les-Bains was stocked and supplied initially by C-47 aircraft of the XII Troop Carrier Command, which continued to do so for some considerable time.

On 21st, one squadron of the 14th Group arrived at Youk-les-Bains, and immediately found itself engaged with an enemy moving in on Gafsa. Two Sorties were flown against this ground target and six P-38 aircraft were lost when they attempted to land after dark. Soon afterwards, the 15th Light Bombardment Squadron joined the P-38 Squadron each aircraft carrying two five-hundred pound bombs from Maison Blanche with an eye to immediate operations.

Meanwhile the B-17 Squadron, by now stationed at Maison Blanche had made an attack on El Aouina airfield near Tunis on the 19th. On the following night, the enemy operating from bases in Sicily attacked Algiers and its environs by night.<sup>(1)</sup> One B-17 was destroyed in this attack and another was destroyed on the following night. General Spaatz who was at that time on his first tour of the area, had inspected Maison Blanche and concluded that it was too exposed for heavy bombers. He recommended to Allied Commander-in-Chief that they should be withdrawn to Tafaraoui where their range would allow them to operate against the enemy equally as well as from Maison Blanche and where their maintenance would be considerably easier than forward in the confusion. Then the B-17 could pick up its fighter escort from any convenient airfield. General Eisenhower agreed to this recommendation and the B-17's were withdrawn on 22 November.

#### Strategic Operations in Support of First Army

During the First Army's advance the Allied bomber effort from Algeria was directed against the principal enemy airfield in Tunisia, in an attempt to cripple the growing strength of Fliegerfuhrer Tunisia.<sup>(2)</sup> After their removal to Tafaraoui the B-17's made one attempt on 23 November to bomb the Elmas-Cagliari airfield, only to be prevented by bad weather. On the following day they were turned back by heavy clouds from attacking Bizerta. The difficulty of obtaining reliable meteorological forecasts was solved by using a P-38 (Lightning) on an early morning weather reconnaissance over the general target area. Four days later thirty-seven B-17's bombed the Bizerta airfield and the adjacent docks without escort. Two of the bombers were lost, while ten enemy aircraft were claimed as destroyed. From Tafaraoui to Bizerta is almost six-hundred miles and in these attacks the B-17 was operating at close to its maximum tactical radius.

A small force of B-26 (Marauder) of the 319th Group had arrived at Maison Blanche in the meantime, after a series of mishaps which had culminated when its C.O. was shot down over Cherbourg on the flight from United Kingdom to North Africa. They began operating on the 28 November, when finding Kairouan airfield unoccupied they attacked the harbour at Sfax from a thousand feet. On the 29th nine aircraft attacked Gabes airfield. The 15th Light Bombardment Squadron were also attacking airfields; Gabes also on the 29th, and El Aouina on the 1 December.

The B-17's were already beginning to be hampered by the mud at Tafaraoui but on the 30th they bombed the north quay at Bizerta, but cloud prevented more than a third of the total bomb load being dropped. On the 1 December, however, the 97th Group (B-17) made an effective strike against El Aouina obtaining hits on the hangars and runway.

#### German Attack

On 2 December the Germans attacked.<sup>(3)</sup> The Twelfth Air Force threw all its available strength into the struggle. The 15th Light Bombardment Squadron, at 0810 hours, and the 319th Group at 1059 hours bombed El Aouina, where at least fifty enemy aircraft were seen on the ground, and some fifteen

(1) See Chapter 7 - Defence of Ports and Shipping.  
 (2) See Chapter 13.  
 (3) See Chapter 7 - 'Discussions on Air Support'.

to twenty damaged. From Tafaraoui eighteen aircraft of the 301st Group (B-17) bombed Sidi Ahmed and the adjacent harbour of Bizerta, shortly before 1000 hours. The 310th Group, of which eight of its aircraft (B-25-Mitchell) had arrived at Maison Blanche made its first sortie against installations south of Gabes. This intensive effort could not be kept up and the allied advance planned for the 1 December was postponed till the 9th.

The efforts of the bomber force of the Twelfth Air Force was switched to Tunisian ports in Axis hands to attempt to curtail the axis build-up. On the 3 December, the 97th Group made an effective attack on Bizerta harbour, hitting the docks and two ships in the canal leading to the docks. The defences of the port, however, had increased. There was much more "flak" than on previous visits and RD/F(radar) had been installed. Two days later B-17's raided the dock area at Tunis with a 'respectable degree of accuracy'; while the 310th Group and the 15th Light Bombardment Squadron bombed Sidi Ahmed.

On the 6 December the German forces in Tunisia again launched an attack, the Allied advance was postponed, and the Winter rains set in.

#### The Area Composite Commands

The differing commitments, which were the lot of the Twelfth Air Force in 1942 demanded a peculiar organisation. The answer of its Commanding General to the conflicting tasks his command was expected to perform, was the concept of area composite commands. He did not put his proposal into being until December, on that date XII Bomber Command was established in the new airbase area to the South of Constantine. An unusual feature of XII Bomber Command was that of having its escort fighters attached. Between 14 and 18 December two squadrons of the First Fighter Group (P-38 - Lightning) came under the control of XII Bomber Command. This obviated the necessity of co-ordinating each sortie with a fighter command headquarters, and the presence of P-38's on the same airfield as the bombers simplified the problem of rendezvous; two difficulties in an operational area where communications were chaotic. This system worked to the satisfaction of U.S.A.A.F. Commanders, but later A.O.C., North West African Tactical Air Forces, (1) considered that the employment of fighters as escort detracted from their primary role i.e. in destroying enemy aircraft.

Existing Twelfth Air Force organisations were drawn upon to form other composite commands, the 51st Troop Carrier Wing furnishing the cadre for a Central Algerian Composite Wing, in the Algiers area, the rear echelon of XII Fighter Command becoming Western Algerian Composite Wing at La Senia and XII Air Support Command 'fathering' the Moroccan Composite Wing at Casablanca. The Central Algerian Wing, never really functioned and the Moroccan Composite Wing did not come into existence until the end of December.

The XII Air Force Service Command, on the other hand, since its responsibilities in the major base area were more constant, set up a stable organisation, the reorganisation of the 11 December merely legitimised their position; there

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(1) Air Vice-Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, formerly Commanding Western Desert Air Force.



were three service area commands already operating in the areas controlled by the Moroccan Composite Wing, Western Algerian Composite Wings and XII Bomber Command. Service units in the Central Algerian Wing's area operated directly under Headquarters XII Air Force Service Command which had moved to Algiers.

However, these commands did not exist for very long. On the 5 January the three composite Wings were to be replaced by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Air Defence Wings as soon as they arrived from the U.S. These units were placed under the command of XII Fighter Command which at this time gave up its Sector forward of Tebessa. Later the air defence of Algiers was given back to the R.A.F. and the Wing thus displaced was attached to the XII Air Support Command in Central Tunisia.

The XII Air Support Command was the air force designed to accompany U.S. II Corps (Major General Fredendall) which was being moved into the Tebessa area with a view to engaging the enemy in an area more favourable to winter operations than Northern Tunisia. Hitherto, the XII Air Support Command had been engaged in police duties and administering the French Moroccan area, although two of its Groups, the 33rd Pursuit Group and the 310th Group had been moved Eastwards for service in Tunisia.

#### Winter Bombing Operations

##### Airfields

The lack of airfields which handicapped the efforts of Eastern Air Command similarly crippled the Twelfth Air Force. With the Winter rains came the call for more airfields. On 1 December the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force was anxious to get his heavy bombers out of Tafaraoui, where no aircraft could move off its runways without becoming bogged, and his medium bombers away from Maison Blanche which was always congested. Although the Twelfth Air Force had a large contingent of airfield construction engineers among its personnel, it did not make much immediate headway against the problem of the shortage of airfields for the heavy and medium bombers of the XII Bomber Command in the battle area. The Eastern Air Command were responsible for the development of airfields from Algiers eastwards, and the Twelfth Air Force's airfield Construction Units were engaged in preparing a ring of airfields along the Spanish Moroccan border.

The necessity, however, of providing airfields more suitable than Tafaraoui, and Maison Blanche led to the development of two airfields. The plateau between the Sakaran and Maritime Atlas, was somewhat drier than along the coast. In this area an airfield suitable for medium bombers was found at Telergma. It was built in eleven days and work was begun on additional airfields in the same area during December. For the heavy bombers, an all weather airfield was essential; and one was found at Biskra, an oasis and winter resort in the desert.

#### Bomber Operations December to January

On the 3 December the Allied C-in-C. informed the C.C.S. that he considered his available bomber force too small to limit the enemy build-up in Tunisia and requested additional squadrons from the United Kingdom. The Middle East were unable to spare the aircraft, but two Wellington Squadrons

were detached from R.A.F. Bomber Command and arrived in North Africa late in December.<sup>(1)</sup>

The Eighth Air Force, in the meantime had been preparing some of its units for a period of operations in North Africa. Accordingly during a spell of bad weather in Europe, when the Eighth Air Force could not operate as frequently as it might in North Africa, General Spaatz as deputy C-in-C. for Air to the Allied Commander-in-Chief ordered out three Squadrons of the 93rd Group (B-24 - Liberator). This Group arrived at Tafaraoui on the 7 December for a stay expected to be ten days. Its first three operations were postponed by rain and a fourth was cancelled when a B-24 collapsed a nose wheel in the mud. On the 13th, however, Bizerta was attacked and on the following day twelve B-24s bombed the same target.

After this brief sojourn in Algeria the 93rd Group were sent to the Middle East in exchange for the 513th Squadron (B-17) of the U.S. Ninth Air Force. It was argued that the 93rd Group could be more usefully employed in Libya where the superior range of the B-24 would enable strikes to be made against Naples and Palermo. The B-17, on the other hand was eminently suitable for operations in Algeria against Tunis and Bizerta. This exchange eloquently expresses the difficulties in North Africa of the shortage of airfields and the problem of supplies. These reasons probably prevented General Spaatz from ordering the two remaining heavy bomber groups of the Eighth Air Force, earmarked for Torch to North Africa. He did, however, attach a condition to the use of the group transferred to the Ninth Air Force; the targets which it allocated were to be those affecting the Tunisian Campaign. On the 15 December it left for Gambut.

#### Selection of Targets

During December the specific objectives for the following day, the time over the target, and the number of aircraft to take part in the attack, were determined by a daily War Room Conference at 0900 at which A.F.H.Q. Twelfth Air Force, Eastern Air Command, Royal Navy and members of General Spaatz's Staff were present. This arrangement, although an improvement on the earlier arrangement whereby the G.O.C., First Army dictated the targets, converted the Twelfth Air Force and XII Bomber Command into agencies which did no more than pass on orders to units. These in turn seldom received the orders in time to select proper bombs and fuzes, so bombs were loaded and fuzed a day in advance, and dropped on whatever target was chosen. By 27 December, this procedure had been abandoned, and the Twelfth Air Force was given a broader directive.

If, however, the bombs had been selected and fuzed for ports and shipping each evening little would have been lost the next day. During December and January XII Bomber Command mostly confined itself to the harbours at Tunis and Bizerta, undertaking strikes against Sousse and Sfax when weather or unusual enemy activity especially favoured them as targets. Daylight attacks on Tunis and Bizerta were left almost exclusively to the heavy bomber, although light bombers occasionally attacked El Aouina, or the docks at Bizerta when B-17's were there to saturate the defences.

After the airfields had recovered from the rainy spell, the allied air forces found that the Axis had put the respite

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(1) See Chapter 7 - 'Tactical Operations'.

to good use; the new German fighter, the FW-190 was in evidence, and there was a marked increase in the 'flak'. Yet the B-17 continued their attacks on Tunis and Bizerta with numbers, which, when compared with the vast air armadas of 1944 and 1945 seem pitifully small. Their losses, however, remained low for the B-17 always had an escort of P-38 fighters, which served to divide the attacking aircraft's attentions. On the 15 December two formations of B-17's were sent from Biskra for simultaneous attacks on Tunis and Bizerta. Six P-38's accompanied seven B-17's on Tunis; while another six escorted the twelve heavy bombers to Bizerta. All the aircraft returned, despite 'flak' and enemy aircraft. Three days later, however, in an attack on Bizerta, four escorting fighters and a B-17 were shot down out of a total of sixteen P-38's and thirty-six B-17's. Thereafter until 26 December bad weather prevented the operations of XII Bomber Command.

After Xmas with a break in the bad weather, the B-17 Groups concentrated on the ports of Sfax and Sousse, which were building up supplies against Rommel's arrival in Southern Tunisia. Seven sorties were made against them in late December. They were escorted by P-40's (Kittyhawk) of the 33rd Pursuit Group, by now operating from Thelepte in Central Tunisia. On the 26th, the target for the 301st Squadron was Sfax. The next day it attacked Sousse. Sfax was again attacked on 30 and 31 December. On the 2 January La Goulette, near Tunis, was the target for twenty B-17's and eight P-38's. Attacking just after noon and bombing from 21000-23500 feet the bombers hit a loading depot, a camp, a ship yard and dry dock, and the power house. Two merchant vessels were hit. Enemy defence measures were well conceived. Just before their anti-aircraft fire ceased, while bursts were seen, evidently a sign to their fighters to attack forty to fifty fighters, Me.109's, Bredas and Macchis, engaged the bombers, while Me.109's joined issue with the escorting P-38's. Two P-38's were shot down, and two Me.109's were claimed as destroyed.

All but one formation of B-17's were prevented by weather on 4 January from bombing La Goulette, but on the 5th and 8th effective strikes were carried out. The 5 January saw the 97th Group (B-17) over Sfax; the bombs of eleven B-17's completely destroying the Sfax power station, hitting two vessels in the harbour and leaving the entire dock area smoking. Bad weather did not prevent an attack on Ferryville on the 8th; the 97th Group found holes in the cloud and bombed through them, hitting oil storage tanks docks and ships. After Tunis had fallen it was ascertained that the ships included five French merchant vessels sunk, a submarine, a sailing vessel, a tug, an aircraft tender, and a patrol vessel.

#### Medium Bomber Operations

During the early operations in North Africa the medium bombers of the Twelfth Air Force did not achieve the performance of its heavy bombers. The medium bombers had no previous combat experience and their tactics and employment had to be worked out. They arrived in the area, mainly in small numbers, and the 319th Group kept losing its commanding officers. Once operational, they could not be kept at operational strength.

#### Targets and Tactics

The targets for medium bombers comprised for the most part, airfields, marshalling yards, and railway bridges, although unsuccessful attacks were made against shipping at



sea and Sousse harbour was twice attacked. The lessons learnt from these sorties was that the B-25 (Mitchell) and B-26 (Marauder) could not be used against targets where the enemy had time to deploy any considerable amount of light anti-aircraft weapons. The medium bombers, thereafter operated from seven thousand to nine thousand feet and even at that height violent evasive action was necessary so that the accuracy of the bombing suffered. All the sorties flown by the mediums were on a small scale. For a time in December the 310th Group's force consisted of six B-25's and the heaviest attack mustered only thirteen medium bombers, the combined resources of the 310th and 319th Groups.

The first attempt to bomb Sousse was prevented by weather. The following day, the 13 December, six B-25's, escorted by four P-38's bombed it from seven thousand feet, hitting the docks and ships in the harbour. A day later six B-26's of the 319th Group made a low-level attack at about nine hundred feet; they hit the docks and three vessels in the harbour. But when this type of attack was repeated on the 15th and 18th it proved to be so dangerous that it was abandoned, except when little or no anti-aircraft fire was expected. On the 18th four P-38's escorted five B-26's and six B-25's to the Sousse marshalling yards where they were greeted by a mile long barrage which shot down two B-26's.

The mediums made no further attacks for ten days. At the end of December when they resumed operations, the effort of the medium bombers was concentrated on airfields, and on the Tunisian railways. On the 30 December, the U.S. 17th Group made its first sortie, six of its B-26's bombing the Gabes airfield. In a second attack on the following day one B-26 was lost. On New Year's day the 17th Group attacked the heavily defended Tunis area, where 'flak' shot down one B-26 and one P-40 of the escort was shot down by an Me.109. On 4 January there occurred a remarkable coincidence. A formation of J.U.88's escorted by Me.109's arrived to bomb Thelepte airfield, at the same time as eleven B-26's to pick up its escort of P-40's. The B-26's made to return to base, shooting down two Me.109's which attacked them. Meanwhile, the J.U.88's were dive-bombing the airfield. Five P-40's managed to take off and shot down the J.U.88 and one Me.109.

#### Attacks on Airfields

The overriding target for XII Bomber Command in January and February was still ports and shipping. The supplies carried by enemy ships which reached North Africa could and did reach the battle front in two days but during these two months the B-17 Group frequently interrupted their bombing attacks on ports to help in the land battle. On the 11 January five B-17's attacked the Libyan fort at Gadames, an attack co-ordinated by the advance of the Free French Column under General Le Clerc. The crews claimed direct hits on the fort, but later inspection showed it to be undamaged.

More successful were the strikes against the airfields in Tripoli in co-operation with the air forces from the Middle East. On the 9 January the aircraft of the 319th Group began the shuttle service by bombing the hangars on an airfield ten miles to the South of Tripoli. Three days later, Castel Benito was attacked and considerable damage was done to airfield installations. On the 17th, the R.A.F., Middle East informed A.F.H.Q. that the retreating enemy from Cyrenaica had concentrated two hundred planes on Castel Benito airfield. R.A.F. bombers were to bomb it that night and it was

suggested that B-17's might bomb it the following day. Thirteen B-17's and thirty-three P-38's bombed the barracks and adjacent buildings.

As effective as these strikes were attacks on El Aouina on 26 January. Twenty-six B-17's began the operations. Two hours later twelve B-26's of 17th Group and a P-38 squadron from the 82nd attacked the airfield. Lastly B-25's dropped fragmentation bombs on the dispersal area. According to First Army intelligence the B-17's had hit an ammunition dump and inflicted six hundred military casualties, and by the most conservative estimate twelve parked planes had been destroyed and nineteen damaged in various ways.

#### Other Operations

Among the duties of XII Bomber Command in January was the daily reconnaissance of the Gabes Medenine - Ben Gardane road, clogged with retreating German transport. The P-38 squadrons swept the area. On 21 January two squadrons in low-flying attacks on the moving columns claimed sixty-five vehicles destroyed but on the following day eight P-38's on a similar expedition were attacked by Me.109's and two were lost. Two days later a bitter running fight took place over the road; the P-38's claimed twenty-five to thirty vehicles destroyed but lost two of their number to Me.109's. Bombers of XII Bomber Command bombed the enemy landing ground at Medenine; weather prevented the attacks of B-17's, but B-25 and B-26 attacked beneath the cloud level and destroyed thirteen aircraft.

The main duty of the heavy bomber groups was still the ports and harbours of Axis held Tunisia. On the 23 January the 97th Group sank a large vessel in the channel near the naval base at Bizerta, while the 301st Group dropped their bombs on hangars and oil tanks. A series of attacks on the ports began a few days later. Sfax was the first target; heavy and medium bombers attacking the port and railway yards all afternoon. The following day it was the turn of Bizerta; twenty-two B-17's attacked the fuelling jetties and warehouses. Ships in the harbour at Ferryville were the targets for the next day's sorties by the heavy bombers; while on the 31 January, twelve B-17's of the 301st Group again attacked Bizerta. This assault was continued on 1 February, on Tunis where two ships were damaged, one of a convoy first entering the harbour at La Goulette.

So important were the ports considered that when the Commander, XII Bomber Command requested permission to bomb the Elmas airfield at Cagliari (as a diversion both for our own and enemy forces), the Twelfth Air Force replied that Trapani and Palermo were more vital objectives, if the bomber commander wished to vary the "milk runs" to Tunis and Bizerta. However, an Allied convoy was heavily attacked and badly damaged between Oran and Algiers by Cagliari-based aircraft on 6 February. As a result fifty-one bombers, a mixed force of B-17's and B-26's were sent to attack Elmas airfield the following day, and in the space of three-quarters of an hour all aircraft dropped their bombs. The raid was successful; bursts covered the airfield and hangars, twenty-five aircraft were estimated as destroyed or damaged. Five Me.109's and two Re.2001 (Italian fighter) aircraft were shot down. Save for attacks on Sousse and on Kairouan airfield, the heavy bombers made no attacks until 15 February, when they sortied against Palermo. On the 17th XII Bomber Command struck at the Sardinian airfields, the B-17's were to

attack Elmas, while the target for the medium bombers was Villacidro. The bombing of B-17's was hampered by weather and the medium bombers attacked both Villacidro and Decimomannu.

#### Twelfth Air Force Part in Air-Sea War

Draft Version  
'History of  
A.A.F. in World  
War II' Vol.II  
Chapter 5,  
p.22 et seq.

Early in January A.F.H.Q. became seriously disturbed over the efficiency of the axis ferry from Sicily, and on the 6th of that month the Commander of XII Bomber Command received a signal from the Commanding General, Twelfth Air Force, directing the immediate formation of a special force for use against shipping. The Commander of the XII Bomber Command, objected to the organisation of a special force, asking instead that the anti-shipping task be given to XII Bomber Command. General Doolittle, who at that time thought that the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. should be regarded as separate forces, as far as possible, objected to Eastern Air Commands claim to the operational control of the force despite the fact that it would be responsible for reconnaissance. In the event all available medium bombers and P.38 squadrons of XII Bomber Command shared in the execution of anti-shipping strikes.

#### Anti-shipping Operations

The XII Bomber Command began operations on 11 January; the 310th Group (B-25 - Mitchell) flying most of the early sweeps and the 319th Group beginning their anti-shipping sweeps on the 15th. As many as three separate sorties were flown on one day; they consisted of six B-25 or B-26 and a squadron of P-38's at least that number being needed for their own protection. The task of the P-38 was to provide top cover for the medium bombers, and at the same time to spot for any enemy ships. The bombing was made at high speed from under two hundred feet and the five hundred pound bombs were dropped in sticks of three or six alongside the vessel. Although convoy information was received occasionally from intelligence or from overnight reconnaissance by Malta-based aircraft, most of XII Bomber Command's anti-shipping sweeps were made without previous reconnaissance and consequently the sorties were often fruitless.

The first successful strike was made on the 20th, when six B-25s escorted by twelve P-38s of the 14th Group sighted a merchant vessel, and a three hundred to four hundred foot tanker, escorted by two destroyers. A direct hit was obtained on the tanker, which exploded and sank. The next day B.26s made a successful sortie. Fifteen miles west of Pantelleria, the aircraft of the 319th Group sunk a medium sized freighter and damaged another. On the 22 and 23 January, the 319th Group had further successes. On the former day, five B-25s attacked a small convoy in mid-channel consisting of two merchant vessels and two corvettes. Two hits were scored on one of the vessels before the convoy's escort of fighters engaged the bombers. The following day, four B-26s left a freighter listing in a cove near Hergla, north of Sousse, and then proceeding out to sea sank a second merchant vessel, and capsized a third. In mid-channel on the 27th, B-25s attacked two destroyers whose decks were laden with men. One was left on fire, listing heavily and the other appeared to sustain damage to its steering gear.

Whenever weather permitted the anti-shipping sweeps went on, and against them enemy supply vessels began to gather in larger convoys with abundant surface escort and air cover. On the 27 January four B-26s which had become separated from their escort of P-38s 'prudently declined a large transport' which was in company with no fewer than a cruiser, two



destroyers and three corvettes; the whole force being escorted by ten to fifteen Me.109s and FW.190s. On the 29th the 319th Group (B-26) with air escort of twelve aircraft from the 1st Group (P-38) made a strike against a large convoy. They pressed home their attack on two liners, setting one on fire, and blowing the superstructure off the other. One bomber was lost, but the remainder of the force went on to bomb a small vessel further west and to strafe a trawler north of Bizerta.

From 29 January to 9 February was a lean period. Admittedly the medium bombers of the XII Bomber Command had made several successful sorties but had not achieved one of the results hoped for, viz, that of forcing the enemy to resume the passage by night. Moreover bad weather and, an insufficiency of P-38s had made sweeps infrequent and ineffective.

On the 10th nine B-25s attacked four Siebel ferries and probably destroyed them all. After this another lean period ensued, until 21 February when the 310th Group set on fire a tanker, sank two small escorts, and damaged a cruiser for the loss of one aircraft. The next two days brought this group further successes, a merchant vessel sunk on the 22nd, and five Siebel ferries on the following day.

## CHAPTER 9

STALEMATEGeneral Review of the Situation in January 1943

Hist. Cabinet  
Sect. 3  
Chap. V.  
P. 3

On 27 December 1942 three days after the assassination of Admiral Darlan, General Henri Giraud, the French military leader introduced into Africa and sponsored by the British and American Governments, was elected High Commissioner by the French Imperial Council. General Giraud also assumed command of the French naval, military and air forces in the North African territories. The ensuing difficulties of reconciling the various French elements fighting against the Axis powers created a delicate situation which occupied much of the attention of the Allied Commander in Chief.

At the beginning of the year 1943 the British Eighth Army were advancing on Tripoli. The Anglo-American Force in North-West Africa had failed to capture the ports of Tunis and Bizerta and their adjacent airfields, which had been seized by the enemy within a few days of the Allied landing. The enemy had built up his ground and air forces<sup>(1)</sup> more rapidly than had been possible for the Allies and the battle-front had become stabilised in Northern Tunisia.

Ibid  
P. 2

A French Force, of about one motorised brigade, under General LeClerc, was advancing north from the Lake Chad area of French West Africa with the object of attacking and destroying Italian outposts in the Fezzan area of Libya, harassing the right flank of the main enemy force and linking with the Eighth Army in the Tripoli area.

The enemy's submarine offensive in the Atlantic and Mediterranean continued against Allied shipping on the routes to the Middle East via South Africa and to N.W. Africa through the Straits of Gibraltar. The British Navy, both submarines and surface vessels, had inflicted severe losses on Axis shipping plying between Italy and Sicily and North Africa, and had forced the enemy to direct part of his Air Forces to the task of protecting the sea convoys. Nevertheless the enemy continued to build up and re-equip his forces.

Ibid  
P. 3

The enemy's communications with Europe were the main target for strategic bombing by the Allied Air forces. From the Middle East, French North Africa and Malta, long-range bombers directed their attack on the African, Sicilian and Italian ports and on enemy shipping in the Mediterranean. In Tunisia the enemy enjoyed Air Superiority over the latter area. An additional Air Commitment in French North Africa was the defence of the Algerian ports and the protection of sea communications.

A.F.H.Q.  
G.O.No.23/42

Formation of the "Allied Air Force" later "Northwest African Air Command"

Separate British and American Air Forces had operated under the unified command of the Allied Commander-in-Chief. This arrangement had proved unsatisfactory in the early stages of the Tunisian campaign, and on 5 December 1942 as a first step towards an improvement, Major General Carl Spaatz U.S. Army, had been appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief for

(1) See Chapter 13.

Air, Allied Force.<sup>(1)</sup> On the previous day General Mark W. Clark who had formerly been Deputy Commander-in-Chief was appointed to the Command of the American Fifth Army. General Spaatz controlled the Eastern Air Command and the 12th U.S. Air Force. He was expected to perform this function in addition to his other duties. In fact his chief concern was the selection of appropriate strategic bombing targets in consultation with representatives from all three Services. The A.O.C. No. 242 Group from his Headquarters, which were located either with the Fifth Corps or the First Army, as circumstances dictated, controlled the fighters in the forward area, and such bombers as were placed at his disposal. The new organisation was promulgated on 5 January 1943 as the "Allied Air Force", but after a month had elapsed the title was merged in the complete reorganisation of all Air Forces in the Mediterranean.

At this time the enemy was enjoying air superiority in Tunisia because of his favourable strategic position. Airfields in enemy territory were more numerous and better placed for tactical operations than those of the Allies.<sup>(2)</sup>

#### Assumption of Command by Allied Force Headquarters

On 1 January 1943, the term Eastern Task Force was abolished and A.F.H.Q. with headquarters at Algiers, assumed control of all military operations in French North Africa. This relieved General Anderson's headquarters of the responsibility for the Base and L. of C. The Rear H.Q. First Army moved from Algiers to join the Main Army H.Q. at Constantine.

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In a directive to the G.O.C. Fifth Corps the Army Commander defined his policy for operations during the period January 1943 as follows:

"During the rainy season the general policy will be to keep the enemy fully occupied by constant pressure and limited attacks."

"Plans will be prepared for an attack on Tunis and Bizerta and Fifth Corps reorganised, trained and re-equipped for this purpose."

Maximum assistance will be given to the French Forces on the right of Fifth Corps as far as and including Pont du Fahs.

A.G. A.F.H.Q.  
387.64

Relations between the French and A.F.H.Q. had been difficult from the beginning of their association. The Clark - Darlan agreement had stated that the French forces would aid and support the forces of the United States and their Allies to expel the enemy from North Africa, but had continued, "the status, command, functions, employment, rights and privileges of French land, sea and air forces will remain under French direction". General Eisenhower was not therefore in command of the French Forces. The Headquarters of General Giraud, the French Commander-in-Chief in North Africa, were situated close to that of A.F.H.Q., and co-operation between the two was as close as could be expected in view of the difficulties inseparable from the

S.G.S. A.F.H.Q.  
016-2

(1) His Chief of Staff was A.V.M. J.M. Robb, formerly A.O.C. Gibraltar. For full details of change in Command see Chapters 10 and 11.

(2) See Map No.8.



use of different languages. But General Anderson, in command of the Allied Forces on the Tunisian front had experienced difficulties in his dealings with General Juin, the Commander of the French Forces in the Field.

A.F.H.Q.  
58/1.6 in  
box 2372

#### Planning for Operation Satin

On 10 January 1943, General Eisenhower held a conference at which all Commanders were present. He explained that owing to the bad weather in Northern Tunisia and the slow rate of build up of the First Army, it would not be possible to renew the main attack by the First Army until the weather permitted. He thought that this might be possible in about sixty days time. In the meantime, he considered it fatal to do nothing. He proposed therefore to concentrate an American Force (II Corps) in the Tabessa area "for action against the coast in order to (a) sever the line of communication to Rommel (b) disperse and weaken the enemy force in the bridgehead Bizerta - Tunis and thereby make the final task of First Army easier". The force was to be commanded by General Fredendall and its main objective the port of Sfax. General Fredendall proposed to move first against Gabes in order to protect his southern flank before turning north against Sfax. General Eisenhower concurred in this proposal.

The First Army were ordered to undertake carefully prepared attacks with limited objectives and were to concert plans with General Juin for action in the area south of Pont du Fahs if weather and opportunity permitted. General Juin's forces were to hold vital points at Fondouk to Ouled El Kebbir and to make an advance, if possible. Additional forces were allotted to General Juin to enable him to hold the Fondouk - Pichon Area. It was intended that the advance should begin between 20 - 25 January, and was to be preceded by two minor operations, one intended to seize the defile of El Guettar, and the other to retake Fondouk. General Eisenhower stated his intention of setting up a forward command post with the collaboration of General Giraud at Constantine, but that he only intended to exercise strategic control from it, as he had neither the facilities for nor the intention of exercising tactical control which was more properly the province of the Commanders in the Field. In his dispatch General Eisenhower gives the following reasons for his action at this time. "Since I was completely dependent on the good will of the French, in order to maintain a secure base in French North Africa, I felt bound to take account of their sensibilities, and, as Commander-in-Chief Allied Force, I took personal command of the battle area with a Command post in the forward area at Constantine, where I would maintain close touch with all commanders and insure co-ordination of all ground and air forces."

C.-in-C.  
dispatch  
P. 29

At the end of the conference it was stated that there would be an air support command with the First Army and one with General Fredendall. General Juin was to call on General Anderson for air support if required in the northern sector of his front and on General Fredendall for air support in his southern sector. General Juin is reported to have expressed himself as being in general agreement with the plan.

#### Location of Air Forces

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History of  
A.A.F. in  
World War II

The XII Air Support Command was ordered to support II Corps during the preparation and prosecution of the Satin plan. It was comprised of two squadrons of the

SECRET

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O.R.B.  
242 Group  
P. 24

33rd Fighter Group (26-P-40's), the 47th Bomb Group (L) (19-P-39's), and the 92nd Fighter Squadron (38 A-20's) and a French Unit the "Lafayette Escadrille". The following airfields had been allotted for use by the Twelfth Air Force Biskra, Tebessa, Telergma, Thelepte, Gafsa, Ain Beida, Youks Les Bains and Oul Mene, while those under the control of the E.A.C. were Duzerville, Souk El Arba, Bone, Souk Ahras, Setif, Guelma, Canrobert, Djidjelli, Jemappes, Constantine, Souk El Khemis and Philippeville. Maison Blanche and Blida were occupied jointly by both Air Forces.

Appendix Q.  
to E.A.C. 540  
Dec. 1942.

Letter EAC/1608/  
Org. 25 Dec

At the end of December 1942, the British fighter squadron had been regrouped as shown

(1)	<u>Wing</u>	<u>H.Q.</u>	<u>Sqdn.</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
	322	Bone	154	Bone	
			81	"	
			242	"	
			225	"	
(2)	323	Maison Blanche	43	Maison Blanche	
			253	Philippeville	To move to
			32	Philippeville	Duzerville
					when aero-
					drome ready.
			87	Djidjelli	
(3)	324	Souk el Arba	93	Souk el Arba	
			152	"	
			72	"	
			111	"	
			241	"	
(4)	325	Setif	255	Setif	Operating as
			600	"	necessary
			153	"	from Maison
					Blanche,
					Souk el Arba
					and
					Duzerville
					(when ready).
			232	Constantine	To assemble
			243	"	and await
					arrival of
					aircraft.
					Under 325
					Wing for
					administra-
					tion.

No.325 Wing became responsible for all night fighter operations in the command, and was to operate directly under Eastern Air Command.

No.323 Wing was then responsible for the operation of the squadrons providing the defence of Algiers, Bougie and Philippeville, and for the protection of shipping convoys along the coast to a point as far east as Cap Takouch. Nos. 322 and 324 (Mobile) Wings were to be controlled by No.242 Group at Ain Seymour for operations in support of the First Army. The Group had also to assume responsibility for the defence of Bone and of convoy protection east of Cap Takouch. The coastline from west of Algiers to Bone was divided into four sectors, the sector boundaries being fixed provisionally by lines drawn north and south through the following points - Cap Tenes, Cap Corbelin,

E.A.C. Air  
Staff Memo  
No.1  
13 Jan. 1943.  
File -  
EAC/280/4/Air  
"Air Staff  
Memorandum 1"  
(Boc IV)

Cap Bougaroon and Cap Takouch. A combined Operations/Filter Room for each sector was situated at Maison Blanche, Djidjelli, Philippeville and Bone respectively.

O.R.B.  
242 Group  
29 Dec. 1942

Gun defended areas had been established at Algiers, Bougie, Philippeville and Bone. The deployment of a Balloon Squadron at Bone was being considered. The A.O.C. No. 242 Group decided to concentrate work on the following airfields in the forward areas in order to try and make them available for operations in all weather, namely Souk el Khemis, Souk el Arba, Bone and Duzerville. It was also decided that Jemappes should eventually be used instead of Philippeville and the landing ground at Taher instead of the aerodrome at Djidjelli.

On 18 January 1943 the first enemy attacks in Central Tunisia were launched.

#### Tunisian Terrain

A.F.H.Q.  
5656

In order to appreciate what follows it is necessary to describe the terrain in which the Army was operating in some detail. In the south near Ferriana and Gafsa, a dry climate and sandy practically barren countryside provided almost desert conditions. In the north precipitous mountains, not unlike parts of the North West Frontier of India, dominated the scene and supply was often only possible by pack-mule. In the Northern Sector, notably in the valleys of the Siliana and Medjerda rivers, winter conditions, prolonged from November until April, produced rain and a glutinous type of mud. Experience proved that after rain, at least five days continuous sunshine was necessary before any attempt could be made at cross country movement. Such movement would be completely halted at the first recurrence of rainy conditions. Armoured formations could only operate with success in the area south of Ferriana - Sbeitla - Pichon, the Kairouan Plain, the Goubellat Plain and the Medjez Valley. Access to all these areas was through passes in the hills dominated by the enemy.

A study of the map will show, that such action unless combined with successes elsewhere could hardly prove decisive except in the Medjez Valley, since operations north of Kairouan were bound eventually to encounter the mountainous country between Enfidaville and the Eastern Dorsale south of Djebel Zaghouan, while an offensive north-east from Bou Arada and east from the Djebel Rihane was barred from Tunis by the range of hills between Bir Meherga - Ain el Asker and Ksar Tyr.

The nature of the country favoured the defensive dispositions of the enemy by limiting the areas in which the Allied armoured forces could deploy.

#### The Enemy Attack in Central Tunisia

At the end of the day (18 Jan.) the enemy's progress had been most marked in the French sector, and it was believed that he might be attempting a double drive against the French north west from Kairouan and south west from Pont du Fahs. During the night 18/19th the attack in the French sector was continued, and on the 19th the enemy advance went on compelling the French and supporting British units to withdraw to the south-west. At 1810 hours General Juin (who had assumed command of the French Forces operating on the Tunisian front) reported that the situation was serious and that enemy tanks and infantry had reached Sidi Said. He urgently requested that the U.S. force then

WD/8/1/42  
(P.86. C.H.)



in the area of Sbeitla should be moved to Maktar forthwith with a view to its operating against the enemy in the Cusseltia Valley. At 2145 hours II U.S. Corp on instructions from A.F.H.Q. in response to General Juin's appeal ordered Robinett Force<sup>(1)</sup> from Sbeitla to Maktar, 26 Combat team (less 2 Batts.) from Guelma to Sbeitla and Combat team B from Feriana to Sbeitla. The G.O.C. V Corps moved forces towards Robaa, which was being held by British and French troops.

Enemy tanks and infantry continued their advance after dark on 19 January in the valley north east of Cusseltia, where some British were holding a defensive position together with a company of Moroccan infantry, four French anti-tank guns and one American tank destroyer platoon. At 2100 hours the French and American withdrew in face of the enemy advance, leaving a detachment of a British anti-tank regiment in an isolated forward position, where they were engaged by enemy small arms fire for some time in the mist and darkness. Believing his position to be surrounded and untenable the officer in command gave the order to abandon the guns and withdrew without having engaged the enemy. On 20 January in addition to the British Force holding Robaa and Robinett Force concentrating in the Maktar area the general disposition of the French units was as follows:- Djebel, Bargou - S.W. of Robaa-Siliana. The situation remained unchanged until nightfall, though enemy movement was observed from the air, when at 1650 hours nine Hurribombers of No.225 Squadron attacked a column of one hundred and fifty vehicles moving south-west from Pont du Fahs on the main road. Concentration of troop and vehicles were also observed and bombed in the area. About midnight 20/21 January there were indications of a further enemy attack south-west down the valley towards Ousseltia and General Anderson visited General Juin at the latter's headquarters at Djerissa to discuss counter measures. The G.O.C. V Corp had issued orders that Bou Arada must be held at all costs. Enemy activity in that area was confined to air bombing and shelling by artillery from the hills to the north-east. Bou Arada itself was attacked by hostile dive bombers and fighters at 0915 hours and again at 1630 hours.

#### A.F.H.Q. General Plan

On 21 January a Conference was held at A.F.H.Q. Command Post at Constantine at which General Anderson explained the tactical situation to the C.-in-C. It was agreed that the collapse of the French Forces in the mountainous region south and south west of Pont du Fahs in the last few days made it evident that the American forces in the south and the British in the north should operate towards a common boundary in order to cover this gap. Measures to effect this object was taken accordingly. But on the same day the enemy was continuing his advance against little opposition and by 1430 hours had reached the general line of the road Kairouan - Ousseltia - Sidi Amara. It was believed that French troops were still holding the mountain ranges east and west of the Ousseltia valley as far north as Djebel Touila and Djebel Bargou respectively.

By the 23rd Robinett force had established a strong point around Ousseltia village. During the day all French troops withdrew south of the road Kairouan - Ousseltia and

(1) An improvised American formation, composed of one medium Tank Battalion - one armoured Infantry Battalion - one Tank Destroyer Battalion (less 2 coys.) one Field Artillery Battalion and one Company A.A. Battalion.

by 1800 hours were holding positions from Djebel Ousselat to the south. Robinett force intention was to hold in conjunction with the available French troops the line Pichon - Kairouan - Ousseltia. The situation in the Robaa area was fairly quiet.

W.D/8/1/584  
(H.C. P. 107)

By 25 January the enemy had withdrawn from the Ousseltia valley and American Armoured patrols had made a considerable unopposed advance east and north east. By 1800 hours Robinett force had reached the general line Djebel el Rihana - Sidi Said - Sidi Mohammed el Aoualdi - north and N.E. of Ksar Lemsā. The four guns and two tractors which had been abandoned on the 19th were recovered during the day's advance. In the Robaa Sector the enemy remained on the defensive.

Activities of No.242 Group. 18-25 January 1942

O.R.Bs 242  
Group No.72 and  
No.111 Sqdn.

During this period aircraft of No.242 Group had been actively engaged. On the 18th three sorties were made by Nos. 72 and 111 Squadrons (Spitfire) operating from Souk el Arba as escort first to No.241 Squadron's Hurri-bombers attacking the enemy at a point S.W. of Pont du Fahs in which thirty enemy aircraft were seen, but only one Me.109 damaged. On the second sortie while escorting No.241 Squadron's Tac/R Spitfires, thirty tanks were observed in formation west of Pont du Fahs. A third sortie organised to attack these tanks, failed to find them, the formation was engaged by 15 Me.109s, three of which were destroyed for the loss of one Spitfire. On the 19th Nos.93 and 111 Squadrons' Spitfires escorted No.225 Squadron's Tac/R Spitfires to the Pont du Fahs area. Enemy tanks, troops and vehicles were seen. As a result a second sortie was made by these two Squadrons escorting No.241 Squadron Hurribombers in successful attacks on these targets.

O.R.B.93 Sqdn.

O.R.B.  
241 Sqdn.

On the next day No.241 Squadron was over the Pont du Fahs area escorted on the first sortie by No.72 Squadron, and on the second by No.93 Squadron. On the second sortie one hundred and fifty enemy vehicles were observed on roads S.W. of Pont du Fahs. A third sortie was organised, this time escorted by Spitfire Squadrons (Nos.72 and 93) and attacks were successfully made on enemy troops and transport. No enemy aircraft were encountered. During the day requests were made to General Craig, the Commander of the XII Air Support Command for help. But the reply came "Regret exceedingly that the range of my fighters will not permit any effort in the area designated". On the 21st Nos.72 and 111 Squadrons escorted No.241 Squadron Tac/R Spitfire over the Pont du Fahs - Robaa area. Considerable movements of tanks and enemy vehicles were seen. Eight enemy aircraft were observed over Medjez el Bab, but no combats took place.

O.R.B.  
242 Group

Ibid

The next day Nos.111 and 225 Squadrons reconnoitred the area Medjez el Bab - Tebourba, but saw nothing and met no enemy aircraft; while Nos.72 and 93 Squadrons escorted 241 Squadron Hurribombers in bombing attacks on targets in the Pont du Fahs area. Hits were made on vehicles, railway lines and buildings. Enemy tanks were seen between Pont du Fahs and Robaa. No.93 Squadron on reconnaissance west of Kairouan observed M.T. columns and tanks. No enemy aircraft were encountered.

On the 23rd Tac/R was undertaken in the areas Mateur and north of Kairouan, but without result. No.241 Squadron's Hurribombers bombed a bridge over a road south west of Pont du Fahs, but no direct hits were claimed.

Once again no enemy aircraft were seen on any of these sorties. The next two days' operations were similar to those already recounted and no enemy aircraft made an appearance.

#### Operations by the Bisley Wing

During the same period 18 - 25 January, the four Bisley Squadrons, Nos. 13-18, 114 and 614 operating from the airfield at Canrobert, and always by night, had for the first two nights bombed Tunis - Sfax and Sousse, but on the night of the 19/20th the attack was shifted to the bombing of enemy transport on the roads in the Tebourba and Pont du Fahs areas. Many direct hits on enemy convoys were effected. The same procedure was observed on the next night when strikes were obtained on railway tracks, viaducts, mechanical transport in convoys and a train was machine gunned. On the night of the 22nd/23rd, two Bisley Squadrons (Nos. 614 and 18) attacked the airfield at Kairouan, large fires were started and much damage was done.

O.R.B.  
242 Group

On the night of the 21st, there were no operations as the weather was unsuitable. But it is noteworthy that by that time only eight Bisleys remained in a serviceable condition. At Souk el Arba forty-nine Spitfires, twenty-six Hurribombers, and six Beaufighters were still serviceable.

At Bone during the period, No. 225 Squadron (Beaufighter) patrolled the area by night; destroying a Cant. Z 1007 Bis., on the 18th, and another on the 19th. On the 21st a He.111 was shot down and on the 23rd a D.O.217. By day the harbour and ships of the convoy were protected by patrols of aircraft from No. 154 Squadron. Spitfires of Squadrons Nos. 232 and 243 made periodic sweeps in the Bizerte - Mateur - Beja areas. On the night of the 23/24 January ten enemy aircraft raided in the Bone area but no damage or casualties were reported. On the 20th the advance part of No. 985 (Balloon) Squadron arrived at Bone from Algiers.

O.R.B.  
242 Group

The most forward aerodrome at Souk el Arba was approximately seventy miles from the scene of action around Pont du Fahs and the endurance of the Spitfire was very limited. An attempt had been made on 5 December to operate fighters from a more advanced aerodrome at Medjez el Bab, but immediate enemy action prevented this and the airfield had to be evacuated. The practice of escorting sorties with two Squadrons of Spitfires appears to have been a wasteful policy. It is true that these aircraft were outclassed by the newer German types, but at this period it would appear that there was little air fighting, in fact on most sorties enemy aircraft were not even observed in the distance. A considerable number of aircraft were tied down in the defence of Bone and in making fighter sweeps in the Bizerte area. The four Squadrons of Bisley's had been a failure from the beginning of the campaign. A complete Squadron (No. 18) had been almost wiped out in an ill-advised operation on 4 December 1942. (1)

O.R.B.  
93 Squadron  
Dec. 1942

O.R.B.  
18 Squadron

#### Activities of XII Air Support Command 18-25 January 1943

A.A.F. in  
World War II  
Vol. II Chap. 5  
P. 9.

General Craig was one of the few Americans who had had, during a brief visit to the R.A.F. in the Middle East, an opportunity of studying the methods employed by the Air Forces in the Western Desert. On 9 January 1943 his

(1) See Chapter 7 - "Tactical Operations".



command consisted of two under strength squadrons of the 33rd Fighter Group and the 47th Light Bombardment Group. His airfields were at Youks Les Bains - and Thelepte, there were forward landing grounds at Gafsa and Sbeitla. Three more were under construction at Tebessa, Le Kouif, and Kalaa Djerda. On 11 January at a Conference at Corps headquarters at Constantine he had declared that the forces allotted to him were insufficient for the role they were expected to play in connection with operation Satan. General Doolittle agreed to provide reinforcements and concurred in General Craig's plan to conserve his operational strength. So that in the period 8 - 18 January XII A.S.C. remained relatively inactive, except for routine reconnaissance.

Ibid P. 12

During the first three days of the Robaa - Ousseltia action XII A.S.C. took no part in the operations, nor were its aircraft especially active on its own front. The fighting had taken place north of the Dechret Bou Dabouss line beyond which the R.A.F. had been originally responsible and No.242 Group had taken on such targets as the German and Italians had presented. The U.S. II Corps, which controlled XII A.S.C., had refused XIX Corps request for air reconnaissance on the grounds that it had no responsibilities or interest in the area. It was true that about seventy miles of mountainous terrain separated the two ground organisations, but such a distance was of course no barrier to General Craig's aircraft.

#### Formation of Allied Air Support Command

Ibid P. 13

On 22 January, General Spaatz sent Air Marshal Tedder a message in which he described the air support situation as critical, and went on to state that he was now compelled to implement part of the organisation which had been agreed at the Casablanca conference.<sup>(1)</sup> General Kuter, who had come out from England to become the A-3 Allied Air Force was to be given command of a co-ordinating air-support organisation until Air Marshal Coningham could arrive. Kuter was to control No.242 Group and the XII A.S.C., and co-operate with General Anderson, who in the crisis had been given command of the II and XIX Corps. On 21 January General Craig was relieved by Colonel Paul L. Williams in command of XII A.S.C. General Kuter's headquarters were at Constantine and his organisation was known as the "Allied Air Support Command". By 25 January his headquarters were in operation, passing bombing requests back to the Twelfth Air Force and to the Eastern Air Command. Until rain curtailed activity after 24 January, XII A.S.C. had given more substantial help than in the earlier days of the operations. On the 22nd ten P-39's, sixteen P-40's and the Lafayette Escadrille swept the battle area, strafing tanks, vehicles and machine gun positions. In the afternoon A-20's bombed a tank depot seventeen miles N.N.E. of Ousseltia. On the next day an attack co-ordinated with the ground forces was made against enemy infantry and gun positions. Six A-20's dropped bombs from three thousand feet. It was believed that two ammunition dumps were destroyed.

Ibid

C.-in-C.  
dispatch P. 32

General Eisenhower summing up this period in his dispatch wrote:-

"our gathering air forces gained their first extensive experience of air-ground support during this engagement. Although enemy troops and vehicles, in general,

(1) See Chapter 10.

were not sufficiently concentrated to provide daylight targets for heavy bombers there was increased scope for fighter-bomber activity, and from January 18 to the end of the month there were almost daily sorties by Hurricane bombers which attacked enemy vehicles, positions and bridges with considerable effect."

General Anderson assumes command of the whole front

As the result of this attack, General Eisenhower, after having consulted Generals Juin and Anderson, placed the whole front under General Anderson's Command. When this action was reported on 27 January to General Giraud, he made no objection and confirmed the decision in writing.

Ibid P. 33

General Eisenhower had, during the whole of this period made frequent visits to the front and to his post at Constantine, but "the number and complexity of problems at Algiers and in the forward areas simply did not permit of divided attention, and I sent several messages urging the early arrival of Alexander to take over the front".

The Ousseltia threat had been checked, but on 30 January the Germans attacked the French in the Faid Pass. About seventy enemy tanks captured Faid by that evening, and the French were compelled to fall back on Sidi Bou Zid, a few miles to the westward.

A.A.F. in  
W.W.II  
Vol.II  
Chap. 5 P. 19

XII A.S.C. spent the whole day bombing and strafing in the Faid area. Twenty-three aircraft (P-40's - P-39's and A-20's) attacked German Panzers in the pass, and claimed to have destroyed twelve of them. The next day defensive patrols were flown over the ground forces at Faid and Mak Nassy. In fighting between eight P-40's and seven Me.109's the Americans lost two aircraft to the enemy's one. American vehicles advancing over the road, without proper intervals, towards Sened Station were heavily bombed by Stukas. On 1 February Sened Station was taken and aircraft of XII A.S.C. patrolling the area, became involved in fighting with twenty-four J.U.87's escorted by Me.109's. The P-40's had the best of it, shooting down three Stukas.

Ibid

XII A.S.C's policy at this time was to maintain continuous air cover over the battle areas, and at the same time provide fighter escort for the A-20's and P-39's. On 2 February the Command suffered severe losses in attempting to protect too wide a front.<sup>(1)</sup> As a result the survivors of the 33rd Group, the most experienced and effective fighter unit, had to be relieved and sent back to Morocco for a rest. They were replaced on 6 February by the 31st Group (Spitfires) which were based on the airfield at Thelpte. One of the reasons for these heavy losses was the fact that the German Squadrons operating against the Americans had been reinforced by the remnants of the forces of Fleigerfuhrer/Africa who had been driven off their airfields in Libya by the advancing Eighth Army and Western Desert Air Force which had captured Tripoli on 23 January.

	<u>Losses</u>
(1) Combat	25
Flak	7
Other	6
Total	<u>38</u> aircraft

Action by No.242 Group

O.R.B.  
242 Group

No.242 Group were not much concerned with these operations as the latter area was out of the effective range of the Spitfires. The Bisley Wing at Canrobert did not operate between the period 1 - 4 February as there was no moon. Kairouan airfield was kept under observation, and sweeps were made in the Sousse area, as well as the normal sorties in support of the First Army. Twelve Me.109's dive bombed Bone aerodrome on 31 January, destroying two Spitfires on the ground. No.81 Squadron intercepted and shot down three of these. Souk el Khemis airfield was bombed on 2 and 3 February, and a large number of Hurricanes and Spitfires were destroyed. Souk el Arba was attacked on the 8th by twelve fighter bombers, but there was no damage or casualties. Very little air fighting occurred during this period.

The Opening of the Kasserine Battle (14 February)

Cabinet Hist.  
P. 172

On 14 February part of the 10th Panzer Division was concentrated as a mobile reserve in the area south of Kairouan and the 21st Panzer Division, a detachment of which had held the Faïd Pass since the 30 January, was believed to be in the area west of Sfax. Until 13 February activity in the sector south of Faïd had been limited to Armoured patrolling by both sides. Early on 14 February, enemy tanks and infantry, supported by aircraft, launched a powerful attack on the 1st U.S. Armoured Division's front between Faïd and Gafsa.

At the same time Sidi Bou Zid was attacked by dive bombers. The enemy then brought infantry reinforcements through the Faïd Pass, and a heavy Armoured battle ensued in the Sidi Bou Zid area in which the Americans were out-maneuvred and incurred fifty per cent. tank casualties. The total enemy tank strength used was estimated at one hundred and thirty. This implied that the 10th Panzer Division had not yet been committed and that this formation still threatened the XIXth Corps in the sector west of Kairouan. The line reached by the enemy directly threatened Sbeitla. General Eisenhower reporting to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the evening of 13th February wrote:-

"Due to lack of adequate reserves, it is no longer possible to hold a line so extensive as that which we had formerly been attempting to occupy, which we had done in order to keep the enemy pinned into the north west possible corridor and to facilitate later offensives. Gafsa was evacuated last evening and II Corps is taking up a position in defence of the general line Feriana - Sbeitla. Any further contraction of this line will result in the loss of the Thelpte airfields which the Air Corps Commander and I consider are of great importance to future operations. Our present tactical difficulties result from my attempt to do possibly too much, coupled with the deterioration of the French resistance in the central mountainous area, which began about 17 January. That deterioration has absorbed the bulk of the United States 1st and 34th Divisions, which formations had originally been pushed forward to provide general reserves and to permit us to attack from the line which we were then holding." By midnight 17/18 February the enemy had reached the general line Pichon - Sbeitla - Kasserine - Thelpte. All the reserves in the forward area were now committed. Two squadrons of Sherman tanks manned by scratch British and American crews were being sent to



Tebessa as a reserve and Churchill tanks were being brought up by road from the docks at Bone. The nearest force of any size that might be employed as an additional Army reserve was part of the 9th U.S. Division at Constantine some one hundred and sixty miles away to the west.

Reorganisation

The 18th Army Group

It had already been decided at the Casablanca Conference, that when the eighth Army arrived in the Tunisian Zone of operations, an Army Group Headquarters was to be established to co-ordinate the actions of the two armies.

A.F.H.Q.  
G.O.  
No. 21/43

On 20 February 1943, General the Honourable Sir Harold Alexander was named as the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Ground Force and appointed in command of the Eighteenth Army Group, Allied Force, which comprised the First and Eighth British Armies. Thus, by the appointment of General Alexander to the position of Deputy Commander-in-Chief, the original plan of a British officer in this position was implemented. It was particularly desirable at this juncture as the British had three Army Corps on the Tunisian front, whereas the Americans and French had each only one.

RA/361.3  
(H.C. P. 187)

General Alexander in a message to the War Office dispatched late on 19 February described the situation thus:-

"General situation is far from satisfactory. British, American and French units are mixed up on the front especially in the south. Formations have been split up. There is no clear policy and no plan of campaign. The Air is much the same. This is the result of no firm direction or centralized control from above. British are in good heart and have fought well. Americans are ignorant, ill-trained and rather at a loss consequently not too happy. French are badly equipped but I believe have possibility to play a useful role if they can be armed. We have quite definitely lost the initiative."

H.L. P. 203

By 21 February the enemy had broken into the centre of the II (U.S.) Corps front, had occupied the Kasserine pass and pushed his tanks through into the plain beyond.

H.C. P. 213

The next day the enemy was in a dominating position some four miles south of Thala. General Alexander reported, "Situation on battlefront is critical and the next day or two should decide issue. I have ordered Anderson to concentrate his armour to meet main enemy if required about Thala. 9th American Division on its way to Constantine from the west.....have instructed Eighth Army to exert pressure on Mareth battle front. This is being implemented by a thrust towards Gabes which should have become a strong threat to the enemy by 25 February. My main anxiety is poor fighting quality of Americans.....Bad weather over battle area has up to today prevented almost all air support."

H.C.  
P. 228

By the 25th crisis had passed. The enemy was withdrawing his troops over the whole of the front; but the progress of the advancing British and American forces was impeded by minefields and demolitions. At 0843 hours

twelve Spitfire aircraft on offensive reconnaissance observed heavy eastbound traffic on the road Sbeitla - Faïd and a concentration of vehicles on the road N.E. of Kasserine. There was no activity by the enemy's airforces.

#### Progress of the Eighth Army

H.C.  
P.231

During the period 13 - 25 February the Eighth Army's advance into Tunisia continued but progress was hampered by the enemy's minefields and by heavy rainstorms and thick cloud which restricted the activities of the Desert Air Force. As the weather improved after 23 February the air forces resumed their attack on the enemy's communications west of Mareth and on the port of Gabes and Sfax. The enemy's policy during this period had been to disorganise or cripple the First Army sufficiently to allow himself time and space to concentrate his armoured strength to meet the Eighth Army on the Mareth position. Rommel had taken advantage of his interior lines to exploit his successes on the 14 and 15 February almost as far west as Tebessa and Thala, and then to fall back quickly to the east and south east on 23 February, relying on the extensive use of mines and demolitions to cover his withdrawal.

#### The Allied Air Support Command in the Kasserine Battle

On 7 February the Allied Air Support Command (General Kuter) assumed operational control of both No.242 Group and XII Air Support Command.

No. 242 Group commanded by Air Commodore Lawson<sup>(1)</sup> from his headquarters at Ain Seymour comprised the following operational Units:-<sup>(2)</sup>

	<u>Units</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>
O.R.B. 242 Group Appendix.	<u>H.Q. No.324 Wing</u>	Souk El Khemis	-
	No. 93 Squadron	"	Spitfire
	No.111 "	"	Spitfire
	No.225 "	"	Spitfire (Tac/R)
	No. 72 "	"	Spitfire
	No.243 "	"	Spitfire
	No.152 "	"	Spitfire
	No.241 "	Constantine	Hurribomber and Tac/R Spitfire
	No.600 "	Souk El Khemis	Beaufighter (N)
	<u>H.Q. No.326 Wing</u>	Ain Beida	-
	No. 18 Squadron	Canrobert	Bisley
	No.114 "	" "	"
	No. 13 "	Oulmene	"
	No.614 "	"	"

Report on  
operations  
XII A.S.C.  
II J.15/36/A

XII Air Support Command under Colonel Paul. L. Williams consisted of:-

31st Fighter Group	Thelepte Area	Spitfire
52nd " " (2 squadrons)	" "	"
81st " " (2 squadrons)	" "	Airacobra
47th Bomb Group (L)	" "	Boston

(1) Relieved by Air Commodore K.B.B. Cross 21 February 1943.

(2) Particulars of No.322 Wing have been omitted as they took no part in the Kasserine action.

of which seventy-six Spitfires, twenty-seven Airacobras and twenty-four Bostons were fit for operations on 16 February.

On 14 February at the beginning of the Kasserine battle, Bostons of XII A.S.C. supported by fighters, first attacked an enemy tank column in the Faïd Pass, and later caused havoc amongst an enemy convoy of about one hundred vehicles which they found halted and undispersed in a position to the north-west of Maknassy.

On the 15th six Me.109s attacked the airfield at Thelepte, but twelve Spitfires which had just taken off were hastily recalled and succeeded in shooting down three of the enemy aircraft. During the rest of the day Spitfires and Airacobras strafed and patrolled in the vicinity of Sidi Bou Zid.

A reconnaissance made on the 14th had shown that many enemy aircraft were located on Kairouan airfield, so that on the 15th it was attacked with fragmentation bombs by a total of twenty-two Mitchells from the Twelfth Group.

The next day II U.S. Corps was harassed by dive bombing in a bitter delaying action east and southeast of Sbeitla. XII A.S.C. did what it could in the deteriorating situation, its fighters providing air cover, and its light bombers attacking vehicles, tanks and gun positions.

Bad weather had prevented the aircraft of No.242 Group from participating in the Kasserine battle until the night of the 16/17 February, when the Bisley Wing were able to operate. Twelve thousand pounds of bombs were dropped on roads and enemy transport in the vicinity of Kairouan.

On the 17th the general situation was such that XII A.S.C. was compelled to evacuate its forward bases. Sbeitla had been abandoned on the 14th and the valuable Thelepte airfields on the 17th. Some three thousand troops and most of the equipment were successfully removed, but eighteen aircraft and fifty thousand gallons of petrol had to be set on fire to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. For the next few days disorganisation and bad weather prevented any large scale action by XII A.S.C.

On 17 February, Air Marshal Coningham arrived at the headquarters of Eighteenth Army Group, and assumed command of the Allied Air Support Command, which in the reorganisation became the next day the Northwest African Tactical Air Force.<sup>(1)</sup> His first action was to signal both commands deprecating the fact that almost all the flying which had been done by XII A.S.C. and No.242 Group had been defensive. Targets had been in evidence, and bombers had been available, but had not been utilized, nor had the fighters been used offensively. In future the maximum offensive role would be given to every sortie - an air force on the offensive automatically protected the ground forces. Tanks were to be ignored as enemy concentrations of troops and/or soft skinned vehicles were better targets.

On the night 18/19 February, the Bisley Wing operating from Canrobert dropped twelve thousand pounds of bombs on enemy road transport vehicles in the area Fondouk - Faïd - Sbeitla - Gafsa. Direct hits were observed on fifteen to twenty vehicles, believed to be tanks, but results were

(1) See Chapter 10.

A.A.F. in  
World War II

O.R.B.  
242 Group

A.A.F. in  
World War II

Ibid

O.R.B.  
242 Group



mostly unobserved owing to the bad weather prevailing.

The next night the Wing made attacks on roads in the Kasserine - Sbeitla area and on Gafsa railway station. Eighteen thousand pounds of bombs were dropped, but bad visibility made it difficult to locate targets or to observe the results of the bombing.

A.A.F. in  
World War II

On the 20th General Spaatz placed most of his strategic bombers (XII Bomber Command plus Nos. 142 and 150 Squadrons) (Wellington)(1) at Coningham's disposal, an arrangement which was retained throughout the critical phase of the operations.

O.R.B.  
242 Group

Once again on the night of the 20th/21st roads, railway sidings and Gafsa town were bombed by twenty-four Bisleys, but low cloud, and icing conditions over the target area made observation difficult.

On the 21st XII A.S.C. were forced out of the airfield at Tebessa, and by the 22nd the whole formation was concentrated at Youks Les Bains. This airfield became the only base left to XII A.S.C., troops streamed past it making for the comparative safety of Ain Beida and Constantine. Operations proceeded from one steel plank runway from which a constant stream of aircraft took off and landed. The weather was very bad with low cloud and intermittent rain, but the Bostons managed to execute one hundred and fourteen sorties on the Thala area from which the enemy was beginning to withdraw.

Fortresses from the Strategic Air Force attempted a series of sorties on targets in the Kasserine Pass, but in the end only seven aircraft dropped their fragmentation bombs on the objectives. Mitchells from the Twelfth Group escorted by XII A.S.C. fighters from Youks made an attack on a bridge, but were unable to observe the result. Lightnings from the Strategic Air Force and Airacobras of XII A.S.C. made continuous attacks on enemy columns retreating through the Kasserine Pass.

O.R.B.  
242 Group

That night the Bisley Wing dropped fifty-six thousand pounds of bombs on the roads Sbeitla - Kasserine - Blidzed-Fane, on a suspected tank harbour, and on the Kasserine Gateway. A direct hit was observed on a train, which was afterwards machine gunned from a low altitude. Bombs were also dropped in the towns of Kasserine and Feriana, and a large fire was started at a point about eight miles northwest of Kasserine. Most of the aircraft completed three sorties each, but the programme was considerably curtailed owing to a weather forecast which foretold that a fog was likely to set in soon after midnight.

Ibid

At last, on the morning of the 23rd, No. 242 Group's fighters were able to operate. Then No. 111 Squadron (Spitfire) escorting No. 225 Squadron (TAC/R Spitfire) on an offensive reconnaissance discovered the road Sbeitla - Kasserine crammed with enemy traffic retreating eastward, and the route Sbiba - Sbeitla full of vehicles moving south. Later Nos. 111 and 93 Squadrons escorted No. 225 Squadron Hurribombers in an attack on the Kasserine Sbeitla road with bombs, cannon and machine gun fire. Results were difficult

(1) The Wellington Squadrons were not called upon to operate in the Kasserine battle.

to observe as enemy aircraft were up and there was heavy fighting, which resulted in two Me.109s being shot down. Towards evening yet another attack was made by Nos.152 and 243 Squadrons (Spitfires) escorting No.241 Squadron's Hurribombers. Enemy transport was still travelling east along the Kasserine - Sbeitla road, and many vehicles were seen dispersed off the road and under cover.

That night the Bisleys of No.114 Squadron attacked transport on the Kasserine - Feriana - Gafsa, and on the Sbeitla - Faïd roads. Parked vehicles were bombed and machine gunned, but fog and mist made observation of the results almost impossible.

On the 24th Nos.93 and 225 Squadrons made an offensive reconnaissance of roads northwest of Kairouan. A small amount of enemy transport and some heavy guns were seen on the road Kairouan - Ousseltia. Nine lorries and a large gun were shot up and the troops strafed. Further sorties were made by other squadrons during the day but by then the enemy traffic had dispersed. At night twenty-nine Bisleys attacked Gafsa and Sbeitla, road movements, and dumps west of these towns. Large fires were started at both places, a direct hit was made on Gafsa station and the town was machine gunned. Supply dumps were set on fire and an ammunition dump was hit. Many large fires were observed in the La Meskiana area.

The next day No.242 Group's fighters were employed on their own front in support of the First Army. Bad weather prevented any operations by the Bisley Wing and by the 27th the airfields at Canrobert had become unserviceable as the result of heavy rain.

It is apparent that the air action in the Kasserine battle was not decisive. In the opening stages XII A.S.C. were incorrectly employed in a defensive role and later when the airfields were over run was practically out of action. Bad weather hampered the efforts of the fighters of No.242 Group and of the Strategic bombers. At night, the Bisley Wing, lifting a comparatively small weight of bombs, could not be expected to achieve decisive results.

Ibid

Author's  
comment

THE REORGANISATION OF THE AIR COMMANDOriginal Dispositions

The original arrangements for Command of the air forces in the Torch area have been described in Chapter 2. For the sake of comprehensiveness they are recapitulated here. The Torch area was divided into two commands by a line running north to south from Cap Tenez. The western division was to be commanded by Brigadier General Doolittle with his H.Q. at Oran; the Eastern division was to be the responsibility of units of the R.A.F. under the Command of Air Marshal Welsh. Both air forces were to operate, for an initial period of from six to eight weeks from airfields located in clearly demarcated geographical areas, and each was to work directly under the orders of the Allied Commander-in-Chief.

Situation by End of November

Air Officer's  
Memo to Allied  
C.-in-C.  
30 Nov. 1942

The situation, however, at the end of November in the Torch area had changed considerably from that planned. A large number of U.S. as well as R.A.F. air squadrons were operating at a high scale of effort in the eastern part of the area. The majority of the former were working from airfields already occupied by the R.A.F. Both the U.S. and R.A.F. air units were operating in support of the First Army against Axis forces in Tunisia under the tactical direction of their own commanders, although in accordance with joint plans made between them and co-ordinated by the Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command. This arrangement appeared to work remarkably well owing to the whole-hearted co-operation of the two Air Commanders concerned,<sup>(1)</sup> and could be regarded as a reasonably satisfactory expedient imposed as a temporary measure by unusual unexpected conditions. It could not, however, be maintained for long and the need for unified command of all air forces in the area, to ensure economical and co-ordinated use of their efforts was manifest.

Mediterranean Idealism

C.A.S. Folder  
1728  
12.11.42

Prior to this the problem of Command in the Mediterranean was being considered both by the Chief of the Air Staff and by the Middle East Defence Committee. It was perhaps premature to consider this as early as the 11 November 1942, but as the Chief of the Air Staff remarked "there was no harm in thinking aloud".

Chief of the Air Staff on Command in the Torch area

C.A.S. Folder  
1728  
12.11.42

To the Chief of the Air Staff<sup>(2)</sup> the first question that seemed to require an answer was whether or not General Eisenhower was to remain a Supreme Commander; and if he did what was to be the area of his jurisdiction. If he remained a supreme commander presumably the Royal Navy had to be under him, and as his jurisdiction would not extend to the Eastern end of the Mediterranean, there would have to be two naval commands. If, on the other hand, General Eisenhower did not remain supreme commander then an airman must be appointed co-equal with him and the Naval Commander of

(1) See Chapter 14 - 'Personalities'.  
(2) Air Chief Marshal Portal.



Western Mediterranean. This airman would have to be an R.A.F. officer since an American could not be co-equal with General Eisenhower.

Apart from service politics and organisation the ideal arrangement appeared to be either a Supreme Commander over the whole area from Gibraltar to Carpathians, or else a triumvirate over that area. Under him or them would be two naval sub-commands, one east and one west with the dividing line just east of Malta; three air commands with approximately the same dividing line for the western two and the third to be co-terminus with the Iraq/Persia Commands, and three land commands, the centre one comprising the existing Middle East Command, extended to the border of Tunis. The Supreme Commander or the triumvirate would be responsible for the allocation of forces and for their strategic direction in these areas. The land commands with their associated air and (in two cases out of three) their associated naval commands would be responsible for the offensive action of the forces placed at their disposal. There might be two subordinate formations of western and central air commands, consisting of naval co-operation groups on the model of No. 201 Group, the allocation of forces from time to time being decided by the Supreme Commander or the triumvirate. The only alternative to this, in the opinion of the Chief of the Air Staff seemed to be to have three commands, all of which did not need, necessarily, to have the same organisation, co-ordinated by the Chiefs of Staff from London, and such an arrangement would introduce great difficulties in the co-ordination of operations. To show the difficulties involved the Chief of the Air Staff took for an example an invasion of Sicily. Such an offensive would obviously require the closest co-ordination of action between central and western commands by land, sea and air, and as the central Mediterranean was where most of the fighting was likely to take place, this seemed to be a fatal objection.

#### Middle East Joint Planners Approach

O.C. (M.E.)  
(42) 115  
12 Nov. 1942

Almost simultaneously, the Joint Planning Staff, Middle East, were approaching the same problem but from a different aspect. The successful landings in North West Africa had given the Allies control of the greater portion of the south western Mediterranean seaboard, and the imminent junction of the First and Eighth Armies called for air power to be reconsidered. They envisaged the task as,

- (i) The support of the land forces in the expulsion of the Axis from Tunisia, thereby gaining bases for the control of the whole southern Mediterranean seaboard and later to support an assault on Sicily and the Italian mainland.
- (ii) Control, in conjunction with the Navy of sea communications in the Mediterranean.

It was their view that both tasks required that the air force should be capable of maximum concentrations and flexibility so that their effort could be switched readily from one task to the other and from one area to another. The Joint Planning Staff, Middle East, suggested that the best co-ordination would be achieved by:-

- (a) The Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, dealing directly with General Eisenhower on all matters concerning naval/air co-operation in the western Basin.

(b) The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, maintaining the closest touch with General Eisenhower concerning the employment and disposition of his air forces.

This paper suggested further that all R.A.F. and specialised naval co-operation units in the western theatre should come under the command of the Air Officer Commanding Eastern Air Command and all units in the eastern theatre would remain under the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East. The organisation would entail the appointment of an R.A.F. Officer to the Staff of General Eisenhower and to that of Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean in order to establish the necessary liaison.

A.O.C. 943  
14 Nov. 1942

These proposals were roundly criticised by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Middle East<sup>(1)</sup> in a signal to the Chief of the Air Staff; he considered that the Joint Planning Staff, Middle East had ignored completely the one pre-eminent and incontestable lesson of the operations of the last eighteen months, viz that the control of sea communications in the Mediterranean had passed to the air. "The victory of Matapan was the last dying flicker of naval supremacy in the Mediterranean," and since 1941 surface ships had only been able to move precariously at sea and then only at the mercy of hostile air forces, and, by grace of what fighter cover the available airfields had made possible. It had been fully and amply demonstrated that reasonable security for British and allied shipping both naval and mercantile could be attained only by their hugging the coast under fighter protection. Long range heavy bombers had proved to be the vital element in attacks on enemy merchant shipping and a factor in dealing with enemy naval vessels. During the eighteen months preceding, an essential feature for both British and Axis air strategy had been the switching of air forces from east to central Mediterranean and vice versa, as the operational situation demanded. Air Chief Marshal Tedder informed the Chief of the Air Staff, that he considered the present arrangement, wherein the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief co-operated with the Naval Commander-in-Chief, and, at the same time was able to concentrate his forces in support of the Army or Navy as the exigencies of the situation required, had worked as satisfactorily as the availability of aircraft had allowed. In his view the proposed chain of command would be as uneconomical as it was unsatisfactory. Was the Naval Commander-in-Chief to be arbiter of air strategy in a theatre where air power was in indisputable control?

AX 645  
15 Nov. 1942  
C.O.S. (M.E.)  
325  
17 Nov. 1942

C.O.S. (42)  
354 (o)

The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Middle East was assured quickly that no such proposals had reached the Chiefs of Staff; they had emanated from Admiralty sources. He was informed that the views of the Commanders-in-Chiefs, Middle East would be requested, and their views were to be made known to the Chiefs of Staff by 22 November and to be considered together with a paper prepared by the Joint Planning Staff. They in the United Kingdom had been asked to consider the question of command in the Mediterranean area on the assumption of the successful completion of Lightfoot and Torch. They were asked to consider it in the light of the following two requirements:-

- (a) to bring maximum pressure to bear on Italy.
- (b) to open sea communications through the Mediterranean.

(1) Air Chief Marshal Tedder.

J.P.(42) 959  
18 Nov. 1942

### Joint Planning Staff's Proposals

The broad features of the scheme proposed by the Joint Planning Staff was that there would be one naval command for the whole Mediterranean, Red Sea and Atlantic within six hundred miles of Gibraltar. The naval commander was to be responsible to the Admiralty for all operations except combined operations in the western Mediterranean. For those he would be responsible to General Eisenhower. The land command was to be divided by a line joining the Tunisian-Tripolitanian frontier to Corfu. There were to be two air commands, one under General Eisenhower, consisting of the U.S. (Twelfth) Air Force and all R.A.F. aircraft based in French North Africa except Coastal aircraft, the other was to be called Middle East and Mediterranean and include all air forces based east of the Tripolitanian-Tunisian frontier and Coastal aircraft in the western Mediterranean was to be Gibraltar. Malta was to remain in the Middle East Command. Two naval sub-commands, one at either end and an air sub-command for so-called Coastal aircraft in the western end of the Mediterranean and at Gibraltar. A combined Naval-Air Headquarters for control of the Mediterranean was to be set up near General Eisenhower's Headquarters and this headquarters was to be run by local representatives of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean and Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Middle East and Mediterranean, who were themselves to remain in Cairo.

### Criticisms

Punch No. 113  
19 Nov. 1942

The Chief of the Air Staff informed the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, of these proposals and went on to comment that the Joint Planning Staff had failed to grasp completely that the war in the Mediterranean would be fought out principally in the air. They had made a first class mistake in imagining that particular types of aircraft could be regarded as purely Coastal and segregated from the remainder of the air force. The solution, according to the Chief of Air Staff, had to lie in centralised air command of the whole Mediterranean with eastern and western sub-commands. If the Americans would not come in, there must be two R.A.F. sub-commands, the western one being lodger units in an area administered by General Eisenhower. In that event co-ordination of the strategic use of air forces under a directive by the Combined Chiefs of Staff would have to be implemented by liaison between General Eisenhower and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East. The latter expressed his complete agreement with the Chief of the Air Staff's desire for a centralised Air Command in the Mediterranean, and in the reply of Commander-in-Chiefs, Middle East to the Chiefs of Staff request for their opinions in command in the Mediterranean, his views prevailed.

D.C.(M.E.)(42)  
85  
21 Nov. 1942

### Appreciation by Commanders-in-Chief Middle East

C.C./143  
22 Nov. 1942

Once North Africa was captured the two main tasks confronting the air forces in the Mediterranean would be the control of sea communications and the support of overseas combined operations. The problem of controlling sea communications would entail for the most part protection of our shipping and offensive action against enemy communications. For this all types of aircraft would be used, and their respective roles necessitated careful co-ordination. As the situation required, the air must be prepared to switch the weight of its offensive to the most important task wherever this might be at any time. They considered that all the air forces in the Mediterranean theatre should



operate under a single air commander, and because of the geographical conditions in the Mediterranean which restricted the freedom of surface forces, thereby imposing upon the Allied Air Forces greater responsibility, their opinion was that this air command should be vested in one single Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

That there might be political objections to this proposal, they were well aware, but they were convinced that the aim of the British Chiefs of Staff should be to achieve a centralised air command as soon as possible. Moreover, they fully realised that the Americans might have very different ideas, but if they could be persuaded to agree, the Commander-in-Chiefs, Middle East, recommended that the air command in the Mediterranean area should be vested in one Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief. Since the greater proportion of the air forces would be British and since this maintenance would for many months continue to depend on bases in Egypt, that Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief should be British. Within this command, they envisaged eastern sub-commands, the latter including the U.S. Twelfth Air Force. A naval co-operation group should be included in the Western sub-command on the same lines as No. 201 Group in the Eastern. The air command at Malta was to remain as it was. The relationship between the Naval Commander-in-Chief and his subordinate commanders, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief and his subordinate commanders, was suggested as that the naval Commander-in-Chief should deal directly with the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief while the sub-command commanders should deal with the Air Officer Commanding, of the Naval co-operation Groups. Similarly the Commanders-in-Chief of the land forces should deal with Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, and their army commanders with the appropriate subordinate air commanders.

Should the Americans not agree to these proposals to centralise Air Command under a British Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East felt that the maximum possible centralisation of control should be insisted upon. This would be effected by placing the present British eastern and western air forces in Tunisia under the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, leaving the U.S. Twelfth Air Force under U.S. command, and the strategic direction of all air forces in the Mediterranean would be co-ordinated by the British Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief and General Eisenhower under the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

#### Conditions in Torch Area

Punch  
A.O.C. 971  
28 Nov. 1942

Meanwhile the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, was paying a visit to the Torch area of operations. In a telegram to the Chief of the Air Staff he gave a resume of conditions in the Torch area as he saw them. He admitted that his observations were based on a cursory visit, but what he had seen so moved him that, although it was outside his province, he felt it essential to comment on the conditions existing in the Torch area. Except for the archaic and chaotic French telephone system communications were practically non-existent and this was a deficiency common to all three Services. Airfields were dangerously inadequate. Heavy rains had bogged all but two or three and on all dispersal was non-existent. The congestion of aircraft on the airfields was almost unbelievable at that stage of the war. Any reality of a combined Headquarters had gone, General Eisenhower and other U.S. Staffs filled a large hotel. The British Army Staff and the Allied Naval Commander lived in the H.Q. ship, because it alone had good communications

with the outside world. The Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command, had his headquarters some miles out of Algiers at Maison Carree and the Commanding General U.S. Twelfth Air Force had a separate Headquarters in Algiers. The U.S. Air Force were running a separate war, although General Eisenhower assured him that he had given instructions that the Twelfth Air Force was to be under the operational control of the Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command. There was an instance on the 27 November in which it had refused to assist General Anderson's operations in the North.

Solution Proposed by Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief,  
Middle East

Ibid

The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, considered that the whole problem demanded firm handling both from the point of view of immediate conditions in Algeria and Tunisia, and from that of the future control of the Mediterranean. The views of the Chief of the Air Staff and his own upon the future air command of the Mediterranean should be implemented at once. A small operational H.Q. of Middle East should be set up at once in General Eisenhower's H.Q. alongside the Allied Commander-in-Chief and the Allied Naval Commander, (1) thus leaving the Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command free to fight his battle, something which at that time he was quite unable to do. The R.A.F., Middle East, could help with its experience of mobile organisation, security measures, communications and repair and salvage.

Punch No. 119  
29 Nov. 1942

Against these impressions must be set the facts that the Torch forces had advanced some three hundred miles in three weeks with little or no opportunity for preparation or, for the accumulation of supplies and transport. Above all the indeterminate political situation and pre-occupation of the Allied Force Headquarters therewith must have added enormously to the difficulties of all subordinate commanders. Yet the situation as described by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, was far from satisfactory and with the development of the campaign, a sound organisation with a clear definition of the chain of responsibilities was required. The Chief of the Air Staff asked the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, for his views as to how this might be achieved, pointing out that he was doubtful whether this was practicable until the land fighting was finished. At this time it seemed that the Admiralty were not going to press for one naval command in the Mediterranean, and there was therefore little likelihood of the Air Ministry being in a position to ask General Eisenhower to release control of even British Air Force units in the Torch area, in the interest of unified control of the air-sea war.

Punch No. 977  
30 Nov. 1942

In his answer to the Chief of the Air Staff, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, suggested that the Air Commander-in-Chief should have the same relationship to General Eisenhower as the Naval Commander-in-Chief, that was, subordinate to him for air operations in Algiers and Tunisia and co-operating with him for air operations in the rest of the Mediterranean. The Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command, would occupy the same position in relation to the Air Commander-in-Chief, and the Army as Air Vice-Marshal Coningham in the Western Desert. In his opinion General Eisenhower would accept or even welcome such a plan. In the event, relationship between British and

(1) Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham.



American Air Forces must depend largely on personalities. The Ninth Air Force in the Middle East were nominally independent but did, in fact, co-operate, being under the control of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief and the Air Officer Commanding, Western Desert, and this situation the Commanding General of the Ninth Air Force acknowledged. Such an arrangement should work equally well in Algiers. As American forces increased in that area, the sub-commander might well be an American.

#### American Views

History of the  
American Air  
Force in World  
War II  
Volume II  
Chapter 1  
Ibid

To appreciate the American point of view one must go back to the planning stage of Torch. Until the decision to mount that operation was taken the United States Eighth Air Force enjoyed an unimpeachable status in the American Air Force; it was fulfilling the main object of the United States Army Air Force, namely the strategic air offensive against Germany. When its aircraft were made available for the North African venture it fell from first priority; fifteen United States Bomber Groups originally destined for it, were sent to the Pacific. More ominous from the United States Army Air Forces' point of view was that the United States Navy began to hail the temporary abandonment of Round-up as a fundamental shift in the over-all strategy of the Combined Chiefs of Staff towards increasing the tempo of the offensive against Japan.

Ibid

Yet in the eyes of the United States Army Air Force Torch was infinitely preferable to any complete reversal of former decisions that Germany was the first enemy to be defeated. At least the air units to be employed were moving in the right direction, for the priority extended to the Torch Air Units logically applied to the organisations in general support of that operation, i.e., the Eighth Air Force. By embracing the lesser evil, the greater danger might be more speedily dissipated, so the United States Army Air Forces argued.

Ibid

Claims by the United States Navy for more Air Forces to be used in the Pacific area were hard to refuse, but by the end of August the Eighth Air Force was preparing the Twelfth for its part in North Africa. As a matter of urgency requests by the Commanding General, Eighth Air Force for more and more strength were backed by the Allied Commander-in-Chief on the grounds that the Eighth Air Force could furnish convenient short term reinforcements for North Africa and, at the same time conduct intensive operations against the Luftwaffe in North West Europe.

#### The Theatre Air Force

Ibid

The arguments put forward by the Allied Commander-in-Chief of Torch for reinforcing the Eighth Air Force strengthened the position of the Commanding General, United States Army Air Forces. He used them to point out to the United States Joint Chief of Staff that the fundamental principle of Torch was that it could not stand alone and that operations in the Middle East and from the United Kingdom were complementary to it in that they all drew off the Luftwaffe. He added a warning that the North African area could support, initially, only the operations of a limited number of aircraft, and no object would be served by piling in air units which might be impossible to use through lack of airfields or the failure of supplies. He contended, 'why not concentrate then in England where facilities were comparatively abundant where pressure could be maintained on



Germany and reinforcements flown to North Africa where they could be more profitably employed.'

Ibid

On the 17 September, 1942 Major General Spaatz the Commanding General, Eighth Air Force was informed of a conversation that the Commanding General United States Army Air Force had with his Chief of Staff (Major General George E. Stratemeyer). General Spaatz was to leave the Commanding General VIIIth Bomber Command in charge of the Eighth Air Force and accompany General Eisenhower to North Africa; he 'should really be designated Commanding General American Air Forces in Europe' read Stratemeyer's letter. This was the logical outcome of the United States Army Air Force contention that England and North Africa constituted a single Air Theatre and represented the hope that the strategic bombing effort could be protected by securing for one of these outstanding experts a command position at the Theatre Headquarters.

Ibid

General Spaatz replied that as Commanding General Eighth Air Force he already exercised control over the formation of the Twelfth, and that after the arrival of that Air Force in North Africa it would not need strategic direction by any Air Officers: the Allied Commander-in-Chief could direct it. Furthermore, under the provision of an order of the 21 August, 1942 General Spaatz was already Air Officer, European Theatre of Operations, United States Army and, therefore, could be ordered to Africa by the Allied Commander-in-Chief<sup>(1)</sup> if the situation warranted.

Ibid

If General Eisenhower had been rather cool to the idea of a Theatre Air Commander, he continued to subscribe to that of an Over-all Air Theatre wherein units could be shifted as the situation demanded and spoke highly of current air operations by the Eighth Air Force, although he mentioned they were entirely dependent on the weather. On the 21 October, as Torch drew near he told General Spaatz that he did not wish to see the Eighth disturbed from its operations while he was out of England and that he would in all probability, after Torch was completed, return for Round-up to which he looked forward with satisfaction. He informed General Spaatz that he intended to move him to the Over-all Command and anticipated that the success of Torch might permit the matter to be put forward in a month's time, he specified that General Spaatz be prepared to bring to him in thirty days, wherever he might be, a plan in the form of a cablegram to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

Ibid

On the 29 October General Eisenhower approved a plan for a Theatre Air Force, a project about which, by all outward signs he had entertained misgivings. The gist of this plan was; 'assuming the availability of the African littoral, General Eisenhower hoped to place a single commander over all United States air units operating against the European Axis, and promised to advocate the inclusion in this Theatre Air Force of the United States Ninth Air Force as well as the Eighth and Twelfth. This force making use of bases "from Iceland to Iraq" and exploiting the mobility of the flight echelon of the Air Force.' Such a command would be more likely to find favour in the eyes of the Combined Chiefs of Staff than two or three separate commands, each one competing for resources to destroy

(1) General Eisenhower besides being Allied Commander-in-Chief of Torch was Commanding General, European Theatre of Operations, United States Army.

Germany. Not long before he left for Gibraltar General Eisenhower reiterated his support of this plan and asked that the Theatre Air Force be stressed in General Spaatz's communications with General Arnold; and informed the Commanding General Eighth Air Force that as soon as he had ascertained what could be accomplished from the various air base areas in England and Africa he should proceed to A.F.H.Q.

Ibid  
Chapter 4  
Pages 1 to 6

Shortly after the landings the Commanding General Eighth Air Force had flown to North Africa at the invitation of the Allied Commander-in-Chief. His main purpose had been to discuss the Theatre Air Force organisation which had been 'hotly favoured' by General Arnold<sup>(1)</sup> and finally approved by General Eisenhower. During this first visit General Spaatz had achieved 'considerable progress' so much so that the United States Army Air Forces Headquarters assumed that the Theatre Air Force would be an accomplished fact by late November. The Allied Commander-in-Chief, however, hesitated to go ahead until the Tunisian bases were secured and apparently it was a letter from the Commanding General United States Army Air Forces which finally decided him. Re-organisation day was set for the 1 December. 'On that date Major General Ira C. Eaker had become Commanding General of the Eighth Air Force and General Spaatz arrived at Tafaraoui on the same day, expecting to take over shortly the Theatre Air Force.

#### General Eisenhower takes Action

C.O.S.(42)  
424(o)  
30 Nov. 1942  
Annex  
Gen. Eisenhower  
to Gen. Ismay  
(for C.O.S.)  
No. 864  
30 Nov. 1942  
Gen. Ismay  
(for C.O.S.)  
to Gen. Eisenhower  
U.S. FOR  
No. 223

Meanwhile General Eisenhower proposed to the British Chiefs of Staff that Air Chief Marshal Tedder should attend his Headquarters to advise him on air operations. Both the Chief of the Air Staff and Air Chief Marshal Tedder considered the position of an adviser without authority worthless. "Advice without authority and responsibility is useless." However, the Chiefs of Staff were anxious to place Air Chief Marshal Tedder's experience at the disposal of General Eisenhower. As an alternative they proposed on 1 December 1942, for the temporary purposes of the battle, that the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, should set up an advanced headquarters alongside Air Force H.Q. in Algiers, from which he would command and co-ordinate the operations of all the air forces in North Africa. For all operations by the aircraft of Torch air forces he would be subordinate and responsible to General Eisenhower and for the operation by Middle East air forces he would be responsible to the Chiefs of Staff by whom he would be instructed to co-operate with General Eisenhower in such a way as to encompass most speedily the defeat of both Rommel and Nehring. Under this arrangement Air Chief Marshal Tedder would command all the air forces in the Mediterranean just as Kesselring on the German side commanded and co-ordinated<sup>(2)</sup> all Axis air forces in the Mediterranean against the Middle East and Torch. The dual responsibility of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East would resemble that of Allied Naval Commander after the conclusion of the first stages of Torch.

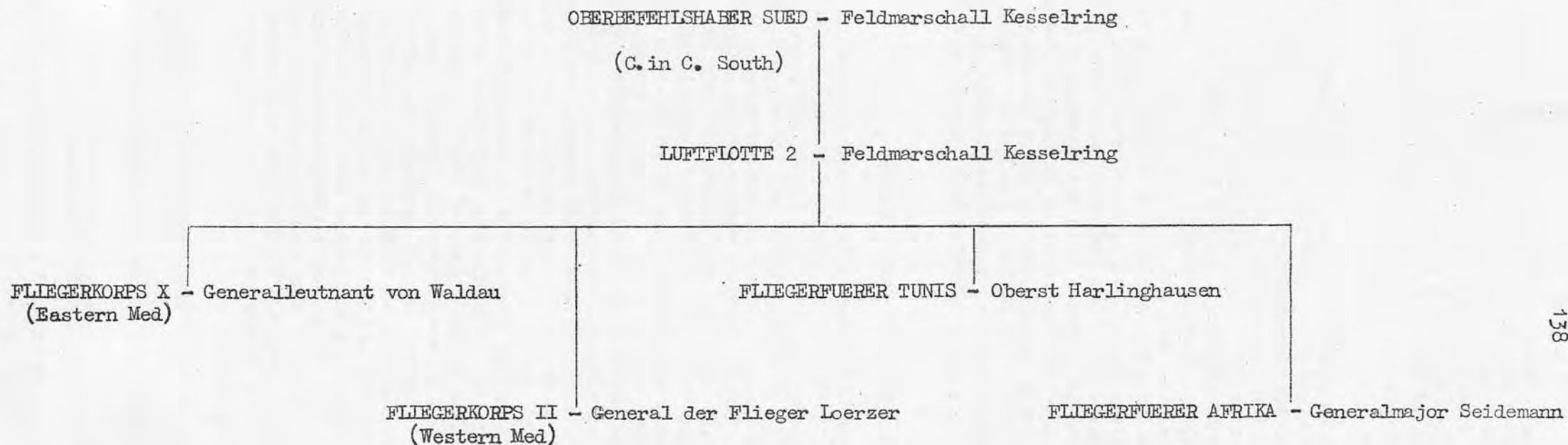
Gen. Eisenhower  
to Gen. Ismay  
(for C.O.S.)  
No. 1107  
3 Dec. 1942

The Allied Commander-in-Chief, however, did not agree with these proposals. His need was immediate and critical. Its solution was not to be postponed by a deliberate study

(1) Commanding General U.S.A.A.F.

(2) See Diagram No. 3 for German system of Air Command in Mediterranean.

G.A.F. CHAIN OF COMMAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - NOVEMBER 1942



N.B. At this period there is no indication as to the subordination of the air transport units, but in January 1943, the post of Lufttransportfuhrer Mittelmeer (Generalmajor Buchholz) was created, and he was responsible to Luftflotte 2 for all air transport in the Mediterranean.



of an overall system of air command. He did not see how the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East could serve in two theatres which were under separate ground commanders and in both of which there existed separate tactical problems. He agreed, however, that the scheme of air command proposed by the Chiefs of Staff did represent the soundest air organization which could eventually be adopted in the Mediterranean, but because of the pressure of time and of the presence in Algiers of General Carl Spaatz of the U.S. Army, he was detaching him temporarily, from the command of the Eighth Air Force in the United Kingdom and designating him, "Deputy for Air Operations." His position was not that of a Commander because there was no time to set up separate communication systems, staff arrangements and so on; and General Eisenhower reiterated that this arrangement was designed to meet the then present emergency.

#### Summary

C.A.S. Folder  
1728

By now it will be apparent that there were two distinct requirements in the Mediterranean area:-

- (a) Co-ordination and development of the air effort of the British and American Air Forces of Torch.
- (b) Co-ordination of the operations of the Middle East Air Forces with those of Torch.

The situation can be summarised as follows:-

Both the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East and the Allied Commander-in-Chief were anxious about the co-ordination of air effort of the Air Forces in Torch. The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East was anxious about the co-ordination of all the air operations in North Africa. General Eisenhower was not unduly anxious about this and believed it could be achieved by co-operation. Air Chief Marshal Tedder looked upon the need for this as a reason for securing unity of control by means of which he intended to meet the first requirement. General Eisenhower was shy of unity of control because he felt it would take too long to organise and would divide the attention of the air commander between two theatres.

#### Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, Doubts Efficacy of Arrangements

Punch No. 112  
5 Dec. 1942

Punch No. 127  
9 Dec. 1942

The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, was still very uneasy concerning the co-ordination of air effort and quoted to the Chief of the Air Staff instances of unco-ordinated requests which he had received from General Eisenhower and the Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Air Command for assistance. It was difficult, if not impossible for him to meet their requirements without a full knowledge of their needs, conditions and facilities in North Africa or, to give a sound opinion of his ability to meet the various requests and suggestions coming from General Eisenhower and Air Marshal Welsh or, on their behalf from the Chiefs of Staff. It was "daily being made yet more and more evident that the distribution of air forces and the direction of the strategic air effort from the whole of the African Coast and Malta are matters requiring almost daily consideration and adjustment", and that adjustment in the view of the Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, could only be properly made by one authority who was in a position to balance the requirements, resources, and, facilities.

CC/150  
9 Dec. 1942

It was felt, however, that General Eisenhower had not fully understood the proposals of the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East. Accordingly the Middle East Defence Committee telegraphed to the Prime Minister and Chiefs of Staff explaining that no long term re-organisation was envisaged but the immediate formation of an Advanced Headquarters of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East by the side of General Eisenhower's, under whose command he would act for the Torch area. The Committee considered it vital to the success of the operations that the strategic direction of the air forces should be in the hands of one man, and they were convinced that Air Chief Marshal Tedder was the man and urged the Chiefs of Staff to press for his immediate move to Algiers.

Punch No.123  
5 Dec. 1942

To a suggestion by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, that a R.A.F. unified command should be set up, even if the American should withstand the proposal, the Chief of the Air Staff replied that while he agreed that one Air Commander was essential, the system would be inefficient if the American Air Forces were not included. General Eisenhower had agreed to the policy of unified air command, but objected to its immediate application on practical grounds. This view had been endorsed by the Prime Minister and must be respected. The point of view of the Air Ministry, was that it favoured strategic control of the air forces now and later, the system being based on strictly reciprocal treatment and on the admission of mixing R.A.F. and American units in operational formations. Unit commanders would operate on the operational directives of the formation commander with the right of access to the next senior officer of his own service in the chain of command. But the immediate solution in North Africa appeared to be between General Eisenhower and Air Chief Marshal Tedder, who might visit once again Air Forces H.Q. at Algiers.

Prime Minister's  
Personal Minute

Waltz.49  
8 Dec. 1942

A.W.T.109 and  
110  
16 Dec. 1942

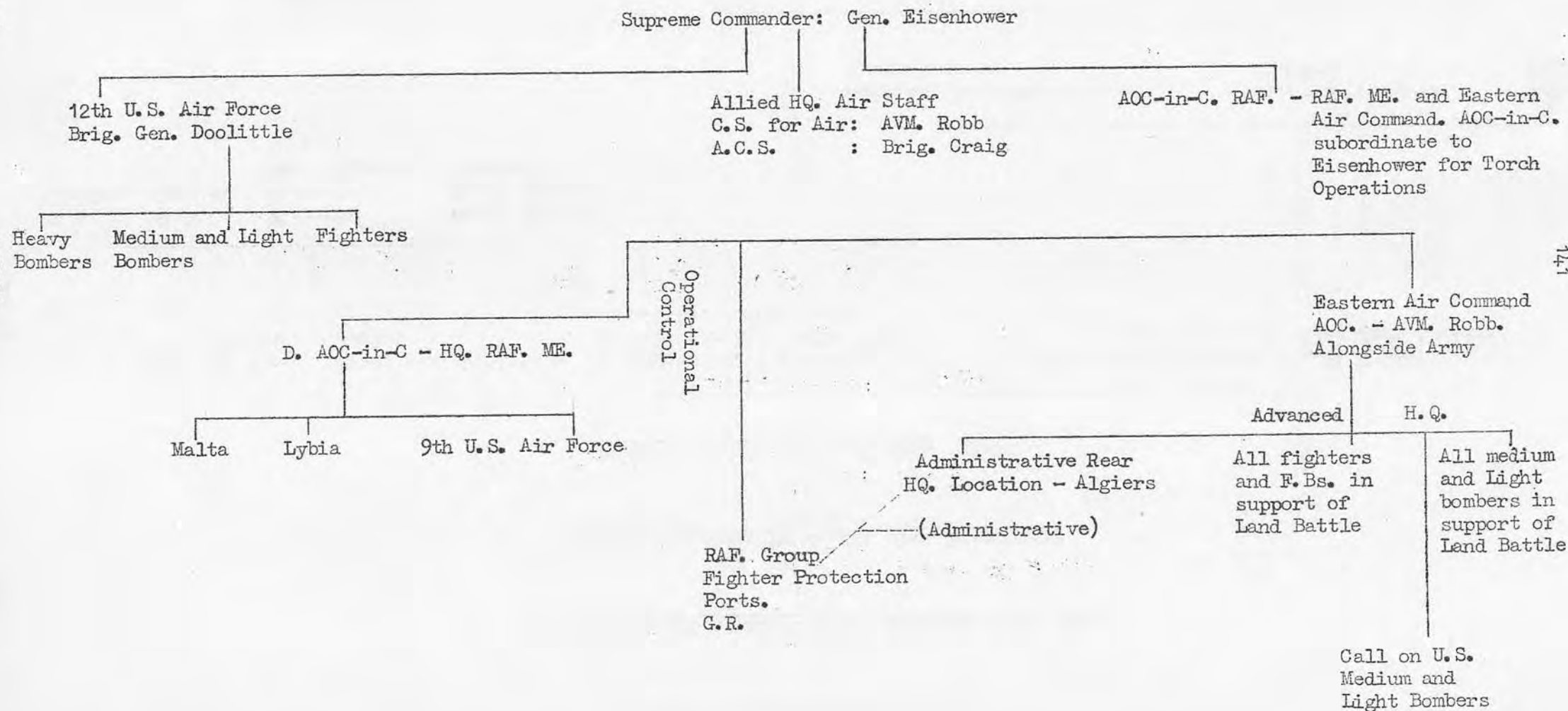
In response to an invitation by the Allied Commander-in-Chief, the Air Officer Commanding, Middle East, visited Algiers on the 13 December, when he found the main preoccupation was the control of air operations in support of the land battle. The G.O.C. First Army<sup>(1)</sup> displayed extreme dissatisfaction with the air support in the land battle.<sup>(2)</sup> This was due to his own fundamental misconception of the use and control of aircraft in close support and his failure to realise the handicap in the nature of airfields, communications, maintenance and supply under which the air forces had been operating. It was Air Chief Marshal Tedder's own opinion that the air forces had done magnificently and more than could have been reasonably expected under the conditions prevailing. Heavy rains had reduced the serviceability of the airfields to a minimum and the difficulty of allocating transport meant that the necessary tracking material was not at hand. Communications whether by land or W/T were incredibly bad, no doubt the peculiar weather conditions gravely affected all wireless communications. Any possibility of a high standard of concentrated air effort in the immediate future was therefore improbable.

General Spaatz was doing useful co-ordinating work but was not commanding.<sup>(3)</sup> There were still two air forces

- 
- (1) Lieut. General K. A. N. Anderson.
  - (2) See Chapter 14 - 'Personalities.'
  - (3) See Diagram No. 5.

T O R C H   O P E R A T I O N

CHAIN OF COMMAND AS ENVISAGED IN AOC-in-C. AWT 109 and AWT 110  
para. 2 of Dec. 16th 1942

SECRET141  
SECRETDIAGRAM 4



SECRET

TORCH OPERATIONSCHAIN OF COMMAND AS EXISTING ON DECEMBER 17TH, 1942Supreme Commander in Chief: Gen. EisenhowerDeputy C.-in-C. for Air: Gen. Spaatz12th Air Force: Brig. Gen. Doolittle  
Location - AlgiersAllied HQ. Air Staff  
C.S. for Air: AVM. Robb  
A.C.S.: Brig. CraigEastern Air Command: A. M. Welsh  
Maison Carre, 15 miles from Algiers

U.S. Heavies	U.S. Medium	Fighter Defence West Algiers	Mixed Force $\nabla$ F.L.B. Heavies Tebessa
-----------------	----------------	------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------

Advanced HQ. with Corps  $\nabla$   
A/Cdr. LawsonFighters Defence  
AlgiersG.R.  
P.R.U.All Fighter  
Defence East  
of AlgiersFighters  
support of  
Land ForcesMedium  
Bombers  
(Bisleys)Call on U.S. Mixed  $\nabla$   
Forces at Tebessa  
at 5 hours' notice

$\nabla$  In the U.S. Army the General Commanding an Army has the right to order Air Squadrons. The Allied H.Q. have, therefore, given General Anderson the authority to use these forces at Tebessa on his orders.

DIAGRAM 5

SECRET  
142

nominally working together but without any effective command, each air force was ignorant of what the other was doing. The view of the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, on one Air Commander-in-Chief, was strengthened by what he had seen and he believed that General Eisenhower was now considering agreeing to a unified air command, although he did not wish to prejudice his control of U.S. air forces in the United Kingdom on which he hoped to draw; this resource might be lost to the Mediterranean area if North Africa and Libya were linked as one theatre of operations. Moreover he was nervous about the reactions of Washington to placing U.S. Air Forces under British Command.<sup>(1)</sup> If there was a political objection Air Chief Marshal Tedder thought it might still be possible to co-ordinate parallel U.S. and British Air Forces at Algiers; the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief would remain in the Middle East with a subordinate Officer Commanding in the forward area.<sup>(2)</sup>

#### Admiral Cunningham Intervenes

Adml.  
Cunningham P.T.  
to 1st Sea Lord  
No. 728  
18 Dec. 1942

On the 18 December a new voice was heard in the counsels. The Allied Naval Commander realised that the position of an intervener was an unenviable one, but he thought he had no choice; and he expressed himself in a forthright sailorly manner. He informed the First Sea Lord that the command of the air in the Torch area was chaotic. There was one clear solution and that was "to put in Air Chief Marshal Tedder". General Eisenhower had complete faith in him, and he was the ideal man to reconcile the varied elements and, at the same time, to achieve results. General Eisenhower "shied off" the terms under which the British Chiefs of Staffs proposed Air Chief Marshal Tedder taking command, because he knew that General Arnold would never accept direct British Command of the Twelfth Air Force and in this would be supported by General Marshall. Admiral Cunningham believed that if Air Chief Marshal Tedder could be sent out on somewhat similar terms to those of his own directive, i.e. any command of American air forces would be nominally through General Eisenhower, it might be acceptable. The basis on which to achieve unified air command which was absolutely essential and vital at that time, would be the need to co-ordinate eastern and western Air Power.

#### The Admiral's Mission

The Chiefs of Staff discussed the private telegram from Admiral Cunningham to the First Sea Lord. They felt that the unsatisfactory state of affairs disclosed by this telegram should be remedied with the least possible delay, and they considered that the best, if not the only hope of doing this, was in Admiral Cunningham being able to persuade General Eisenhower to submit a request that Air Chief Marshal Tedder should be permitted to occupy the same broad position in relation to himself as did Admiral Cunningham. Accordingly the First Sea Lord signalled to him asking him to undertake the task. If Admiral Cunningham was willing the following was the outline for which they suggested General Eisenhower should press. Air Chief Marshal Tedder would establish an advanced Headquarters in Algiers from which he would co-ordinate the strategic air operations from

(1) In constitutional language it is a convention of the American constitution that U.S. forces should never be placed under the command of a foreign or even allied power.

(2) See Diagram No. 5.

Libya and Malta, as he was doing at that time, and secondly operations of the following air forces:-

- (a) An air force Headquarters would be established with the advanced headquarters of the First Army to control British and American short range aircraft allocated to the tactical battle. This might be controlled by a R.A.F. Officer.
- (b) An air force Headquarters would be established for control of strategic bombing operations by both American heavy and medium bombers, of the Torch force. This force might be commanded by a U.S.A.A.F. Officer.
- (c) Fighters for defence of ports and G.R. squadrons would be combined in a group directly under Air Chief Marshal Tedder's Headquarters.

Besides co-ordinating the work of these three air forces on behalf of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, Air Chief Marshal Tedder would control the administrative and supply policy for the air forces with a combined Staff.

Adml.  
Cunningham to  
First Sea Lord  
1159A  
29 Dec. 1942

It was some time before Admiral Cunningham could implement the suggestions of the Chiefs of Staff. On the 29 December 1942, he discussed with General Eisenhower the question of Tedder's appointment. The difficulty was that the Allied Commander-in-Chief had already approached the U.S. Chiefs of Staff stressing the necessity for a single air commander in the Torch area, and that commander was to be American as the bulk of the air forces were American. For this position he had already committed himself to the appointment of General Spaatz. He still desired Air Chief Marshal Tedder and appeared to favour the idea of his co-ordinating all the air activities in the Torch area and Middle East, with full authority. It appeared that everything depended on how he had committed himself to the U.S. Chiefs of Staff.

#### Allied Commander-in-Chief's Solution

To C.C.S.  
No. 3650  
N.A.F. 72  
31 Dec. 1942

General Eisenhower's intentions were soon made clear. After a thorough study of Allied air organisation in the Torch area, he was convinced that a single command of the air forces there was necessary. This did not mean that the initial organisation was faulty in view of the missions and operational conditions then anticipated. However, the utilisation of both American and British air units in the same area had created conditions which required centralised control by an officer who could act in his own name without referring problems to his Commander-in-Chief. He had discussed the matter with the British Chiefs of Staff, Air Chief Marshal Tedder and Admiral Cunningham and had decided to subject his proposals for approval by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Subject to their concurrence he intended to set up immediately an Allied Commander-in-Chief for air, directly under himself, and he named General Spaatz to that post.

He realised that this solution did not of itself ensure full consideration of strategic air activity in the Mediterranean. However, the immediate task of co-ordinating long range bomber effort in the Tunisian area was much easier to accomplish by co-operation than was the more intricate one of assuming a complete unification of effort within his new and sprawling theatre. Obviously the most pressing matter was the solution of this local problem, while the strategic bombing effort was continued by co-operation until a better



solution could be devised by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. As General Spaatz was now thoroughly familiar with the problems in the Torch area and was otherwise well qualified, the Allied Commander-in-Chief desired to put this responsibility upon him without delay.

#### British Answers to Allied Commander-in-Chief's Solution

COS (W)  
3 Jan. 1943

The British Chiefs of Staff were still thoroughly convinced that unified air command throughout the Mediterranean Theatre was the right answer, but they were prepared to defer their decision in this until the Combined Chiefs of Staff met.<sup>(1)</sup> At the same time they recognised the need not to delay for two or three weeks the initiation of a system of command that would ensure proper co-ordination of the air forces in Torch, and no less on administrative than on operational grounds were they prepared to put British air forces under the Command of an American Officer. They would accept General Spaatz in that capacity without prejudice to any subsequent decision by the Combined Chiefs of Staff about an unified air command in the Mediterranean. They had, however, to be satisfied that the organisation of his Command was such as to provide adequately, not only for strategic bombing but also for support and co-operation with land and air forces and for aspects of air operations in which the R.A.F. were especially experienced such as General reconnaissance and night fighting.

They considered that General Spaatz's Chief of Staff should be an R.A.F. Officer and that he should have on his staff, a senior R.A.F. Officer with special experience of R.A.F. maintenance and supply. Administration in the Torch area was a key factor under the conditions then present. Under General Spaatz they envisaged three sub-commanders, each comprising both British and American Units according to their functions, the local tactical requirements from time to time and administrative feasibility. The first was to be under an American commander; it was to contain only heavy and medium bombers, with fighters as appropriate for escort. This force was to be under the direction of the Air Commander-in-Chief. The second sub-command was to be under a British commander and was designed for co-operation with the Royal Navy and day and night protection and defence of ports, shipping and back areas. The third sub-command was also to be under a British Commander. It was to consist of all light bomber, Army co-operation and support squadrons, and fighters for close cover and support of the land front. Photographic reconnaissance units would probably be best retained under the Control of Air Headquarters, with forward detachments if necessary under the third sub-command.

General Eisenhower agreed with the British Chiefs of Staff that General Spaatz should have a British Chief of Staff and a senior British administrative officer. He was also in agreement with their proposals for the sub-divisions of General Spaatz's Command subject to the following minor modifications. The Eastern Air Command and the Twelfth Air Force were then functioning as units and had solved many of the difficult administrative problems peculiar to the Torch theatre, on which operations were so vitally dependent. Moreover, as the two ground areas of operations were widely separated, General Eisenhower considered it essential to preserve continuity as far as possible.

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(1) The Combined Chiefs of Staff were to meet early in January at Casablanca.

This intention was, therefore, to organise as follows:-

- (i) The Commander Eastern Air Command was to be responsible for the G.R. force and Air Striking Force to hit shipping at sea, operating with the Royal Navy and for day and night fighters whose duties were to be the defence of ports and back areas and the protection of shipping.
- (ii) The Commanding General Twelfth Air Force was to be responsible for heavy and medium bombers for strategic bombing and the appropriate fighters for escort. Through subordinate Commanders, he was to be responsible for close support of the American sector of the Tunisian front and in Morocco, if hostilities started in that area. The control of photographic reconnaissance aircraft was to be as suggested by the British Chiefs of Staff.

British Criticisms of Allied Commander-in-Chief's Organisation

COS(W) 438  
11 Jan. 1942

The differences between the organisation proposed by the British Chiefs of Staff and that put into effect by General Eisenhower amounted in the British view to more than "minor modifications." He had departed from the British proposals in respects which the British Chiefs of Staff considered fundamental; they did not consider that the same subordinate commander could exercise control over three separate and distinct functions; and in particular, as regards close support for the First Army, the British Air Commander would merely be a useless and unnecessary link between General Spaatz and the subordinate Commander responsible for air support of the First Army. The close support of American and French troops and of British troops on a land front, which, from an air point of view was very narrow would be under separate commanders. The essence of the Chiefs of Staff proposals was that in General Eisenhower's own words "manifestly all operations covering the Tunisian front form part of a complete whole." This applied with especial emphasis to air operations in Tunisia although a front in Spanish Morocco would be widely separated; but the outbreak of hostilities in that area would create a new situation and, as there would be ample warning of that, it would involve a considerable re-organisation in which a re-allocation of air responsibilities would be a comparatively simple problem. They were unable to understand the distinction between "Strategic bombing" for which the Twelfth Air Force was to be responsible and the bombing of shipping at sea which was to be the responsibility of Eastern Air Command. They regard it as essential that all medium and heavy bombers, British and American should be under the control of the same commander, who should be able to concentrate his effort against whatever objectives were most important at any given moment. This might vary from day to day, but it seemed to them that the most important strategic objective during the next period would be normally Axis shipping and ports of embarkation and disembarkation. Apart, therefore, from the unwisdom in principle of permanently segregating a portion of the air striking force to deal with any particular type of target, it seemed to them as manifestly illogical that one Commander should be responsible for bombing shipping at sea, while another was responsible for bombing it before it left or when it reached port - which was in effect the arrangement General Eisenhower proposed. They suggested that these differences of opinion

should be resolved at the forthcoming conference at Casablanca (Symbol).

COS(S)  
7th Mtg.  
Anfa Camp  
19 Jan. 1943

At an informal British Chiefs of Staff meeting at Anfa Camp, where the Combined Chiefs of Staff met at Casablanca, the Chief of Air Staff handed round a draft<sup>(1)</sup> note on the subject of Air Command in the Mediterranean. He had shown this informally to General Marshall who had sent it to General Eisenhower. He proposed to find out from General Arnold whether the U.S. Chiefs of Staff agreed in principle and if so, the note should be circulated to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The Committee took note with approval of the suggestion of the Chief of Air Staff.

Chief of the Air Staff proposals

C.C.S.  
163/43

The Chief of Air Staff proposed that there should be appointed an Air Commander-in-Chief over the whole of the Mediterranean theatre with his headquarters at Algiers under whom would be the Air Commanding-in-Chief North Africa, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, and the Air Officer Commanding, Malta. The relationship and mutual responsibilities of the Air Commander-in-Chief and the Commander-in-Chief N.W. African theatre were defined as follows:-

(a) The Air Commander-in-Chief was to be subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief in respect of:-

(i) The air forces stationed from time to time in the N.W. African Theatre and their operations.

(ii) The operation of other Mediterranean air forces in conjunction with operations conducted in or from the N.W. African Theatre.

(b) The Commander-in-Chief Allied Expeditionary Force would afford to the Air Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean all possible support and facilities in the N.W. African Theatre for the operation of the Mediterranean air forces, and for their efficient co-operation with the land and sea forces in North West Africa they were to be divided into three sub-commands:-

(a) Heavy and medium bombers and appropriate escort fighters.

(b) G.R. Army Transport and fighters for the defence of shipping, ports, and back areas.

(c) An Air Support Command.

The detailed organisation of the Command, however, had to be left to the decision of the Air Commander-in-Chief when he was appointed. But in order that land operations might be effectively supported by the combined air forces, there had to be one Army Commander, or Deputy Commander-in-Chief appointed to co-ordinate the operation of all three Armies in the Tunisian Theatre. Similarly the Air Officer Commanding the Air Support Command had to co-ordinate the operations of the air forces supporting all three Armies, and was to share an advanced headquarters with the Deputy Commander-in-Chief, whence he could direct the Operation of the air forces to the advantage of the land battle. Army support wings were to be attached to each of the three armies.

(1) Issued as C.C.S. 163.



The Commanders of these wings were to act as air advisors to the Army Commanders and would command such airforces as might be assigned from time to time to them by the Air Officer Commanding Army Support Command, in consultation with the Deputy Supreme Commander.

The organisation of the Middle East was to remain as it was, except that Malta would be detached and come directly under the Air Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean. Further, certain air forces employed in close support of the Eighth Army were to pass under the command of the Air Officer Commanding Air Support under the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief North West Africa.(1)

#### The U.S.A.A.F. Conception

History of  
American Air  
Force in  
World War II  
Vol. II  
Chapter 4

The United States Army Air Force had other ideas. The Commanding General U.S.A.A.F. arrived at Casablanca in the hopes that the unity of Strategic Air Operations in the United Kingdom in North Africa and in the Middle East would be recognised in the new command system. He conceived these regions as one vast encircling 'horseshoe' area where-from allied air power could strike at enemy occupied Europe, utilising whatever point on the perimeter was most favourable either by seasonable weather, or by its convenience to targets of current strategy. Once the African bases had been captured and furnished with the facilities for servicing a mobile heavy bomber force, true strategic mobility could be achieved and the strain on the Italian and German air forces increased by the necessary dispersal of their defence efforts.

#### Acceptance of C.A.S. Proposals by Combined Chiefs of Staff

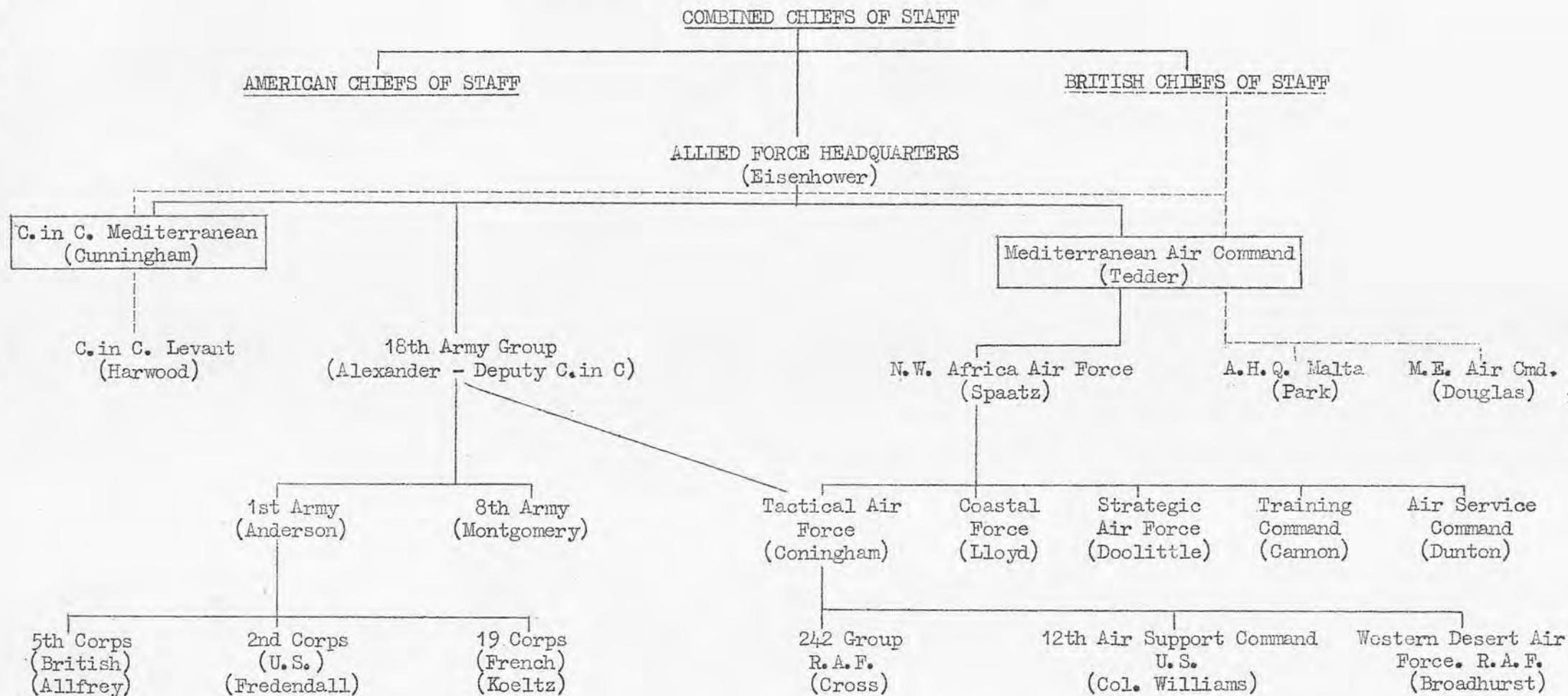
C.C.S. 172

The British view, however, prevailed. The next day the Combined Chiefs of Staff accepted these proposals subject to any minor changes which might be found necessary by the Air Commander-in-Chief after his appointment. The arrangement for Air Command in the Mediterranean Area and approval to these was given by the President and Prime Minister on the 23 January 1943. Agreement was also reached on the officer to be appointed to the position of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Mediterranean Air Command, as the new command was to be called. The Combined Chiefs of Staff welcomed the appointment of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder to be the A.O.C.-in-C. and with his appointment a new stage in the air war in Tunisia commences.

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(1) See Diagram No. 6.

## CHAIN OF COMMAND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN - 1943



149

SECRET

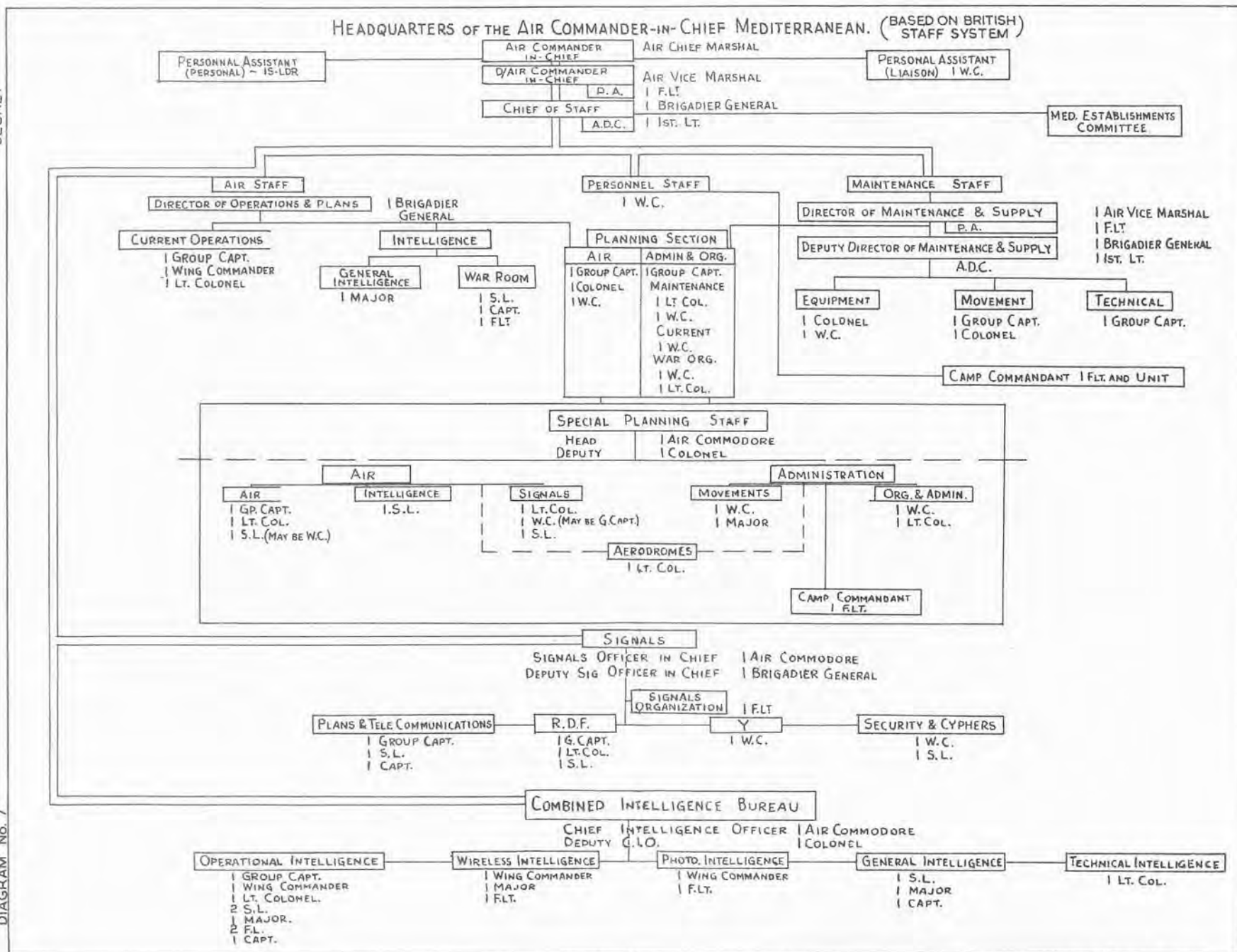
----- = Control by British C.O.S. through Air Chief Marshal Tedder.

----- = Control by General Eisenhower through Air Chief Marshal Tedder.

DIAGRAM 6

SECRET

DIAGRAM No. 7





## MEDITERRANEAN AIR COMMAND

C-in-C - Air Chief Marshal SIR ARTHUR TEDDER  
 D. C-in-C - Air Vice Marshal H. E. P. WIGGLESWORTH  
 C. O. S. - Brigadier General H. A. CRAIG  
 D. O. P. - Brigadier General P. W. TIMBERLAKE  
 D. M. S. - Air Vice Marshal G. G. DAWSON

**NORTHWEST AFRICAN AIR FORCES**  
 C. G. - Major General CARL SPAATZ  
 Deputy - Air Vice Marshal J. M. ROBB  
 C.O.S. - Colonel E. P. CURTIS  
 A.O.A. - Air Commodore A. MACGREGOR

**MALTA AIR COMMAND**  
 A.O.C. - Air Marshal SIR KEITH PARK

**MIDDLE EAST AIR COMMAND**  
 C-in-C - Air Chief Marshal SIR SHOLTO-DOUGLAS

Etab.  
 Five S.E. Fighter Squadrons - 105 A/C (Spitfire V B/C)  
 Four T.E. Fighter Squadrons - 84 A/C (Mosquito & Beaufighter)  
 Three Torpedo Squadrons - 65 A/C (Beaufort & Wellington)  
 One G. R. Squadron - 8 A/C (Baltimore)  
 One Night Fighter Squadron - 6 A/C (Beaufighter)  
 One P.R.U. Squadron - 3 A/C (Spitfire)  
 Three Squadrons Fleet Air Arm - 36 A/C (Albacore & Swordfish)  
 Total Aircraft - 305

Approx. Combat Strength	Etab.
Twelve H. Bomb Squadrons	128 A/C
Six M. Bomb Squadrons	96 A/C
Eight L. Bomb Squadrons	120 A/C
Forty S.E. Fighter Squadrons	599 A/C
Three T.E. Fighter Squadrons	65 A/C
Four Night Fighter Squadrons	84 A/C
Two Army Coop. Squadrons	42 A/C
Seventeen G.R. Ron Squadrons	273 A/C
Six Torpedo Squadrons	120 A/C
<b>Total Aircraft</b>	<b>1525</b>

**N.A.A.F. STRATEGIC AIR FORCE**

C.G. - Major Gen. JAMES H. DOOLITTLE

Nine H. Bomb Squadrons	- 78 A/C
Sixteen M. Bomb Squadrons	- 248 A/C
Nine T.E. Fighter Squadrons	- 240 A/C
<b>Total Aircraft</b>	<b>566</b>

**FUNCTIONS:**

Plan and control the air operations of all bombers and escort fighters assigned to the command for strategic support of land and sea forces

**N.A.A.F. TACTICAL AIR FORCE**

A.O.C. - Air Marshal SIR ARTHUR CONINGHAM

	Etab.
Twenty-one S.E. Fighter Squadrons	- 464 A/C
Four Army Coop. Squadrons	- 72 A/C
Six L. Bomb Squadrons	- 96 A/C
Two Fighter Bomb Squadrons	- 52 A/C
Western Desert Force:	
Thirteen S.E. Fighter Squadrons	- 275 A/C
Three L. Bomb Squadrons	- 72 A/C
Four Ron. Squadrons	- 84 A/C
<b>Total Aircraft</b>	<b>1093</b>

**FUNCTIONS:**

Plan and control the air operations in support of the land operations in TUNISIA.

**N.A.A.F. COASTAL AIR FORCE**

A.O.C. - Air Vice Marshal SIR H.P. LLOYD

	Etab.
Seven S.E. Fighter Squadrons	- 144 A/C
Three Night Fighter Squadrons	- 48 A/C
Two G.R. Squadrons	- 32 A/C
Two Squadrons Fleet Air Arm	- 28 A/C
<b>Total Aircraft</b>	<b>252</b>

**FUNCTIONS:**

- Plan the air defense of NW Africa and control the operations of all units allotted to the command.
- Direct the operation of the air-ground and ground-air recognition system for NW Africa.
- Control all sea/air reconnaissance.
- Control all anti-submarine operations.
- Control air operations for the protection of shipping in agreement with Naval authorities.
- Control all shipping strikes undertaken by the command.

**N.A.A.F. TRAINING COMMAND**

C.G. - Brig. General J.E. CANNON

	Etab.
Two M. Bomb Groups	- 128 A/C
One L. Bomb Group	- 64 A/C
One D. Bomb Group	- 96 A/C
Four Fighter Squadrons	- 105 A/C
<b>Total Aircraft</b>	<b>393</b>

**FUNCTIONS:**

- Plan and control the training or other activities of such units as may be assigned to the command. This includes air cooperation with elements of the land forces located in the area.
- Training and replacement of air and ground personnel of U.S. and RAF air units for active operations.

**N.A.A.F. PHOTO RCN. WING**

C.O. - Colonel E. ROOSEVELT

Four P.R. Squadrons - 42 A/C

**FUNCTIONS:**

- Plan and control the operations of all aircraft assigned to the command in carrying out missions in accordance with priorities laid down.
- Responsible for interpretation and distribution of photographs.

**N.A.A.F. SERVICE COMMAND**

C.G. - Brig. General DEIMAR H. DUNTON

One Air Transport Wing - 159 A/C

**FUNCTIONS:**

- Responsible for the supply and technical maintenance of the MAAP, its U.S. and R.A.F. branches serving U.S. and R.A.F. units.

PREPARATION FOR AN OFFENSIVEThe Formation of the Mediterranean Air Command<sup>(1)</sup>

A.F.H.Q.  
G.O. No. 20/43

On 17 February, 1943, the Mediterranean Air Command formed with its Headquarters in Algiers. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder was appointed Air Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, his deputy being Air Vice Marshal H. E. P. Wigglesworth, Brigadier General Howard A. Craig his Chief of Staff and A.V.M. G. G. Dawson as Director of Maintenance and Supply. The Command comprised the Middle East Air Command, R.A.F. Malta Air Command, and the Northwest African Air Forces. The Middle East Air Command was commanded by Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, R.A.F. Malta by Air Vice Marshal Sir Keith Park and the Northwest African Air Forces by Major General Carl Spaatz, U.S. Army; his deputy being Air Vice Marshal J. M. Robb. The new Command covered all the North African area from the Red Sea to the Atlantic as far as Malta. Hence its designation, Mediterranean Air Command (M.A.C.). The Air Commander-in-Chief was under the command of the Allied Commander-in-Chief only for operations in Northwest Africa. In Tripolitania and the Middle East the Air C.-in-C. was independent of General Eisenhower.

The Northwest African Air Forces were organised as follows:-

V.A/13/2  
(Annex to G.O.1)

- (i) An air headquarters at Constantine comprised of an amalgamation of the personnel of the headquarters unit of Eastern Air Command, and the H.Q.'s and H.Q. Squadron of the Twelfth Air Force.
- (ii) The Northwest African Tactical Air Force (N.A.T.A.F.) under Air Vice Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham comprised the H.Q. Allied Air Support Command, the XII Air Support Command, No. 242 Group R.A.F.<sup>(2)</sup> and later the Western Desert Air Force.
- (iii) The Northwest African Strategic Air Force (N.A.S.A.F.) under Major General James H. Doolittle, with the H.Q. and H.Q. Squadron of the XII Bomber Command, augmented as necessary by R.A.F. Staff elements, and units of the Twelfth Air Force and of the Eastern Air Command.
- (iv) The Northwest African Coastal Air Force (N.A.C.A.F.) under the command of Group Captain G. G. Barrett (acting) comprising the H.Q. and H.Q. Squadron of the Twelfth Fighter Command and certain elements of the existing headquarters, Eastern Air Command.
- (v) The Northwest African Training Command under Brigadier General John K. Cannon with such personnel as were available from the U.S.A.A.F. and R.A.F. in the Northwest African Air Forces.
- (vi) The Northwest African Air Service Command under Brigadier General Delmar H. Dunton U.S. Army, comprising

(1) See Chapter 10 for discussions preceding the formation of this command.

(2) Commanded by Air Commodore K.B.B. Cross, R.A.F. from 21 February, 1943.

the Twelfth Air Service Command and the Eastern Air Command Maintenance organisation.

- (vii) The Northwest African Photographic Reconnaissance Wing, Lt. Col. Elliot Roosevelt consisting of the third Photographic Group (U.S.) and No. 682 (P.R.) Squadron, R.A.F.

#### The Role of the Mediterranean Air Command

The A.O.C.-in-C. had his office in the Allied Force Headquarters, and was in immediate touch with the Supreme Commander, the Naval C.-in-C., and with General Alexander on the occasions when he visited Allied Force Headquarters. In so far as North West Africa was concerned, Air Chief Marshal Tedder had a dual role. On one hand he was a Commander with authority outside the North West African area who decided on the allocation of air forces and the co-ordination of air operations between two theatres of war; a function previously exercised direct by the Chief of the Air Staff. On the other hand, he functioned as a local A.O.C.-in-C. and issued operational directives to the Commanding General, North West African Air Forces, prepared after consultation with the Naval C.-in-C. and the Supreme Commander.

H.Q. Mediterranean Air Command dealt primarily with major policy, and the A.O.C.-in-C. stressed the importance of adhering strictly to the delegation of responsibility laid down in the chain of command. The Headquarters had no administrative function in North West Africa and only dealt with administrative matters affecting the Mediterranean theatre as a whole. The staff was composed of both American and British officers.

Although all questions of future planning were handled by the Air Staff, there was a special future planning organisation with an air force section directly under the Supreme Commander.

#### The role of the Commanding General North West Africa Air Force

General Spaatz had his Headquarters at Constantine, and it was there that control and administration of all Air Forces in North West Africa was concentrated. The General and his staff were concerned only with the higher direction and control of the Air Force in North West Africa, and not with the details of actual operations. Within the terms of the general directive given him by the A.O.C.-in-C. Mediterranean Air Command, General Spaatz issued directives to the Commanders of lower formations. The role of his Headquarters was therefore primarily that of strategic direction.

#### Staff organisation

To assist him, General Spaatz had a mixed staff of British and American officers each of whom was concerned with the Air Force as a whole irrespective of nationality. The Chief of Staff being an American Brigadier General, and the A.O.A. a British Air Commodore.

Administratively the Headquarters dealt direct with the Air Ministry and the Commanding General American Forces (General Eisenhower). The staff was organized on the American system which had been modified to include an A.O.A.

Report by  
A.M. Sir T.  
Leigh-Mallory  
ILJ.15/33/10

Ibid

Ibid



instead of all branches working directly under the Chief of Staff.

#### The role of the A.O.C. North West African Tactical Air Force

This Headquarters was closely linked with the H.Q. Eighteenth Army Group (General Alexander) and shared the same camp. Thus the A.O.C. was fully in the mind of the Military Commander and was able to adjust the operations of his air forces to meet the Army's main requirements. The role of the Tactical Air Force was operational co-ordination of air operations in support of the armies in the field by formulating policy, planning, and the issue of operational guidance by means of directives to subordinate formations. The only administrative problems dealt with at this headquarters were those minor matters which affected operations, and those personnel matters which were of particular concern to the A.O.C.

#### Staff organisation

Ibid

As the North West African Tactical Air Force consisted of British and American formations, the headquarters had a mixed staff of British and American officers and an American Deputy A.O.C. In this instance the British staff organisation had been adopted. This was facilitated by the fact that the Headquarters was not concerned with administrative details.

#### Chain of Operational Control

The A.O.C's intentions were converted into action by three air force formations each closely identified with a Military Headquarters, No. 242 Group with the First Army, the Western Desert Air Force with the Eighth Army, and XII Air Support Command with II U.S. Corps. At this level the fusion of British and American staffs had not been adopted, as in principle the forces had been organised on a national basis. There were, however, some American squadrons in the Western Desert Air Force under the command of A.V.M. Broadhurst and American liaison officers were employed at W.D.A.F. Headquarters.

#### Function of subordinate formation Commanders

Ibid

Commanders and their staffs concentrated on planning and the issue of instructions, normally verbal, as to the object and scope of the operation and any essential directions for its execution including the allocations of squadrons. The actual co-ordination and control of all aircraft employed was delegated to a Fighter Group Commander who exercised operational control over all types of squadrons. The principle being to free formation commanders and above from becoming involved in detailed control.

#### Problems confronting N.A.T.A.F. on formation

Micro Reels  
12 and 13x

The Kasserine battle was in progress at the time of the formation of N.A.T.A.F. (28 February, 1943) and the control organisation had had to be built up while operations were being conducted. The Western Desert Air Force was already properly organised and a going concern, but No. 242 Group and XII A.S.C. required considerable re-organisation. The staff was formed on a joint R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. basis. The policy of the A.O.C. being that appointments were not to be duplicated but that American and British officers were to be equally represented on the establishment. The A.O.C., S.A.S.O. and the

Group Captain Operations had served together in the W.D.A.F. These officers had full experience of mobile air operations, but the remainder of the Staff were found from the E.A.C. and the Allied Air Support Command which had formerly been the controlling formation.

File.  
Org. MED.ME.  
V D./98/1.

A.V.M. Sir Arthur Coningham, on assuming command had been surprised to find conditions in Tunisia exactly as they had been when he had taken over the command of the Western Desert Air Force in October, 1941. It had appeared to him that many of the lessons of the Western Desert warfare had not been applied in Tunisia, although conditions were very similar. For instance, under the provisions of the War manual, the Army when working with the Air Force were responsible for providing the R.A.F. with (among other things) petrol, ammunition and rations. In the Western Desert operations none of these commitments had in fact been undertaken by the Army. There the R.A.F. had taken over one hundred three ton lorries with Army personnel, in order to insure that petrol, ammunition and rations were delivered to units when required. The principle had been that the Army delivered these items to the port, rail-head or roadhead and the R.A.F. made overland delivery with unit and/or Supply and Transport columns mechanical transport. He pointed out that a report on this and other matters had been made to the headquarters of Middle East Command in August 1942 and considered that had this report been made available to the planners of the Northwest African Campaign, many mistakes might have been avoided. His first act was therefore to issue a directive to his subordinate formations making known his views in the light of the experience gained in the operations in the Western Desert.

Ibid

Directive by A.O.C.

General  
Operational  
Directive in  
file N.African  
Command  
Org.IIJI/122/54

The A.O.C. N.A.T.A.F. had been given a broad instruction by the Commanding General N.A.A.F. - "to provide maximum air support for land operations". This object, as the A.O.C. N.A.T.A.F. pointed out in his first directive to his subordinate commanders, on 2 March could be attained only by first obtaining air supremacy in the theatre of operations. After this had been achieved, it would then be possible for the land forces to operate practically unhindered by enemy air attack, and the Allied Air Forces would be able to operate with increased freedom in the battle area and against objectives in the rear of the enemy. He therefore ordered his Commanders to train, to prepare, and to operate their air forces with this object in view.

The course of action he proposed to adopt to achieve his object was:-

- (i) A continual offensive against the enemy in the air.
- (ii) Sustained attacks on enemy main airfields.

For the offensive, increased means of obtaining warning of enemy air activity would be required in the forward areas, and for this reason measures were about to be undertaken to increase the R.D.F. facilities and improve signal communications in all areas in his command.

As soon as improvements had been effected, commanders would be held responsible for initiating fighter action to counter enemy air activity. The enemy was to be attacked wherever he could be found, and destroyed.

Ibid

For the attacks on the main enemy airfields, it was

intended to employ light and medium bombers in escorted raids by day. At night, light bombers would be directed against enemy airfields. These operations would be supported by the Strategic Air Force, acting independently, but in conjunction with the N.A.T.A.F. plan.

It was realised that, on a front extending for two hundred and fifty miles, there would be a tendency for operations to be restricted to areas within ranges of aircraft from their home bases. It was necessary however that the main elements of the force should be capable of providing mutual support and concentration as necessitated by the operations. Commanders were therefore ordered to plan the movement or reception of units in detail from one sector to another, and to be prepared to implement their plans at short notice.

Training was to be undertaken immediately and fighter units were ordered to institute shadow firing practices. "I judge the efficiency of fighter squadrons solely on their abilities in air fighting ... efficiency ... depends upon high morale, sound tactical unit and wing plans, good marksmanship and alertness in the air."

Ibid

The A.O.C. was not in favour of the employment of large fighter formations for offensive patrolling where the enemy was encountered only in small numbers. He preferred to operate with a greater number of small well drilled formations which gave more chance of a decisive battle and less opportunity for the enemy to deliver "pirate" attacks. He stressed that fighters operating as protective escort for bomber formations should not allow themselves to be diverted from their proper role. "It is a point of honour that the bombers should not be attacked by enemy fighters."

He pointed out the necessity of communication being established between the fighter and bomber leaders in escorted raids; and ordered that it was the responsibility of the fighter leader to decide as to the desirability of abandoning a sortie, whether as a result of the weakening of the fighter escort after an engagement, or because of the advent of unsuitable weather conditions.

Ibid

He considered that all light bombers should be capable of operating by night as much army movement, particularly supplies, was covered by darkness, and it was during this period that crippling blows might be delivered. Moreover, night bombers could undertake dusk and dawn attacks when the enemy might often be found concentrated and unprepared for an attack.

Squadron Commanders were made responsible for the training of their own replacement crews and for making the decision as to when such crews were considered fit to take part in operations. "I would prefer to have a reduced effort than to employ partly trained crews".

Ibid

Finally, the A.O.C. dealt with the most important subject, "We are fighting this war with personnel, the efficiency of the human machine being the basic requirement for success in operations .... personnel matters come first in my thoughts... the weak men of low morale are not to be tolerated in units as they taint the atmosphere, you are to remove such personnel immediately on discovery --- the inculcation of the offensive spirit is of paramount importance. Spirit and confidence will spring from good leadership and training and can be safeguarded by consideration for the individual".



On this note the directive ended. Thereafter the A.O.C. and his staff visited the units at frequent intervals and infused them with their own confidence and enthusiasm.

#### Tactical Reconnaissance

Micro Reels  
12 and 13 x

O.R.B. 225  
and 241 Sqdns.

At the inception of N.A.T.A.F. tactical reconnaissance was being executed on the Northern front by Nos. 225 and 241 Squadrons, both highly trained Army Co-operation Squadrons equipped with Hurribombers. Both these squadrons were, however, being employed in an offensive role, strafing and fighter-bombing, with a consequent weakness in Tactical Reconnaissance (TAC/R). In order to remedy this No. 225 Squadron was made responsible for TAC/R on the whole of the First Army front, while No. 241 Squadron was employed principally on fighter-bomber duties. It was considered that one squadron could give adequate coverage for TAC/R over the First Army, and as an urgent measure one flight of No. 225 Squadron was equipped with Spitfires and at a later date the whole squadron was so equipped. As a result the standard of TAC/R sorties improved and later became very efficient. In support of II U.S. Corps No. 154 (Reconnaissance) Squadron equipped with P.39's (Airacobra) had been meeting the TAC/R, armed reconnaissance sorties, and the attack of opportunity targets. A change was made so that this squadron operated more on the lines already imposed on No. 225 Squadron. The Air support parties were strengthened and the Air Liaison organisation increased. In order to assist the squadron, an experienced TAC/R Squadron Commander was attached to it and the results were most beneficial.

#### The landing ground situation

H.Q. M.A.C.  
Airfields  
N. Africa.  
II J/166/60(A)

One of the greatest problems confronting H.Q. N.A.T.A.F. was the availability and serviceability of the landing grounds. In the Northern Sector the only suitable area was in the valley running east from Souk El Arba and Souk El Khemis, ideal for fine weather conditions and with ample space for any number of landing grounds, but badly placed among high hills for the cloudy winter weather, and with heavy soil which became unserviceable after the slightest fall of rain. There was, however, no alternative and these landing grounds with all weather strips were used in the valley at the outset. Aircraft unserviceability was high and greatly hindered a force operating against enemy air located in open country with reasonable runways.

Ibid

Summerfield tracking was of little use when laid on normal soil, but fortunately some sandy soil was found which provided a foundation and therefore gave a reasonable certainty of operations except under heavy rain when pools of water gathered on the landing strips. In the Central Sector, high ground and mountains stretched north eastwards from Kasserine to Pichon, and the country to the West was extremely bad for landing grounds either from the point of view of flying or of ground serviceability. To the East the country was often sand-desert, particularly in the Thelepte area, and most suitable for natural all weather landing grounds. Further west, and out of fighter range from the front line, the Canrobert and Constantine plains offered good landing grounds for bombers, although becoming unserviceable after heavy rain.

Ibid

It was therefore necessary to inaugurate an ambitious airfield construction programme. The ideal was to provide a semi-circle of landing grounds capable of housing the whole tactical fighter and bomber force around the Axis bridgehead,

the main centres being Souk El Khemis, Le Kef, Kairouan and the Sousse area. The plan could not be put into effect until the enemy had been pinned back in the Southern sector, and yet the new airfields had to be prepared to keep step with the advance of the Eighth Army. Lack of equipment for the construction of landing grounds was the greatest difficulty experienced.

#### The improvement in the use of R.D.F. in the battle area

Micro Reels  
12 and 13

XII A.S.C.  
report of  
operations.

The mountainous country in Northern Tunisia imposed definite limitations on the use of R.D.F. Headquarters N.A.T.A.F. found that these limitations were being accepted and no effort was being made to obtain early warning of enemy air activity in the battle area; although an excellent R.D.F. layout existed in the rear areas and along the coast. Consequently the whole R.D.F. layout was reorganised and augmented with the object of being able to look over the Tunis coastal plain as far as the mountainous country permitted. The gap in the cover was made up by the extensive use of light warning sets. Great difficulty was experienced in the development of telephonic communication between R.D.F. sites, in fact at the beginning much of the plotting had to be done by W/T. In the south the 3rd Air Defence Wing installed a similar system for the use of aircraft of XII A.S.C.

#### The Formation of the Tactical Bomber Force

O.R.B. T.B.F.  
IIM/A.46/1A

Experience in the Western Desert and in the current operations had decided the A.O.C. of the North West African Tactical Air Force, to place all his British and American light and medium bombers (except those allotted to the Western Desert Air Force) in a separate group under his immediate control. This enabled him to employ them on whichever portion of the front the situation demanded. In addition to being operated directly under T.A.F. H.Q. light bombers could be operated under the control of subordinate Commanders who were provided with facilities and staff for controlling the bombers and co-ordinating their operations with the fighters. Accordingly a new force was formed on 20 March, 1943, composed of the Bisley Squadrons of No. 326 Wing, the Boston Squadrons of the American 47th Bombardment Group, two squadrons of Mitchells from the American 12th Bombardment Group (transferred from the W.D.A.F.) and No. 8 Groupement of the French Air Force with night flying Leo 45's. This formation was entitled the Tactical Bomber Force, and was placed under the command of Air Commodore L. F. Sinclair G.C., who set up his headquarters at Maison Forestiere, near Oulmene.

H.Q. N.A.T.A.F. had ordered that administrative authority was to be assumed by T.B.F. over American units on the same lines as that exercised by the Commander of XII A.S.C. The American Deputy A.O.C., was to control both the 47th Group and the two B-25 Squadrons of 12th Group either in his role as Senior Staff Officer or as Commander of American units at the discretion of the A.O.C. T.B.F.

Ibid

At the beginning equipment was the greatest difficulty. Only the 47th Bombardment Group was fully equipped and even they had left a good deal of their equipment and personnel behind at Casablanca. The 12th Group had no ground crews or equipment and had to be maintained by the R.A.F. Servicing Commando. Supplies of aircraft spares were obtained from units of the Twelfth Air Force operating similar aircraft from Telergma. One of the most immediate necessities was the re-equipment of the Bisley squadrons with aircraft more

suitable for close support work. Conversion of aircrews of both Nos. 18 and 114 Squadrons had already been begun by using A.20 aircraft borrowed from 47th Group, but the first Boston arrived only on the 21st of March. Re-equipment of the other two squadrons was not possible, owing to lack of aircraft, and they had to continue flying Bisleys and were only used on night intruder operations.

Forces available to the North West African Tactical Air Force

The Tactical Air Force had been given control of all air forces whose activities directly affected the ground battle. In early April 1943, those in Tunisia comprised:

	<u>UNIT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
	H.Q. No. 242 Group	Souk El Arba
	H.Q. No. 322(F) Wing	Souk El Khemis
	81 Sqn. (Spitfire)	"
Appendices	152 Sqn. "	"
O.R.B.	154 " "	"
242 Group	232 " "	"
	242 " "	Bone
	H.Q. No. 324(F) Wing	Souk El Khemis
	72 Sqn. (Spitfire)	"
	93 " "	"
	111 " "	"
	243 " "	"
	225 " "	"
	241 " (Hurribomber)	"
	<u>Tactical Bomber Force</u>	
	H.Q. No. 326 Wing	Oulmene
	13 Sqn. (Bisley)	"
	18 " "	"
O.R.B.	614 " "	"
T.B.F.	114 " (Boston)	Canrobert
	47th Bombardment Group	"
	84 Sqn. (Boston)	"
	85 " "	"
	86 " "	"
	97 " "	"
	81 Sqn. (Mitchell) detachment from 12th	Canrobert
	82 " Bombardment Group (WDAF)	"
	No. 8 Groupement French Air Force Sixteen Leo. 45's	Biskra
	<u>XII Air Support Command</u>	
	31st (F) Group (U.S.)	
File Order	307 Sqn. (Spitfire)	Thelepte-Sbeitla ana
of Battle	308 " "	
North Africa	309 " "	"
IIJ1/145/17	52 (F) Group (U.S.)	"
and	2 Sqn. (Spitfire)	"
XII Air Force	4 " "	"
Admin History	55 " "	
IIJ/136/(A)	33(F) Group (U.S.)	
	58 Sqn. (Kittyhawk)	
	59 " "	
	60 " "	



XII Air Support Command (Contd.)

81st (F) Group U.S. (1)	Thelepte-Sbeitla ana
91 Sqdn. (Airacobra)	"
92 "	"
93 "	"
and No. 154 (R) Sqdn. (U.S.) Airacobra	"

The Air-Sea War

C.C.S. 169

On 20 February, the re-organisation of the Naval Command of the Mediterranean (as proposed at the Casablanca Conference) had been effected. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham became once more C.-in-C., Mediterranean, but the character of the command was altered. The former command comprised only the eastern half of the Mediterranean, whereas the new command comprised the original Torch area which was extended eastwards to an imaginary line drawn from the Tunisian-Tripolitanian boundary to latitude 35° north longitude 16° east, and thence to Cape Spartivento in Italy. Admiral Harwood relinquished his title of C.-in-C., Mediterranean and assumed that of C.-in-C., Levant, which was the new designation of his existing Command in the Eastern Mediterranean, and included the Red Sea. (2)

Admiral Cunningham's Command included Malta which became an increasingly effective Naval and Air Base in offensive action during the campaign in Tunisia. The allies were, however, not yet in a position to supply the Naval and Air forces in Malta, for as long as the enemy could maintain his air strength over the Sicilian "Narrows" it was inadvisable to send convoys to Malta through the Western Mediterranean. It was therefore decided that the supply of Malta should continue to be the responsibility of the C.-in-C., Levant.

Coastal Air Defences

Micro. No. 8.  
Defence of  
Algiers.  
Personal and  
Secret A.M.  
Welsh to  
U.S. of S.

The A.O.C. Eastern Air Command at this time, in a letter to the U.S. of S. 20 February, 1943, reviewed the question of the efficiency of the air protection that had been afforded to convoys proceeding into and east of the Port of Algiers since the start of the operation. He pointed out the difficulties which had been experienced in the earlier stages.

Ibid

The poor communications, the crude state of the airfields, the lack of an adequate warning system. The fact that his airfields were within easy reach of enemy long range bombers based in Sardinia and Sicily and, in the case of Bone of fighter escorted long range bombers and the latest types of short range fighters operating from Tunis and Bizerte. But that in spite of these difficulties convoys had been moved with clocklike regularity without regard to moon or weather, and that the enemy had been forced to abandon his daylight raids on ports and shipping and to resort to night attacks. These had, in turn, been successfully countered by night fighters as soon as the proper radar equipment had been provided. Latterly the enemy had confined himself to the employment of torpedo aircraft, operating mainly at dusk.

- (1) 81st Fighter Group was withdrawn on 3 April for reorganisation.
- (2) On 27 March, Vice Admiral Leatham assumed the post of C.-in-C., Levant on the relinquishment of that command by Admiral Harwood on medical grounds.

and dawn. But the Air Marshal said he was about to undertake measures to prevent this. He went on to give a list which showed the names and particulars of ships which had been sunk by enemy action during this period. It was pointed out that the percentage of sinkings at sea and in harbour had been only 1.1 per cent and of ships damaged at sea and in harbour only 1 per cent, while the percentage of ships sunk or damaged while in passage had been under 1 per cent. He continued "The development of the fighter defence organisation along the entire coastline from Oran to Bone is now in an advanced stage and this fact, coupled with the provision of the facilities necessary to counter the low flying torpedo bombers, should it is confidently suggested, enable the percentage of shipping losses to be reduced to still smaller figures".

Ibid

#### The Naval Outlook

Admiral Cunningham had not been satisfied with the Allied position at sea. He had pointed out in a "Review of the Situation regarding enemy supplies to Tunisia" dated 10 February 1943, that in spite of severe sea losses inflicted by air and sea forces the rate of supplies and reinforcements reaching the enemy had increased during January and February 1943. Measures taken by the Allies had forced the enemy shipping to cross the Sicilian Narrows by day only, in order to avoid Allied Naval attack by night, and to take advantage of their own fighter protection. Enemy convoys from Naples had been crossing the Tyrrhenian Sea by day and arriving off the West Sicilian coast by night. After indicating the Naval counter measures it was proposed to initiate, the Admiral suggested the following programme should be undertaken by the Air.

IIM/A.37(P.59)  
MAC.ORB  
Appendix P.(59)  
in box B.105

Reconnaissance and bomber strikes over the Tyrrhenian Sea by day and over the West Sicilian coast by night and a minimum of two bomber searches daily over the Sicilian Narrows. He asked for an increased air effort and proposed that this should be made possible by drawing on aircraft from the Middle East and by diverting bomber Squadrons based in Algeria from their Tunisian targets. He realised that in view of the limited number of fighters available, bomber searches over the Sicilian Narrows would have to continue to withdraw escorts from equally vital bombing sorties against enemy installations in Tunisia. In his opinion the P.38 (Lightning) was the only suitable type of escort for these searches owing to the distances involved, and he recommended that an additional two Squadrons be provided for this purpose as a matter of extreme urgency.

Ibid

#### The Importance of Bone

The importance of the Port of Bone for the entrance of supplies to the Allied forces needs to be emphasized. Its loss would have had disastrous consequences, either as an additional port available to the enemy, or in the event of its being severely damaged or blocked, would have deprived the Allies of a harbour from which to support any subsequent offensive actions. By its loss, the Port of Philippeville would have become untenable under the threat of air attack from the Bone area; and the Allied Naval forces would have been forced back to bases at Algiers and Bougie from which they would have been unable to exert effective pressure on the enemy sea supply line to Tunis, Bizerta and Bone. In fact, enemy supply to these ports could have been so routed as to be free from any interference except such as could have been brought to bear by submarines and aircraft. The result would

MAC. ORB.  
II M/A.37  
(P.60)

have been that the enemy would have been able to build up a considerably increased force in Tunisia.

Authors  
comment

That Air Marshal Welsh, who had relinquished his appointment as A.O.C. of the Eastern Air Command on the 23 February, 1943 had fully appreciated the importance of the air-sea war in general and of the port of Bone in particular, is self evident. All through his tenure of command he had had to resist the suggestion that the greater part of his limited number of fighters should be employed in support of the First Army. An attempt had also been made to induce him to remove his headquarters from Algiers, where he was in close touch with the Combined Headquarters, and establish himself near the First Army Command Post, from which he would have been unable to exert any influence over the conduct of the Air-Sea war.

#### Intensification of the Air-Sea War

O.R.B.  
H.Q. N.A.C.A.F.

These difficulties were eliminated to some extent, by the formation of the North West African Coastal Command under the command of Group Captain G. G. Barrett<sup>(1)</sup> who set up his Headquarters in the Standard Oil Company's building in Algiers. Its functions included shipping strikes, anti-submarine operations, the protection of Allied port and land installations from Casablanca to Bone, and the protection of all Allied shipping in the Western Mediterranean from longitude 30° West as far as Bone.

Action against the enemy at sea was not solely confined to Coastal aircraft. A strategic operational Directive issued by M.A.C. on the 7 March, 1943 to the Commanding General North West African Air Forces makes this clear.

(I) "At present the normal mission of the strategic striking forces of the N.W.A.A.F. will be the air attack of Axis sea, land and air lines of communications and supply to and from Tunisia. During periods of battle in Tunisia it is expected that the maximum contributions of the forces under your command, except for those elements essential for general reconnaissance, protection of land and sea routes of communication and those specially allotted to the attack of shipping by previous directive, may be required to assist the ground forces participating in the battle. Whereas this support role would be of primary importance at the time, it is temporary in nature, and such forces that cannot be used effectively in the fulfilment of it should revert as soon as possible to the normal role. Any diversion of heavy bombardment aircraft from the normal mission will be authorised only by this command.

(II) In the normal mission of the striking forces, which is the interdiction of enemy supply, maximum advantage is to be taken of advice and intelligence available from the Army, the Navy and the Air Forces engaged in coastal operations.

(III) As the task assigned is a continuing one, and not capable of complete accomplishment in a designated period of time, the following priority of targets is defined:

(a) Shipping in the Mediterranean in the following order:

(1) Fuel tankers en route between Sicily and North Africa.

(1) Relieved in March 1943 by A.V.M. Sir H. P. Lloyd.



(2) Fuel tankers en route between Italy and Sicily.

(3) Merchant shipping bearing vital war supplies en route to North Africa in the order of sea routes as above.

(b) Active shipping in ports as follows:

(1) Tunis - Bizerta.

(2) Other Axis held North African Ports.

(3) Palermo - Messina - Trapani.

(4) Naples."

The directive continued on these lines ending:-

"(e) Escort vessels and small craft."

Ibid  
Appendix 21

Another directive issued a few days earlier made provision for two fully trained medium bomber Squadrons to be held continually at readiness to strike at shipping on information supplied by Malta, the Coastal Air Force, and the Navy. Thus by the end of March 1943, a very large proportion of the available Allied aircraft had been directed against Axis shipping.

Malta (March - April 1943)<sup>(1)</sup>

Ops. Malta  
IIJ.15/35

On 18 February, 1943, R.A.F. Malta was placed under the operational control of the Headquarters Mediterranean Air Command.

At that the date the air force available on the island comprised:-

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Function</u>
No. 23 Sqn.	Mosquito	TE/Ftr./Recoe./Bomber
No. 39 Sqn.	Beaufort	Torpedo Bomber/G.R.
No. 69 Sqn.	Baltimore	G.R.
No. 89 Sqn. Det.	Beaufighter	T.E. Night Fighter
No. 126 Sqn.	Spitfire	S.E. Fighter
No. 185 Sqn.	Spitfire	S.E. Fighter
No. 221 Sqn.	Wellington	Torpedo Bomber
No. 227 Sqn.	Beaufighter	T.E. Day Fighter
No. 229 Sqn.	Spitfire	S.E. Fighter
No. 249 Sqn.	Spitfire	S.E. Fighter
No. 272 Sqn. (Det.)	Beaufighter	T.E. Day Fighter
No. 458 Sqn.	Wellington	Torpedo Bomber
No. 683 Sqn.	Spitfire	P.R.U.
No. 1435 Sqn.	Spitfire	S.E. Fighter
No. 701 Sqn. (Det.)	Walrus	Reconnaissance
No. 821 Sqn.	Albacore	Shipping Strike
No. 828 Sqn.	Albacore	Shipping Strike
No. 830 Sqn.	Swordfish	Shipping Strike

These units represented a strength of two hundred and nine aircraft, of which one hundred and fifty-nine were serviceable.

With these resources, the Royal Air Force Malta was ordered to:-

- (1) For Malta's Contribution to Torch see appendix "F".  
Hitherto Malta had been a separate command.

O.R.B.  
Malta  
Feb. 1943

- (1) Continue to maintain local air superiority and thereby contain the enemy air forces in Sicily.
- (2) Maintain torpedo attacks on enemy shipping.
- (3) Provide protection for allied shipping against aircraft and submarine attack.
- (4) Provide General and photographic reconnaissance for the Allied Air Forces and for the Royal Navy.

O.R.B.  
Malta  
March, 1943

In March 1943, there was little enemy activity against the island, the alert had only been sounded six times during the month and then only on account of enemy reconnaissance or high flying sweeps. No bombs had been dropped on or around the island.

Wellingtons, Beaufort and Albacore Squadrons, operating under No. 248 Wing, had continued to achieve considerable success. Despite adverse weather conditions, a total of fourteen thousand five hundred tons of enemy shipping had been sunk and thirty-eight thousand tons damaged, in strikes by day and by night.

Ibid

The outstanding attack had been made by nine Beauforts escorted by nine Beaufighters against a south bound convoy, in the Gulf of Taranto; which had been sighted by a Baltimore on reconnaissance early on the morning of the 17 March. Five hours later the convoy, consisting of one merchant vessel of about seven thousand tons escorted by fifteen M.E.10's and JU.88's, was attacked and while the Beaufighters drove off the convoy's air escort the Beauforts attacked the vessel with seven torpedoes. A big column of water and a large cloud of black smoke were seen at the stern of the ship and smoke was observed to be issuing from its decks. Later, a Baltimore sent to photograph the strike found one JU.88 and a twin engined flying boat circling a large oil patch on the sea. The enemy flying boat, on seeing the Baltimore climbed into some thick cloud, stalled and then crashed into the sea.

The offensive against Italian and Sicilian railways was continued by Mosquitos by night and Spitfires by day. Despite the fact that during the moon period, visibility was often hampered by ground haze, the Mosquitos derailed or damaged sixty-five locomotives in Sicily and Southern Italy. Considerable damage was inflicted on the Italian west coast electric railway, by attacks against the track and railway buildings. On one occasion a Mosquito patrolling this line, almost reached the environs of Rome and attacked four trains in that vicinity.

Ibid  
April 1943

In April, despite the marked reduction in the number of enemy convoys to Tunis and Bizerta, and the limited number of operations which could be undertaken, owing to the Allied Naval activity in the Sicilian Narrows, the months shipping offensive had achieved good results. Eleven thousand tons of enemy shipping had been sunk, and five thousand tons damaged. Bombing attacks by Wellingtons and Albacores had been made against shipping and harbour installations in the main Sicilian and Tunisian ports, and mines had been laid in the approaches to Trapani.

Enemy activity with bombers and transport aircraft had diminished greatly, but in spite of this a number of aircraft had been destroyed or damaged by Mosquitos on intruder Operations over the Sicilian and Pantellaria airfields.

At night, aircraft on patrol, to protect allied shipping strikes, encountered no enemy night fighters.

By day the Spitfire fighters and bombers increased their efforts. The islands of Lampedosa and Pantellaria were attacked together with industrial objectives and airfields in Sicily. Sweeps were made as far as the Sicilian Narrows and to the north of Messina. Thirty-six enemy aircraft had been destroyed or damaged during the month, which brought the total of enemy aircraft destroyed by the R.A.F. Malta since the outbreak of war to over one thousand.

Ibid

Photographic reconnaissances from Malta had shown that although the enemy had sent an ever increasing amount of supplies to Sardinia and Sicily, only a few convoys had attempted the crossing to Tunisia. This was due partly to the dangers of the sea crossing and partly to the Axis's lack of suitable merchant vessels. This shortage was, however being remedied by the use of ships taken over from the French; and at the end of April, two French tankers and two large French merchant vessels were seen to have arrived in Naples and Genoa by way of Leghorn and Spezia. Apart from these arrivals, activity at Naples had been slight and the few vessels using the port had, when not actually loading or unloading, been dispersed in the vicinity. Palermo was full of wrecks and with two quays already destroyed, had very few berths available for the accommodation of shipping. Trapani had been almost evacuated by vessels of any size, and Taranto had ceased to be a port of supply for Tunisia, although the results of photographic reconnaissances suggested that both Bari and Brindisi were being used as supply bases for Greece.

Ibid

Visual reconnaissance by Baltimores and photographic reconnaissance by Spitfires had been maintained over the ports of Palermo, Messina, Taranto, and Naples and often even when no convoys had been sighted in the daytime; strike forces, consisting of Wellingtons, Beauforts, and Albacores, some carrying special equipment and some armed with torpedos and bombs; had been despatched to search for enemy shipping in the Sicilian Narrows.

This brief account of the activities of the Royal Air Forces from Malta gives an indication of the prominent part played by them in the interdiction of the enemy's supply line during the month of March and April, 1943. Some months later Mussolini in a broadcast addressed to "Legionaries and Italians", referring to the fact that the Italian Navy had sailed to Malta after the Armistice, had said "That island has been a pillar of British Imperialism in the Mediterranean and a constant threat to the vital interests of Italy".

Ops. Malta  
IIJ.15/35

The battle for  
Tunis by 8th  
Abteilung  
A.H.B.Trans.  
VII/25

#### The enemy's viewpoint

The enemy were not completely satisfied with the course of events at sea. A German account states that the decisive factor in the supply situation was the shortage of convoy escort vessels, and that the number of transport ships available and the unloading facilities of the Tunisian harbours were of secondary importance. The reason for this shortage had never been explained. The Italian Navy had alleged that the situation was due to the effect of enemy action and lack of fuel. But the Germans suspected that the Italians were anxious to conserve their Fleet as an asset with which to bargain at the eventual peace negotiations. In the end the decision was taken to operate fast supply ships without escort. The Italians had insisted on the greatest possible air protection, and German bomber units had had to provide this.



The supply position had been made even more difficult by the Allied Air attacks against traffic and communications in Sicily. These were facilitated by the fact that the air defence had previously been withdrawn from the Sicilian harbours. At the end of February coal reserves for only six days had been available in Sicily. As a stoppage of rail traffic there would have had serious results on the shipment of supplies to Tunisia the Italians had decided to dispatch supply convoys to Sicily and shipping for this purpose had had to be withdrawn from the direct Africa route.

The Italian Navy had been badly maintained. Of their existing thirty-three destroyers, only eleven were fit for action. Allied air and sea activity against Axis convoys had increased daily, and many ships had been torpedoed in the immediate vicinity of Naples.

AHB trans.  
VII/25  
Pp. 13 and 14

Another German account stated "Increased importance was attached to the enemy attacks on the German and Italian supply fleet, as they caused considerable losses and there was the threat of a shipping crisis. The Axis bases in Sicily and above all in Palermo, became the object of air attacks far more than in January. The enemy's superiority in the Mediterranean presented our reconnaissance aircrews with important and difficult problems. In addition to patrolling the sea lanes from Sicily, long-range reconnaissance aircraft also surveyed constantly the shipping routes off the North African coast, and harbours. Bomber, dive-bomber and fighter bomber units of Luftflotte 2 were directed for the most part against targets at sea. An attempt was made to attack all enemy convoys carrying supplies to Africa, in addition to the ports of unloading at Algiers, Bone, Tripoli, Benghazi, and Tobruk.

Long-range bombers were only to be used against ground targets when the close support air strength was not adequate to the task of opposing the development and course of an enemy attack. In accordance with this principle, enemy shipping was in constant danger of Axis air attacks throughout February. One cruiser and merchant ships totalling 63,000 tons were sunk. But above all the enemy harbours received heavy blows. Tripoli alone, which the Fuehrer had ordered particularly attacked, was raided fifteen times during the month".

CHAPTER 12

VICTORY IN TUNISIA

The Offensive from Tunisia to Assist the Mareth Battle

The Eighth Army had planned to start the main attack on the Mareth line on 20 March 1943. Before this General Alexander had decided to employ II U.S. Corps situated on the extreme right of his line in Tunisia in a limited operation. His objects were to restore the American's confidence in themselves after the earlier setbacks they had encountered, to exert pressure on the right rear of the enemy defending the Mareth position, and to be ready to open an alternative line of supply for the Eighth Army after they had broken through the Gabes Gap. He planned, therefore that II Corps, commanded by General Patton who had relieved General Friedendall, should attack Gafsa about 15 March with the 1st Armoured and 1st Infantry Divisions. They were to secure Gafsa and build up there a dump of petrol for the use of the Eighth Army, subsequently exploiting down the Gabes road and towards the Maknassy defile in order to draw the enemy's attention and provoke counter-attack. General Patton was to try and capture the El Guettar defile, southeast of Gafsa, but was not to operate any strong forces beyond that until further orders.

The Air Plan

The Headquarters of the Tactical Air Force had moved with the H.Q. of the Eighteenth Army Group to a camp site near Ain Beida on 11 March and had issued an air plan which divided the proposed operation into three phases A, B, and C.

In File  
Operation  
Fugilist

II J.6/70

Phase "A" postulated that the First Army would merely stage demonstrations against the enemy, while II U.S. Corps attacked him in the south. In all operations the role of the Tactical Air Force would be to provide the maximum assistance to the land forces in the battle area, while the Strategical Air Force, acting under the orders of the headquarters of the Northwest African Air Force, would support the operations by attack of selected objectives outside the battle area in conjunction with the Tactical Air Force plans.

The following preliminary action was to be undertaken by XII A.S.C. and No.242 Group.

- (a) Develop an early warning and fighter control system to cover the probable battle area in the Southern Sector.
- (b) Concentrate XII A.S.C. in the Thelepte area.
- (c) Organise and concentrate the Tactical Bomber Force at bases in the Canrobert area.
- (d) Stock the airfields in the Thelepte and Youks area to meet operational requirements and to provide a surplus for the use of the Western Desert Air Force.
- (e) Attack the main enemy airfields in all Sectors.
- (f) Prepare a detailed reinforcement plan for units of No.242 Group by units of XII A.S.C.
- (g) Attack any enemy concentrations reported by Western Desert Air Reconnaissance in the Southern Sector.

It would also be necessary to undertake the following airfield construction:

- (a) Two new airfields in the Thelepte area (one to be available for reinforcing aircraft from No.242 Group or Western Desert Air Forces)
- (b) Develop Kala Djerda as a bomber airfield
- (c) Improve the existing Thelepte airfields (Nos. 1 and 2)
- (d) Improve the Sbeitla airfield and make reconnaissance for additional airfield sites in that area.
- (e) Construct a light bomber base airfield at Tarf.

The air operations to be undertaken during the offensive by XII A.S.C. and No.242 Group in the battle area were set out in the following order:-

- (a) Offensive action against enemy aircraft in the air.
- (b) Attack of enemy airfields in the North and South Sectors
- (c) Attack of opportunity targets reported by air reconnaissance or by other channels.
- (d) Night attack against the enemy's lines of communication.

In the strategic area

- (e) Attack of selected objectives reported by air reconnaissance - as the enemy withdrew from the Mareth line concentration of mechanical transport might be expected in the Gabes area.
- (f) Attacks by night on the enemy's lines of communication to the Mareth area.

The Western Desert Air Forces were to operate during this phase entirely in support of the Eighth Army, and were to undertake the detailed planning and control of their own operations.

Phase "B" of the operation would begin when II U.S. Corps had captured Gafsa and the Eighth Army had begun to advance on Gabes, when the enemy was expected to withdraw to defensive positions in Central Tunisia. During phases "A" and "B" the following preparatory measures for phase "C" - the final assaults on Tunis were to be made -

- (a) The Tactical Air Force was to maintain a continuous air offensive against the enemy air force at a light sustained scale.
- (b) A warning system was to be developed in the Northern Sector extending southwards to cover Kairouan,
- (c) Two additional fighter airfields were to be constructed in the Souk El Khemis area (one to be available for reinforcing fighter aircraft)



- (d) Souk El Arba airfield was to be developed as a bomber operational base
- (e) Additional airfields in the Souk El Arba area were to be constructed for the use of reinforcing bomber aircraft
- (f) An airfield was to be constructed in the Le Kef valley, in addition to those already existing at Le Kef and Le Sers, for the use of reinforcing aircraft
- (g) Stocks of fuel, bombs ammunition, were to be accumulated in the forward areas to meet the demands of intensive operations by the Tactical Air Force over a period of ten days, with reserves in the rear within easy access
- (h) Lateral line communication was to be developed between No.242 Group and XII A.S.C.

Operational Plan - Phase "B"

As soon as Gafsa had been taken two airfields (previously used by XII A.S.C.) were to be prepared for the use of the Western Desert Air Forces as advanced operational bases if required. Stocks of fuel, bombs and ammunition were to be held ready for transfer to these airfields when ordered by the advanced headquarters of the Western Desert Air Force. The movement of the warning system eastward from Thelepte to cover Central Tunisia and north eastward to cover Kairouan would be required, and lateral communication was to be developed by wireless and subsequently by land line between XII A.S.C. and the advanced headquarters of the Western Desert Air Force.

Air Operations by the Tactical Air Force

Co-ordinated air action was to be undertaken by XII A.S.C. and the advanced headquarters of the Desert Air Force, on an intensive scale, in the Southern and Central Sectors against enemy air and ground forces by day and night; priority targets to be enemy concentrations on the roads during their withdrawal. In the Northern Sector No.242 Group were to continue operations on a sustained scale against the enemy air forces. In attacks against main enemy airfields assistance would be provided by the South African Air Force.

Airfield Construction

- (a) Development of three additional fighter airfields in the Sbeitla area.
- (b) Airfield construction required by the Western Desert Air Forces was to be met from their own resources.

Supply

Provision of supplies as required by the Western Desert Air Forces.

Preparation for Phase "C"

- (1) Increased early warning in the Northern Sector
- (2) Development of a common standard of fighter control

between No.242 Group, XII A.S.C. and the Western Desert Air Forces, in order to be able to control fighter formations from the most convenient sector.

(3) The linking by land line of the Le Kef valley airfield with those at Souk El Khemis and Sbeitla.

(4) The development of a co-ordinated air reconnaissance plan.

(5) The development of a co-ordinated bomber plan and the allocation of objectives.

(6) The development of a co-ordinated fighter plan.

(7) Sustained attacks against the enemy's lines of communication by sea, and against his supply ports, were to be made by the Strategical Air Force.

#### Operational Plan - Phase "C"

For the final assault on Tunis, the Tactical Air Force units would be in a position to develop their maximum scale of attack from bases in the Souk El Khemis, Le Kef, Sbeitla and Southern or Central Tunisian areas. At this stage it was expected that R.D.F. equipment would be installed in position from which all main enemy airfields would be covered. Lateral communication would have been established between the elements of the Tactical Air Force and a standard system of control in the air would be available for fighter aircraft in all sectors. Operational bases would carry stocks sufficient for ten days intensive air support with reserve supplies within easy access.

In the period before the land forces began their offensive, the Tactical Air Forces would conduct an intensive offensive against the enemy air forces in Tunisia by day and by night. While the Strategical Air Force concentrated their bomber effort on the enemy's lines of communication by sea, and on his main supply ports.

As soon as the land forces attacked the enemy, the Tactical Air Force would concentrate its main effort on ground targets in the battle area by day and night. The Strategical Air Force would continue in its former role, but with a sustained scale of attack.

When the land forces began to make headway all the air forces would be concentrated in an effort to annihilate the enemy and prevent his evacuation by sea or by air.

#### The Conference at Canrobert

On 12 March a conference was held at Canrobert convened by the A.O.C. of the Tactical Air Force. The A.O.C., S.A.S.O., and A.O.A. of the Western Desert Air Force, the A.O.C. No.242 Group, and the Commanding General XII Air Support Command were present in addition to members of the Tactical Air Force Staff. It was agreed that when the battle for Mareth began, the air forces of No.242 Group and XII A.S.C. would endeavour to neutralise and divert the attention of the enemy air forces from the Eighth Army front by attacking airfields, including those in the Gabes area, by day and by night. This would allow the whole of the Western Desert Air Force effort to be devoted to the support of the Eighth Army.

Operations  
W.D.A.F.  
II J.15/4

The attack on the enemy landing grounds

N.A.A.F.  
Air Int.  
Reports  
IIJ.15/8

On 13 March twenty-four Spitfires of the 31st Fighter Group (XII A.S.C.) making a reconnaissance discovered a group of enemy landing grounds in the neighbourhood of La Fauconnerie on which were seen dispersed twelve Me.109's and six reconnaissance aircraft. These airfields were attacked in the afternoon by twelve P.39's (Airacobra) of the 81st Fighter Group (XII A.S.C.) escorted by twenty-four Spitfires of the 31st Fighter Group flying as "top cover" two thousand feet above them. The P-39's were attacked by eight F.W.190's and four Me.109's and as the escort failed to intervene, the battle resulted in the loss of seven P-39's.

The next day no operations by the Tactical Air Force were possible owing to the bad weather conditions, but on the 15 March part of the Strategical Air Force was diverted from its normal role to the attack of enemy airfields. Twelve B-26's (Marauder) of the 17th Bomber Group (N.A.S.A.F.) escorted by thirty-seven P-38's (Lightning) of the 1st Fighter Group (N.A.S.A.F.) and Spitfires of the Tactical Air Force, attacked the landing ground at Mezzouna and destroyed twelve enemy aircraft on the ground. After leaving the target they were attacked by six Me.109's and two F.W.190's between Maknassy and Tebessa, but the results were inconclusive. At night eight Bisleys of the Tactical Bomber Force attacked the enemy landing grounds at Djebel Tebaga from a height of about one thousand feet, while another eight bombed the Gabes-Sfax road. Results were difficult to observe owing to the bad weather prevailing.

Ibid

On 16 March Mezzouna was again raided by twelve B-25's (Mitchell) of the 321st Bomber Group (N.A.S.A.F.) escorted by forty P-40's (Kittyhawk) of the 33rd Fighter Group (XII A.S.C.) Fragmentation bombs were dropped from a height of three thousand five hundred feet. On the way back to their base the escort was attacked first by two Me.109's near El Guettar and again later by six Me.109's, but the attacks were not pressed home and the results were not apparent.

The next day the Tactical Air Force made over one hundred sorties mostly reconnaissance in force over the Gafsa-Maknassy-Faid area, but low cloud and the prevailing dust precluded operations from most of the Southern Tunisian airfields.

The most valuable landing grounds to the enemy were those in the Djebel Tebaga and Gabes areas, because aircraft operating from them were able to make sorties either in defence of the southern front, or attacks against the U.S. forces in the Gafsa-Maknassy areas with equal facility. This fact was appreciated fully by the Allied Air Staff, and on 20 March the Strategic Air Force made its first heavy attack on the Tebaga landing grounds with eighteen B-26's (Marauder) of the 17th Bomb Group escorted by twenty-five P-38's (Lightning) of the 82nd Group (N.A.S.A.F.) the formation was attacked by fifteen Me.109's three of which were probably destroyed.

In the afternoon the attack was repeated by seventeen B-25's (Mitchell) of the 321st Bomb Group escorted by thirty-six Spitfires of the 31st Fighter Group (XII A.S.C.) Fifty single engined and ten or more twin engined enemy aircraft were seen dispersed on the ground in shelters, several of which were damaged and one twin engined aircraft was seen to explode. This raid was followed up in the early hours of

O.R.B.  
614 Sqdn.



the next morning by an attack by Bisleys of the Tactical Bomber Force.

The next day Tebaga was again attacked by aircraft of the Strategic Air Force. Eighteen B-17's (Fortresses) of the 97th Bomb Group escorted by twenty P-38's (Lightnings) of the 1st Fighter Group dropped fragmentation bombs from sixteen thousand feet. Later in the morning yet another raid was made by eighteen B-17's of the 301st Bomb Group escorted by seventeen P-38's of the 1st Fighter Group; but bad weather impeded observation of the results of the attack. In the afternoon a further attempt was made on the same target by forty-six B-17's of the 97th Bomb Group (NASAF) with an escort of twenty-eight P-38's of the 1st Fighter Group, but the weather had by then become so unfavourable that only a small proportion of the bombers dropped their bombs on the objective, the remainder found targets on the landing ground at El Hamma and others dropped their bombs on a camp near Gabes and on the town of Gabes itself.

O.R.B.  
614 Sqdn.

That night twenty-one Bisleys of the T.B.F. dropped incendiary bombs on the landing ground at Sfax el Maou. These illuminated the target for the twelve Wellingtons which followed them, and disclosed the presence of enemy aircraft dispersed along the south side of the landing ground.

IIJ 15/8

O.R.B.  
614 Sqdn.

On the 22nd Spitfires of the 31st and 52nd Fighter Groups, (XII A.S.C.) P-39's (Airacobra) and F-4's (Corsair) of the 68th Observation Group and P-39's of the 81st Fighter Group (XII A.S.C.) made two hundred and thirty-three sorties during the day including escorting bombers of the Tactical Air Force in attacks on Mezzouna landing ground. Photographic reconnaissance had revealed that forty fighters were dispersed in shelters at Tebaga North landing ground, thirty-two on Sfax el Maou and six at Mezzouna. That night the latter was bombed by nine Wellingtons from Nos. 150 and 242 Squadrons R.A.F. and by six Leo-45's and twenty-two Bisleys of the T.B.F.

On the 23rd fifteen B-25's (Mitchell) escorted by Tactical Air Force fighters bombed Tebaga North from seven thousand feet. Three enemy aircraft were observed taking off as the bombs fell, and others were seen dispersed on the landing ground. On the same day twelve B-26's (Marauder) of the 17th Bomb Group (N.A.S.A.F.) escorted by fighters from the Tactical Air Force bombed an enemy landing ground at La Smala des Souassi.

One of the features of these attacks was the use of fragmentation bombs, and different formations were tried out by the N.A.S.A.F. bombers during these attacks on the landing grounds to find out the type of bomb pattern best suited to attacks on the landing grounds to find out the type of bomb pattern best suited to attacks on airfields. These experiments were amply rewarded by the gradually increasing success of bombers against enemy aircraft, even though dispersed, on landing grounds throughout the remainder of the campaign. The enemy's dispersal was successful and the damage done was not in proportion to the weight of bombs dropped, but the bombing of landing grounds proved an effective policy as only five enemy aircraft appeared over the Eighth Army front in an offensive role during this period.

In spite of these continuous and persistent attacks the enemy air force still continued to make use of their important landing grounds. Reconnaissance reported on the

25 March that there were nineteen aircraft on Sfax el Macou, and thirty-eight fighters on Tebaga North. This was especially significant as Tebaga had been heavily bombed only five hours before the reconnaissance had been made. As long as the enemy air force was in occupation of landing grounds north of a line east of Sfax he could continue to be a threat to Eighth Army and II U.S. Corps. Continuous air attack on these landing grounds was therefore maintained.

By 29 March the Axis Air Force was beginning to concentrate its aircraft on the landing grounds around La Fauconnerie. Twenty-eight aircraft were seen dispersed in shelters there. An attack was made by thirty-six P-40's (33 F.G.) (XII A.S.C.)<sup>(1)</sup> which was strongly resisted by twelve Me.109's. In the ensuing fight five enemy aircraft were shot down for the loss of one P-40. The next day very heavy bombing attacks were made on the same landing grounds by aircraft of the Tactical Air Force, eighteen A-20's (Boston) escorted by thirty-six Spitfires (52nd F.G.) (XII A.S.C.) attacked in the morning and in the afternoon the raid was repeated by B-25's (Mitchell) with an escort of thirty-six P-40's (33rd F.G.) (XII A.S.C.) Both attacks were met by the enemy's fighters and they lost nine destroyed, six probably destroyed and three damaged.

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.  
Review of  
N.A.T.A.F.  
Ops Apl. 1943

In early April, similar attacks to those which had driven the Axis Air Force from the Djebel Tebaga and Mezzouna landing grounds, were continued on those around La Fauconnerie. Frequent raids were made by formations of twelve to eighteen medium bombers with their appropriate escorts. Attacks were also made on landing grounds in the Kairouan-El Djem areas. At the same time the Western Desert Air Force employed a mass formation of ninety bombers in attacks on landing grounds at Sfax el Macou. This heavy weight of attack was no doubt mainly responsible for the early retreat of the Axis Air Force to bases in the bridgehead though the security of his landing grounds from attacks from the Western flank must have been an additional reason.

Report on Ops.  
242 Grp. p.6  
IIJ1/116/129

The general direction and co-ordination of all operations in the latter area was undertaken by the Tactical Air Force H.Q.'s. A daily directive was issued in which the operations for the following day were indicated, but commanders of subordinate formations were entitled, and encouraged, to initiate operations outside the terms of the directive if sudden and unexpected changes occurred in the land battle situation.

The following extracts from a N.A.T.A.F. directive for the 9 April indicates the flexibility of the force and the varied nature of the tasks undertaken during this period.

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.  
Ops  
Instruction  
No.47

"No.242 Group to assist operation of V Corps. If weather precludes employment of Hurribombers these are to be prepared to operate from Sbeitla in support of operations of IX Corps.

XII A.S.C. and T.B.F. Maximum effort to assist operations of IX Corps. Reconnaissance to determine bomber and fighter bomber targets in general area Kairouan-Fondouk to commence at first light and to continue as required. Two formations A-20 to be held at readiness for attacks on targets on

(1) 33rd F.G. rejoined XII A.S.C. on 20 March 1943.

IX Corps front. Light bomber effort against developed targets to be continued until enemy dispersal. If weather permits Strategic Air Force undertaking medium bomber attack La Smala de Souassi landing ground during late morning. XII A.S.C. to provide heavy fighter escort. Spitfire IX's to be employed on high cover for bomber missions and when considered necessary for cover for offensive fighter sweeps. Reconnaissance of roads leading to Kairouan from south and in immediate vicinity of Kairouan to be undertaken to develop targets during afternoon if Light Bomber Force not employed on IX Corps operations. Bisleys to be prepared to operate on road targets night 9/10 April."

O.R.B.  
242 Grp.

In the northern sector enemy activity had been slight. This breathing space had enabled No.242 Group to complete preparations for the final battle in Tunisia. A joint headquarters had been formed with the First Army near Thibar. Airfields in the Souk el Khemis area had been constructed to accommodate the whole fighter and fighter bomber force, (these were named after London terminal railway stations: Waterloo, Euston, Paddington, Kings Cross, Victoria and Marylebone) R.D.F. had been installed which could overlook the Tunis plain. No.242 Squadron (Spitfire) had been transferred from the Coastal Air Force and had moved from Tingley airfield to Souk el Khemis (Marylebone).

#### Action by XII A.S.C. and II U.S. Corps

A.A.F. in  
World War II  
Chap. 6 p.12  
et seq.

II U.S. Corps under General Patton had begun their attack on the night of the 16/17 March. By noon the next day Gafsa had been taken and his armoured forces were advancing on Sened. Sened Station was taken on the 21st, and Maknassy on the 22nd. In the meanwhile the infantry moving southeast found El Guettar had been evacuated by the enemy and were able to take up a position fifteen miles to the east of El Guettar along the Gafsa road. Here the enemy attacked with tanks and infantry and further progress became impossible until the Eighth Army had advanced North of Akarit.

During the first two days of the offensive, the T.B.F. and XII A.S.C. gave support in the immediate battle area. Gafsa was attacked prior to its capture by Mitchells and as no enemy aircraft intervened the escorting fighters came down low to strafe. Reconnaissance and strafing attacks were made on a reduced scale thereafter, as the fighters were needed for escort on the T.B.F./N.A.S.A.F. campaign against the enemy landing grounds. However, when on the 23 March the Axis launched a counter attack against II U.S. Corps, the T.B.F. was directed against enemy troops concentrations east of El Guettar.

Ibid

The A.O.C. of the Tactical Air Force had given strict orders that XII A.S.C. were to operate offensively in the areas where the enemy air force were likely to be encountered and not to fly defensive "umbrellas" over friendly troops, as had been done in the past. Airacobras might be used for ground strafing but not Spitfires.

Trans German  
document  
A.H.B.6. Vol.8  
p.15

Sweeps were made, mostly in the El Guettar area and Kittyhawks escorted by Spitfires adopted the role of fighter bombers. The enemy air force was driven to intervene in the battle, attacks were made by Ju.87's against the advancing troops especially at El Guettar. General Patton complained that his divisional command posts and forward troops were being bombed continually "Total lack of air cover for units has allowed German Air Force to operate almost at will," but



the Tactical Air Force commander refused to change his orders and revert to a local defensive policy.

Ibid

Nevertheless on the 1 April there were eighty-seven enemy aircraft active in the El Guettar area, but on the 3rd, Spitfires of the 52nd Group (XII A.S.C.) intercepted a formation of Stukas, escorted by fourteen fighters, on their return from a bombing raid over the II U.S. Corps front, and destroyed fourteen of them for the loss of one Spitfire. Soon after this action the Ju.87 was gradually withdrawn from Africa.

#### The Eighth Army Plan of attack on the Mareth position

Operations  
W.D.A.F.  
II J.15/4 and  
O.R.B. W.D.A.F.

The Eighth Army plan was to deliver a frontal attack on the night of the 20/21 March against the enemy's eastern flank with the object of breaking into the Mareth position, then to roll it up from the east and north and to destroy the enemy holding troops and subsequently to advance and capture Gabes. This was to be the task of XXX Corps.

The task of the New Zealand Corps was to make a turning movement round the enemy western flank and then to advance northwards and establish itself astride the Gabes - Matmata road so as to cut off the enemy and prevent his escape. The capture of Sfax was the final objective of this operation. The Western Desert Air Force was ordered to act in support of the Army plan.

#### The Western Desert Air Force Order of Battle

##### Fighters and Fighter/Bombers

No.239 Wing.	Squadron Nos.3, 112, 200, 260 and 450	(Kittyhawk)
No.244 Wing.	" " 1, 92, 145 and 601	(Spitfire)
No.7 (S.A.A.F.) Wing.	Squadrons Nos.2, 4 and 5	(Kittyhawk)
No.57 Fighter Group.	Squadrons Nos. 64, 65, 66 and 314	(Warhawk)
No.79 Fighter Group.	Squadrons Nos. 85, 86, 87 and 316	(Warhawk)
No. 6 Squadron		(Hurricane)
No.73 "		(Hurricane)

##### Bombers

No.3 (S.A.A.F.) Wing.	Squadron Nos.12, 21 and 24	(Boston and Baltimore)
No.232 Wing.	Squadron Nos.55 and 223	(Baltimore)
12th M.B. Group.	Squadron Nos.83 and 434	(Mitchell)

##### Reconnaissance

No.285 Wing S.A.A.F.	Squadrons No.40 and 60	(Spitfire)
No.1437 Flight and No.2 P.R.U. detachment		Baltimore and Mosquito)

#### The assault against the Mareth defences

Ibid

Owing to the unfavourable weather it was found impossible to fulfil the intensive day bomber programme intended prior to the night of the attack, and it was not until 20 March that the bomber forces were able to operate at anything approaching maximum intensity. On that day, however, nine attacks by formations of Bostons, Baltimores and Mitchells were made against gun positions and enemy concentrations in the Mareth area. Escort was provided by Kittyhawks and Warhawks,

Spitfires being employed on interception patrols over the forward areas. F.W.190s were engaged for the first time on this front, No.1 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron claiming one destroyed and three probables for no loss. Two fighter/bomber raids were made during the day, one against land forces and the other against Gabes airfield.

Wellingtons and Halifaxes continued the air offensive by night, dropping in all some on hundred and twenty-four tons of bombs on enemy positions at Mareth and Kettana.

On the 21st, in response to calls for support, fighter bombers attacked mechanical transport and tanks south of El Hamma. These formations of eighteen bombers attacked enemy positions in and about the Mareth Line and these attacks were continued by Wellingtons and Halifaxes at night.

Ibid

Bad weather prevented bomber operations on the morning of the 23rd and it was during this period that the enemy formed up for a counter-attack. By the time the weather had lifted sufficiently to allow the bombers to operate the counter-attack was in full swing and the two forces so interlocked that it was impossible for the air forces to intervene. The enemy continued his counter-attack during the night and on the following day, by which time the Eighth Army had withdrawn and the front was once again static.

It was now clear that the frontal attack on the Mareth position had failed and General Montgomery decided not to renew it. The New Zealand Corps, which had been making an outflanking movement, had reached a position south of El Hamma and was being reinforced by the main armoured reserve of the Eighth Army. The intention was to make the main thrust towards the Gabes gap via El Hamma, and to switch all available air support away from the Mareth front to support this thrust.

Ibid

Day operations during the 24th and 25th were on a heavy scale. On the 24th, in response to an Army support call, Hurricanes of No.6 Squadron made two attacks on armoured vehicles and guns southwest of El Hamma. The great success of both these attacks was confirmed by the land forces. Escorting Kittyhawks also shot up targets in the area.

On the 25th, eighteen bombers escorted by Kittyhawks and Spitfires attacked the airfield at Djebel Tebarga where fifty small and medium aircraft in shelters had been reported. Later in the day No.6 Squadron's Hurricanes attacked twenty tanks southwest of El Hamma and claimed many hits. Spitfires on patrol had a successful day, destroying six enemy aircraft for the loss of three Allied pilots.

#### Preparation for the battle of El Hamma (Operation Supercharge)

Ibid

The Army was still held up by the difficult and well defended "funnel" leading up to El Hamma village. The "funnel" was in fact a valley stretching northwards of El Hamma, overlooked on both sides by two ranges of hills. It narrowed from south to north, and could be covered throughout its length by anti-tank guns and field artillery were concealed in the hills. Furthermore, the bottom of the valley was crossed by dry stream beds at right angles to its length, each one providing a naturally strong defensive position.

General Freyburg, Commanding the New Zealand Corps, was asked to recommend the best plan of attack. He reported

that the nature of the country was such that he did not consider a frontal attack feasible, and that outflanking movements, which might take up to ten days to execute, would have to be prepared.

Ibid

After carefully considering the air and land aspects of this problem, the A.O.C. of the Western Desert Air Force suggested to the Army Commander that a really heavy and concentrated air "blitz", in daylight, would have the effect of temporarily paralysing the enemy forces, and that if the Army could stage a frontal attack timed to coincide with the air "blitz", it might then be possible to drive an armoured force straight through towards El Hamma. Once this was done, it would be possible to deploy greatly superior armoured and infantry forces against the enemy in open country. It was eventually agreed that the plan was a sound one and details were immediately worked out.

In the meanwhile, however, it seemed likely that the situation in Central and Northern Tunisia might compel the A.O.C. of the Tactical Air Force to change his original policy of giving the Western Desert Air Force a completely free hand. It appeared that as much as thirty per cent of the Western Desert air effort might have to be switched against enemy airfields. This being so, the concentrated air "blitz" planned for El Hamma would not be possible. Judged purely from the Western Desert Air Force angle, there were strong arguments against a change of policy at this juncture. Their appreciation was as follows:-

Ibid

- (i) The basic land strategy was for the Eighth Army to make the main thrust against the enemy, the other armies in Tunisia making small diversionary attacks or remaining on the defensive. It was therefore sound policy to give the maximum air support to the Eighth Army.
- (ii) The enemy air force was interfering with the Eighth Army so little, on the ground or in the air, that there seemed little reason to attack it. As air superiority had already been gained, now was the time to exploit it.
- (iii) To attack enemy airfields meant that light bomber formations would have to be escorted by Kittyhawks and cover provided by Spitfires. All this potential effort, it was agreed, should be concentrated where it really mattered, that is to say in support of the vital land battle.

#### The battle of El Hamma

Ibid

Before the day chosen for the "blitz" attack the whole bomber force was employed on night operations. In conjunction with No.205 Group, (1) a programme was arranged for the nights 24/25th and 25/26th to last from dusk to dawn. The object was to destroy enemy transport and telephone communication in the El Hamma area and to deprive his troops of rest. There was a brilliant moon and pilots described the targets as "the best they had ever had in Desert operations". In all three hundred and twenty-two sorties were flown on these two nights.

The object of the air plan was to paralyse enemy

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(1) A Wellington and Halifax Group of the R.A.F. belonging to the M.E. Command attached to the W.D.A.F. for operations.



resistance on the ground for long enough to enable the Army to make their break through. It was therefore decided to concentrate the maximum number of aircraft which could reasonably operate over the area throughout the period which had been agreed by the Army, two and a half hours. It was important to surprise the enemy, and mainly on this account, the attack was timed to start in daylight. Since General Montgomery had taken over command, no major attack had been initiated by the Eighth Army in daylight, and it was likely that the enemy was expecting an attack to be made by night.

Ibid

At 1530 hours on 26 March, three formations of light and medium bombers launched a simultaneous pattern-bombing attack on the main enemy positions. The intention was to create disorganisation and particularly to disrupt telephone communications. This attack made a low and evasive approach and met no air opposition.

Immediately afterwards, the first relay of fighter/bombers entered the area and began to bomb and shoot up from the lowest possible heights. A strength of two and a half squadrons was maintained in the area, fresh relays arriving at intervals of a quarter of an hour. Pilots were briefed to bomb specific targets and then to strafe gun positions with the object of killing the crews, particularly of those guns which were in a position to hold up British armour. Hurricane "tank-busters" also attacked and broke up enemy tank concentrations. A Spitfire patrol of one squadron strength was maintained over the area to protect the fighter/bombers, while at the same time light bombers under the control of the Tactical Air Force attacked enemy airfields as a diversion. So effectively, however, were the enemy surprised that no opposition whatsoever was encountered over the battle area.

Ibid

As the country was difficult for navigation, a scheme of identification was used consisting of a large land mark cut into the ground against which red and blue smoke was burned throughout the period of the air attacks, while at the same time Army forward troops burnt yellow smoke. In addition, lorries were arranged in the form of letters to act as ground strips at selected pinpoints. During the first five minutes of the air attack artillery shelled the most important enemy strong points with smoke shells. In spite of a thick haze these indicators worked well.

Half an hour after the air offensive opened, infantry attacked under cover of a heavy barrage creeping at the rate of one hundred feet a minute. Aircraft bombed and strafed continually in front of this line and became, in effect, part of the barrage. The enemy defences were completely overwhelmed and this most difficult position was taken with relatively light losses, and the armour broke through.

The Western Desert Air Force had made four hundred and twelve sorties during the two and a half hour period at a cost of eleven pilots missing.

Ibid

On the 28th, the enemy had been thrown back from the road south of El Hamma and the British forces striking northeast towards Gabes were within eight miles of the town by last light. Fighter/bombers attacked enemy mechanised transport vehicles on the road running north from the town, but targets were well dispersed and no outstanding results were achieved.

Targets were not numerous on the 27th, but fighter/bombers attacked some mechanised transport on the Gabes -

El Hamma road where they encountered intense anti-aircraft gunfire. Enemy air activity was on a small scale, his squadrons having been forced to withdraw to new airfields in the Zitouna area.

The Eighth Army at the Wadi Akarit (Operation Scipio)

O.R.B. and  
operations  
W.D.A.F.  
II J.15/4

After the capture of Gabes on 29 March, the enemy appeared to be somewhat disorganised and transport targets were plentiful. Fighter/bombers made five hundred and fifty sorties against vehicles on the Oudref - Sfax road, and bombers attacked the airfields at Zitouna and Sfax El Mou. The Wadi Akarit, where the enemy was expected to make his next stand, was covered by daily photographic reconnaissances and although there was great activity in this area, the continuous movement of transport northwards towards Sfax indicated that the enemy intended to fight only a delaying action in the Akarit position.

Ibid

On 30 March, bombers made a series of concentrated attacks in maximum strength against Sfax El Mou landing ground where photographs showed forty aircraft on the ground. Fighter/bomber targets became less numerous but Spitfires of No.244 Wing made several interceptions, including a raid by Me.210s which were forced to jettison their bombs.

Eighth Army forces advancing to the line of the Wadi Akarit found it strongly held from the coast to a flank on the Djebel Tebaga and it was not expected that further forward movement would occur until the Army forces could be reorganised.

Bombers made further attacks against Sfax El Mou on the 31st. These raids were meeting intensive anti-aircraft opposition over the target and were suffering some losses in consequence. The landing ground, however, was badly cratered.

Ibid

On 1 April ninety bombers with fighter escort again attacked Sfax airfield and Sfax was not again used by the enemy, except by a few individual aircraft.

The next day the air effort was switched to enemy defence positions and vehicles at Wadi Akarit but targets were dispersed and only moderate success resulted.

The next major air operation began on 6 April when the Eighth Army launched their attack on the Akarit position. This attack (known as operation Scipio) was planned with the intention of breaking through and driving towards Sfax. Infantry attacks were to begin during the night 5/6 April, but the main attack was to start at 04.15 hours on the 6th. Subsequently the New Zealand Corps, followed by X Corps was to pass through and advance northwards to the west of the main Gabes - Sfax road.

Ibid

The role of the air forces was direct air support, but action on the lines of the El Hamma battle was not possible, because of the nature of the country and of the enemy defensive positions along the Wadi which did not lend themselves to that form of attack. It was not therefore part of the plan to rely on air support during the initial stages, but after the break through the enemy would be retreating and it was hoped that good targets would then present themselves.

Three Infantry Divisions attacked the Akarit position

during the hours of darkness on the night of 5/6 April. The three objectives were the Djebel Tebarga, a section of an anti-tank ditch, and the Djebel Roumana. All three objectives were reached by mid-morning. The enemy counter-attacked fiercely, on the two flanks, but was held off, except in the east where he regained the most important point of the Djebel Roumana and at last light still held it, after very heavy fighting. British armour had in the meantime begun to cross the anti-tank ditch but met with heavy opposition in difficult country.

Ibid

The air offensive in support of the attack was at first confined to armed reconnaissances but later, when it was seen that counter-attacks were developing, strong formations of bombers and fighter/bombers attacked the enemy concentrations. These attacks were most successful in smashing the counter-attacks before they developed. In the late afternoon reports were received of movements north along the coast road and fighter/bombers strafed the targets then presented. Hurricanes of No.6 Squadron sent out to attack tanks which had been reported by air and ground forces, found only one enemy tank (MK.III) which they destroyed. Spitfires had a successful day, intercepting a heavily escorted Stuka attack consisting of some sixty enemy aircraft.

During the night 6/7th Wellingtons of No.205 Group with Albacores of No.821 Squadron successfully attacked vehicles on the road to Sfax and also bombed Sfax railway station and sidings.

Ibid

On the morning of the 7th, tactical reconnaissance reported that the enemy had withdrawn from the Roumana feature during the night and by the late afternoon he was holding a line Cekhira to the salt marsh at Sebkret el Noual. The trickle of enemy movement eastwards from the El Guettar front soon became a torrent and proved that the II U.S. Corps had contained a strong enemy force which might otherwise have been thrown into counter-attacks at Akarit.

Fighter/bombers made a series of armed reconnaissances in the early morning and found targets on the road to Sfax. The tempo increased as more targets were found, until finally all bombers and fighter/bombers were working at maximum pressure, finding even better targets in the afternoon on the track leading east from the Djebel Chems. This movement proved to be the enemy forces retreating from the El Guettar front where they were in danger of being cut off by the Eighth Army's advance. Much damage was caused and the enemy was forced to disperse over a wide area.

On the afternoon of 7 April an American patrol from II U.S. Corps met a patrol of the 4th Indian division of the Eighth Army. At last the two armies from the east and the west, had made contact after their long and triumphant advances.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### The Enemy retreat from the Akarit position

On the morning of the 7 April reconnaissance showed that

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- (1) This meeting was important from the Naval aspect as it meant that the Eighth Army could be supplied from the Ports of Algeria and Morocco instead of from the Middle East. The long and dangerous journey round the Cape to Suez was no longer necessary.



Micro reels  
12 and 13 and  
O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.

the enemy were in full retreat from the Akarit position northwards along the coastal road and north eastwards from El Guettar on the II U.S. Corps front. This was the moment for which the whole Air Force had been waiting. In the Western Desert campaign the enemy had, by using bad weather and the hours of darkness, been able to get quickly out of range of Allied fighters and bombers when he decided to retreat, but this was now impossible as the Allied Air Force was in a position to strike along his whole flank. Provided the weather remained favourable the Allies could make all roads leading northwards untenable and this was probably the reason for the headlong retreat to the shelter of the hills around Enfidaville. All available aircraft from W.D.A.F. and XII A.S.C. attacked the enemy columns from dawn to dusk with devastating effect. W.D.A.F. were able to keep up the attack on the 8th, but bad weather grounded the Tunisian based air forces. From then until the 16th the rapidity of the enemy's retreat outran the ability of the W.D.A.F. to keep within range. It was clear that the enemy had not intended to stop on the southern side of the Enfidaville line as the roads leading northwards were thick with traffic. Continuous attacks were made by aircraft of No.242 Group and XII A.S.C. in the face of very heavy Flak defences, but very little air opposition. The enemy was obviously anxious to get the roads cleared before the advent of better weather. All available night bombers continued the attack, but by the 12 April the enemy had retreated behind the Enfidaville lines and the targets had disappeared. The bombers were then diverted to support No.242 Group in the attack of ground targets in the northern area.

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.  
13/4

#### N.A.C.A.F. in the Air Sea-War

N.A.C.A.F.  
Ops. Record  
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1943

During this period North West African Coastal Air Force had been reinforced by the transfer of No.81 Fighter Group from XII A.S.C. These fighter units had been made responsible for the defences of Oran and Casablanca while No.323 Wing had undertaken that of Algiers, Djidjelli and Phillipeville. Three Beaufighter squadrons equipped with Mk IV AI were also available; No.153 Squadron based on Maison Blanche and Nos.255 and 600 Squadrons on Setif airfield. In addition there was No.14 Marauder Squadron<sup>(1)</sup> (torpedo-carrying) which had been considerably overworked by having to be employed on reconnaissance duties, in addition to T.B. sorties. Later it was decided that the squadron should abandon its striking role and be devoted to reconnaissance only. This left N.A.C.A.F. without any anti-shipping striking force, it was therefore arranged that N.A.S.A.F. should allocate two B-17 (Fortress) Squadrons daily to follow up enemy ship sightings. No.826 Fleet Air Arm (Albacore) Squadron was based as far to the east as possible for short range offensive reconnaissance of the Bizerta approaches.

Ibid

The lack of long-range reconnaissance and anti-shipping strike forces had enabled the enemy to pass a great number of large ships, routed well to the northwest of Sicily, into Tunis and Bizerta. The scarcity of all weather airfields in North Africa further hampered the anti-shipping operations of N.C.A.F. Bone airfield was still undergoing alteration and could not be used by the reconnaissance Marauders which were forced to operate from Blida. Similarly night reconnaissance

(1) Transferred from No.201 Group.

of the Sicilian Narrows could not be undertaken by the Hudson squadrons for lack of a suitably located airfield.

In April the chief task of N.A.C.A.F. had been that of shipping protection. In this much success had been achieved for out of a total of thirty-one convoys which had been afforded air protection only two ships had been sunk and these both by the same U-boat, during a period of fog and bad visibility.

Anti-submarine warfare executed by Nos. 500 and 608 (Hudson) Squadrons had been equally successful. A total of seven submarine sightings had been made during the month of April and five attacks had resulted. It was remarked that surfaced U-boats preferred to remain surfaced and fight back with their deck guns rather than try to submerge and risk a depth charge attack. Reconnaissances for enemy shipping were made by all types of N.A.C.A.F. aircraft which swept the waters around Sicily and Sardinia and the Approaches to Naples. Many sightings were made of enemy convoys, barges and lifeboats, dinghies and mines. Information secured was passed to N.A.S.A.F., the Navy or Air Sea rescue as the occasion required. Albacores made shipping sweeps at night and claimed a torpedo hit on a tanker and near misses on several merchant ships, they were also employed in the bombing of land targets when the situation required the use of all available aircraft.

Ibid

N.C.A.F. fighters were mostly employed on shipping escort duties, harbour patrols and the interception of enemy raiders. At 2000 hours on the 18 April when eighteen enemy aircraft approached Algiers, Beaufighters shot down three of these and claimed three more as damaged, and the enemy were pursued and three more were damaged over their base in Southern Sardinia. Enemy air attacks on Allied shipping convoys were even less successful.

On the night of 5/6 April four S.M. 79's endeavouring to attack Allied shipping were all shot down by aircraft of No. 253 Squadron, and on the evening 13 April Beaufighters of No. 255 Squadron on patrol intercepted twelve enemy aircraft on the same errand. The enemy promptly jettisoned all the torpedoes they were carrying and attempted to make off. In the pursuit which ensued two were shot down, one probably destroyed and three damaged. Enemy air transport, by this time operating mostly at night on account of the severe losses they had experienced at the hands of the W.D.A.F. during the day, was also frequently attacked. At dawn on 30 April a Beaufighter of No. 153 Sqdn., operating from Bone, shot down five Ju. 52's thirty miles south of Sardinia<sup>(1)</sup>. N.C.A.F.'s operations, although unspectacular protected the Allies sea lines of communication and diminished the volume of supplies which the enemy were able to deliver to his hard pressed forces in Tunisia<sup>(2)</sup>.

O.R.B.  
255 Sqdn.

#### Move of II U.S. Corps to the Northern Sector

When General Montgomery (Eighth Army) had been held up

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- (1) The aircrew F/Sgt. A. B. Downing and Sgt. J. Lyons belonged to No. 600 Squadron.
  - (2) See also R.A.F. Narrative "The R.A.F. in Maritime War". Vol. VI Sect. 6 A.H.B. (1)

CAB Hist.  
File 9000/0/5

by the strong resistance of the enemy at the Wadi Akarit he had sent a message to General Alexander in which he said "Contribution of II U.S. Corps has been very poor so far. If that Corps could come forward even a few miles it would make my task very simple."

File 9000/0/1

II U.S. Corps  
Report  
Operation  
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Later when the Eighth Army reached the Enfidaville Line it was decided to switch II U.S. Corps to the Northern Coastal Sector to relieve British units of V Corps. The route followed crossed the First Army's main axis of supply at right angles. However, by careful planning of movement and road control, the move of all these troops was completed without incident and did not affect adversely the maintenance of the First Army.<sup>(1)</sup> It had been agreed that II U.S. Corps<sup>(2)</sup> should remain under the command of Eighteen Army Group, but that its operations should be co-ordinated by the First Army, and that No. 242 Group XII A.S.C., and the T.B.F. should assist the operations of the First Army and II U.S. Corps together with all available Tactical Air Forces.

No. 242 Group therefore assumed the direction of both XII A.S.C. and the Tactical Bomber Force. The final order of battle of the Group was:-

Report on  
Ops by 242 Grp.  
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#### 242 Group

10 Spitfire Squadrons (1 Spitbomber)

1 Hurricane Bomber Squadron

1 Spitfire/Mustang Tac/R Squadron

P.R.U. detachment Lightning/Spitfire

#### XII A.S.C.

6 Spitfire Squadrons

3 Kittyhawk Squadrons

1 Airacobra Squadron

1 Airacobra/Mustang Tac/R Squadron

#### Tactical Bomber Force

6 Light Bomber Squadrons (Boston)

2 Medium Bomber Squadrons (Mitchells)

The majority of the operations made under the control of the Group were from landing grounds situated on the plains of the Merjerda valley between Souk el Arba and Souk el Khemis, but XII A.S.C. operated from a group of landing grounds in the Le Sers area, about thirty-five miles south of Souk el Khemis. These had been built in anticipation of the southern front becoming stabilised south of Sousse and in expectation of Kairouan becoming the main enemy landing ground area in the final phase. But the enemy retreat to Enfidaville upset these calculations,

(1) That this movement could have been made without being opposed by the enemy air force shows that Allied air superiority had already been established.

(2) General Patton was relieved in command of II U.S. Corps by General Bradley on 27 April 1943.



and as the Le Sers Grounds had been completed, H.Q. No.242 Group, had no option but to base XII A.S.C. formations in that area.

This location afterwards proved unfortunate as the land-line communications were so bad and unreliable that it was found impossible to keep the Commander of Staff fully in the "Army/Air picture" owing to the rapid fluctuations in the situation which took place during the battle.

The result was that the greater part of the potential effort of No.242 Group's command was never used. However in the final stages of the campaign the Tactical Bomber Force moved into landing grounds adjoining those occupied by the Fighter Squadrons, the two Operations Rooms being sited close together. But most of the air operations in support of II U.S. Corps had to be provided by the British Squadrons, as XII A.S.C. at Le Sers were unable to operate effectively in the northern area.

#### Maintenance of the Air Forces

The main Air Forces in the western theatre had been located on the axis Telergma - Canrobert - Ain Beida - Tebessa; until the transfer of II U.S. Corps northwards when the centre of activity moved into the First Army Area. This Third Service Area Command was responsible under A.F.H.Q., for the supply and maintenance of all air forces. Although only N.A.T.A.F. was operating directly under H.Q. Eighteen Army Group, the supply of N.A.S.A.F. was equally important as it had to be provided out of the tonnage available for the maintenance of all forward troops. Eighteen Army Group therefore established a close liaison with the Third Service Area Command to ensure that, while adequate supply by sea, rail and road, was allotted to the Air Forces it was not out of proportion to that allocated to the Army.

An advanced base to supply all the forward Air Forces was formed in the Constantine area which was maintained either by rail to Constantine or by sea to Philippeville and brought into the forward areas by rail or road. It was from this base that all main air forces were maintained. In addition to providing maintenance for the Air Forces already operating in Algeria and Northern Tunisia, it was also necessary to build up adequate stocks to permit units of the W.D.A.F. to be switched to Landing grounds in the First Army area as and when the operational situation demanded. The total tonnage that could be moved by sea, rail and road from the base to the forward area was insufficient to meet all demands for maintenance and building up. Eighteen Army Group therefore decided the priorities between First Army, II U.S. Corps, N.A.T.A.F. and N.A.S.A.F. As the loading of shipping at the base was immediately affected by this, Eighteen Army Group signalled to A.F.H.Q. a suggested allocation of tonnages for a particular period, and ships were loaded in accordance with these priorities. A.F.H.Q. made the final allotments in accordance with Eighteen Army Group's priorities and the detailed bids of the formations concerned.

#### Destruction of enemy air transport

Throughout the German occupation of Tunisia air transport had operated mainly from Naples with stops in Sicily and terminal airfields at Tunis and Bizerta. At all stages of the Campaign air transport had been a successful line of supply, but when enemy shipping losses increased this air supply line became vitally important. Daily traffic between

CAB Hist. file  
9000/0/1

Ibid

Reels 12 and 13

N.A.A.F.  
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Operation Flax

Italy and North Africa had been in excess of one hundred sorties per day rising to a peak of two hundred and fifty sorties. Organised air attacks had been made by the Allied Air Force on these air convoys on the 5 April which had resulted in a diminution of the volume of traffic.

From 12 April when the enemy's army had retreated to Enfidaville his situation had become critical and he began to make increasing use of air transport, especially Me.323's(1) whose local carrying capacity was nearly four times that of the Ju.52's which had formerly been employed. Large convoys escorted by short range fighters from both sides of the Mediterranean were crossing but not more often than twice a day. The problem presented was therefore how to intercept such a fleeting target.

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F. 19/4

By the 16 April W.D.A.F. was located on forward landing grounds north of Sousse and were able to operate in the Bay of Tunis approaching from over the Cape Bon peninsula. The whole Spitfire and P-40 (Kittyhawk) force was therefore concentrated on the interception of enemy air transport convoys. Sweeps were made in strength with never less than three squadrons of Kittyhawks and one squadron of Spitfires as top cover. These operations absorbed most of the available resources of the W.D.A.F. with the exception of the night bombers, but the result achieved fully justified the policy(2).

Operation  
W.D.A.F.  
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Trans of  
German docs.  
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At first, results were disappointing. But the sweeps were nevertheless maintained, and on the 18 April the first outstanding success was achieved. Four Squadrons of Warhawks of the 57th Fighter Group with a top cover of Spitfires provided by No.92 Squadron, intercepted a strongly escorted convoy of one hundred Ju.52's flying at sea level in the neighbourhood of Cape Bon. They attacked immediately and threw the cumbersome enemy formation into complete confusion. Many Ju.52's deliberately crashed into the sea or landed on the coast in order to avoid the devastating fire of the Warhawk's machine guns. After this fight, between fifty and sixty fires were seen on the ground, and it was estimated that fifty-eight Ju.52's, two Me.110's and fourteen Me109's had been destroyed and twenty-nine enemy aircraft damaged.

This remarkable action was followed the next day by a further interception in the Cape Bon area, when Kittyhawks of the 7th (S.A.A.F.) Wing sighted a formation of about eighteen Ju.52's and S.M.79's, with fighter escort. Fifteen of the enemy were destroyed for the loss of one Allied fighter.

The final blow to the enemy's air supply system came on the morning of the 22 April, when a patrol of the 7th (S.A.A.F.) Wing (Kittyhawks) and one (S.A.A.F.) Squadron (Spitfires) met an escorted formation of Me.323's over the Gulf of Tunis, thirty of these were destroyed. It was believed that they were laden with petrol as many of them burst into flames as they crashed into the sea.

After this the Axis Air Force abandoned the use of air transport by day and made attempts to operate a small number

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- (1) Monoplane motorised gliders - Six French engines, they could carry a 10 ton load.
  - (2) 205 Group (Wellington) were transferred from W.D.A.F. to operational control of N.A.T.A.F. on 20 April.

of Ju.52's by night, but in this they were frustrated by the night flying Hurricanes of No. 73 Squadron and the Beaufighters of No.600 Squadron which maintained constant patrols over likely points of arrival. They were also employed in search searches at last light over areas where air fighting had taken place during the day to shoot up aircraft on the ground which had crash-landed and were attempting to unload under cover of darkness.

As it was no longer necessary to devote further effort against air transport the W.D.A.F. fighter/bomber forces were directed against the enemy's sea lines of communication, which resulted in the destruction of eleven vessels during the month, and with these losses added to those inflicted by surface craft, submarines, long range aircraft and M.T.B's the enemy could no longer hope to keep his forces in Africa supplied and it seemed highly improbable that he would be able to attempt any organised evacuation.

#### Enemy aircraft begin to withdraw from Tunisia

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.  
April 1943

Meanwhile attacks were being continued by N.A.T.A.F. on enemy air bases in Northern Tunisia. Attempts to operate Stukas (Ju.87) failed and they experienced heavy losses. Ju.87's began to disappear and reconnaissance showed most of them to be located at base areas in Italy. Before the Allied offensive opened on the 22nd attacks were made on all known occupied enemy landing grounds. After one days attacks the enemy began to group his offensive fighter aircraft on landing grounds in the Protville and Soliman areas together with additional aircraft for the defence of Tunis and Bizerta, but the majority of the Axis Air Force began to withdraw to bases in Sicily.

NATAF  
Int/Opson  
No.52 et seq.

On the 23 April N.A.T.A.F. conducted practically continuous offensive operations unhindered by the enemy air force. Bisleys of the T.B.F. intruded for over five hours over roads south west of Tunis and bombed villages in that area. French Leo's bombed La Marsa landing ground and Bostons and Mitchells of the T.A.F. dropped 175,000 lbs of bombs on seventeen sorties directed against tanks, mechanical transport and gun positions mainly on the II U.S. Corps and V Corps fronts. Mitchells also successfully attacked Soliman South landing ground where photographs taken earlier in the day had revealed the presence of fifty enemy aircraft. Hurribombers and Spitbombers of No.242 Group and P-40 (Kittyhawk) bombers of XII A.S.C. also attacked army targets and mechanical transport. Fighters of No.242 Group escorted the bombing sorties and although more enemy aircraft were seen than usual, they showed little disposition to fight.

On the next day bad weather hampered air operations, but on the 25th the main effort was devoted to a heavy air offensive in support of the ground forces with targets mainly in the area in front of the First and Eighth Armies. On the 29th the Army called for assistance on the V and IX Corps fronts which was promptly met by heavy, light and fighter bomber attacks. No.152 Squadron (Spitbomber) delivered a highly successful attack at Kasr Tyr which greatly assisted the ground operation. Three sorties each by fighter bombers of XII A.S.C. and No.242 Group on troop and gun positions located targets which were accurately bombed; fighters from the same formation flew their usual offensive sweeps and escorts to bombing sorties, but encountered little air opposition.

Except for isolated occasions, when special operations were undertaken by Sicilian based aircraft and for sporadic



attacks by fighter bombers operating from forward landing grounds in Africa, the Axis Air Force ceased to play any serious part in the battle and Allied air attacks in force on enemy landing grounds in Tunisia, except on air transport terminals, were discontinued.

#### The final offensive

Alexander  
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First Army Op.  
Instruction  
No.37

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Ops  
N.A.T.A.F.  
IIJ15/27

Ops  
N.A.T.A.F.  
Reel 27/1  
Box 5800

O.R.B.  
242 Group

Reel 27/1

On the 20 April H.Q. Eighteen Army Group and N.A.T.A.F. headquarters had moved to a position a few miles southwest of Le Kef. The Army plan was that the Eighth Army should attack the Enfidaville position and advance towards Hammamet in order to draw enemy forces away from the First Army and prevent him from withdrawing into the Cape Bon peninsula, where he might attempt to retain a bridgehead. At the same time the First Army was to launch attacks designed to capture Tunis and Bizerta. The Eighth Army had failed to penetrate the Enfidaville line and attacks in other sectors had not been very successful. Indeed the enemy had launched on the 20/21 April a counter attack against the First Army on the line Medjez - Goubellat using a force of five battalions and about seventy tanks, which had been partially successful. On the 29 April General Alexander decided that it was necessary to change the point of attack further to the north, and ordered the Eighth Army to send reinforcements to the First Army for the purpose. He intended to make his main attack straight at Tunis along the Medjez - Massicault road and his forces were to be supported in the initial assault by the greatest weight of artillery which could be made available and by a very heavy air attack in the "blitzkrieg" style. On the same day No.242 Group, as Air Headquarters for the First Army, was given operational control of the available Air Forces. The whole of the Tactical Air Force, including co-ordinated support from the W.D.A.F., and such medium bombers of the N.A.S.A.F. as were not required for use against vital strategical targets. Bad weather seriously reduced the tactical bombing effort on the 29th and 30th, but the W.D.A.F., despite strong enemy air cover, obtained an outstanding success against enemy shipping. One destroyer, one Siebel ferry, one launch, and one E boat were destroyed, and a second destroyer, one motor vessel, and one E boat were left in flames.

On the 1 May, during a sweep over the Gulf of Tunis, No.111 Squadron encountered fifteen escorted Me.110's; at least ten Me.110's were destroyed or damaged without loss to the Spitfires. Bostons under escort again attacked Ksar Tyr. On the 2nd photographic reconnaissance, Tac/R sorties, and fighter sweeps were made over the battle area, and No.XII A.S.C. made one hundred and forty-three sorties at the request of No.242 Group.

Bad weather had again restricted the operations of the N.A.S.A.F. during the past three days but on the 3rd Fortresses were escorted in an attack on Bizerta. The next day a thirty minute raid by one hundred and thirteen light and medium bombers was made on the Zaghuan area; in addition to fighter sweeps over the latter area, and shipping reconnaissances. It is significant that no enemy aircraft were seen during these operations.

On the night of the 4/5 May, harassing attacks by Wellingtons and Bisleys were made on the area southwest of Tunis. During the day fighter bombers made successful attacks on landing grounds in the Protville area, on the few ships which could be found, and on jetties and mechanical transport in the Cape Bon peninsula.

A.A.F. in  
World War II

The night of the 5/6th saw the beginning of a maximum air offensive in support of the First Army's drive for Tunis. No.205 Group's Wellingtons operating from Tripoli bombed the Tebourba, Djedeida, Cheylus area, and Bisleys of the T.A.F. attacked La Sebala and El Aouina.

O.R.B.  
242 Group and  
A.A.F. in  
World War II

At first light all the air forces were in readiness to co-operate with the First Army's final onslaught. The morning was occupied with pre-arranged sorties designed to give depth to the artillery barrage and was concentrated on an area four miles long by three and a half miles wide. N.A.S.A.F.'s No.47 Group bombers made fourteen sorties before 0915 hours against Bort Frendj and Djebel Achour on the axis of the advance. The W.D.A.F. concentrated against Furna. By 1100 hours the infantry had advanced an appreciable distance and enemy resistance had begun to crack.

In the afternoon the Army called for support over the St Cyprien area which was readily afforded. But later the Army's advance was so far ahead of the programme and the situation so confused, that the maximum air effort had to be discontinued. Fighters had attained complete mastery over the weak enemy air opposition. Spitfires of No.52 Fighter Group (XII A.S.C.) shot down nine out of twelve Me.109's as they were attempting to take off from their airfield. By the end of the day twenty enemy aircraft were claimed against the loss of two. By nightfall the Army had reached Massicault and were halfway to Tunis.

It was clear that no further large scale air support would be required in support of the land battle, and since the enemy had been making increasing use of Pantellaria Island, both for the operations of air forces and small surface vessels, it had been decided to attack the airfield and port on the island. Large formations of bombers escorted by fighters, bombed the airfield on 8 and 9 May, and similar attacks in great strength were made against shipping in the harbour on the 10th. Photographs showed that many aircraft had been destroyed on the landing ground, which had become thoroughly pitted with bomb craters. An ammunition store had been blown up and "F" boats lying in the harbour had been damaged.

On 6 May II U.S. Corps had advanced as far as Mateur. On the 7th Tunis was taken and an hour and half after the British entry into Tunis the 47th Regimental Combat Team of the 9th U.S. division gained Bizerta.

Reels 12  
and 13

The enemy forces were now split, one sector to the northwest between Tunis and Bizerta, and the other to the southeast between the base of the Cape Bon peninsula and Enfidaville. The ground situation was changing too rapidly to permit of support calls being acted upon and the air forces were directed to disrupt the movement of the enemy's already disorganised forces. In particular heavy attacks were made on the road from Tunis to Bizerta in the Protville area, the roads and bottlenecks leading to the Cape Bon peninsula, and the westward defile out of Tunis at Hammam Lif. The enemy forces between Tunis and Bizerta were surrounded and after having been subjected to heavy bombing attacks in the peninsula area east of Bizerta surrendered on the 10 May.

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.

The important sector, however, was to the east where large forces might have reached the Cape Bon area and fought a delaying action. The air task in this area was to assist the Allied armoured forces to force the defile at Hammam Lif

and thus to cut off the enemy from Cape Bon. Several attacks were made on Hammam Lif, and while fighter bombers maintained continuous pressure the Army broke through and moved rapidly down to Bou Ficha. This was the decisive stroke which completed the defeat of the enemy. By the 10 May the enemy was surrounded and no armed forces of any value had reached the Cape Bon peninsula. From that day on until the final surrender on the 13 May the Allied Air Force continued in action, but only in order to maintain pressure to the end. The last air operation in North Africa was an attack by W.D.A.F. bombers on the remaining enemy pockets of resistance north of Enfidaville.

O.R.B.  
N.A.T.A.F.  
Alexander  
despatch  
Vol.II

The fall of Tunis and Bizerta clearly came to the German High Command, both in Africa and Berlin, as a most severe shock. On the evening of the 8 May the high command had issued a statement that Africa would now be abandoned and "the thirty-one thousand Germans and thirty thousand Italians remaining" would be withdrawn by sea. In fact, no "Dunkirk" was even attempted. It is believed that less than one thousand Germans and Italians succeeded in leaving North Africa. The Allies had concerted elaborate plans for dealing with such an operation had it been tried. During the campaign from 18 February - 4 May N.A.T.A.F. units had completed 59,000 sorties, destroyed 573 enemy aircraft, more than 500 M.T. vehicles, and 23 miscellaneous ships.

Operation  
Retribution

#### Conclusion

M.A.C.  
O.R.B.  
The course of  
the war in  
the Med.  
Theatre of  
operations  
Jan 1-May 13  
1943  
A.H.B.6.  
Vol.8 p.18

The best tribute to the work of the Air Forces in the Tunisian campaign is contained in a German report written in 1944. "The Anglo-American air forces played a decisive part in the enemy operational successes, which led to the destruction of the German-Italian bridgehead in Tunisia. They took part in the ground fighting to an extent never before attempted thus increasing the pressure of the advancing attacking forces, and putting the defensive powers of the German and Italian troops to the severest of tests.

During the lull in the fighting the first day of the month (May) the enemy flyers limited their activities to single operations against certain areas of the front and the supply lanes in the areas. When the offensive started they were used in uninterrupted waves, and attacked the retreating Axis troops the whole day long with bombs and machine gun fire. On 6 May alone, seven hundred and fifty-six enemy aircraft were counted. The Allies possessed undisputed and complete superiority in the air. Meanwhile the enemy air raids on the supply bases in southern Italy, Sicily, Sardinia and Pantellaria continued. Palermo, Messina, Marsala, and the airfield at Pantellaria were attacked without respite. The massing of Anglo-American Air Forces over the Sicilian Narrows was also intended to render a partial evacuation by sea impossible for the German-Italian leaders. Simultaneously a terrific enemy air offensive against the Italian mainland and islands was introduced, which continued right through the battle in Africa, and which was intended to be the initial phase of new attacks on the fortress of Europe".

Trans.  
A tactical  
appreciation  
Tunisia.  
A.H.B.6

The German Air Historical Branch attributed the weakness of their ground forces in the Tunisian campaign to political conditions. The poor organisation of the supply-system in the Mediterranean, which had been the responsibility of the Italian Fleet, was entirely due to political dissensions among the Italian. The Italian Navy had displayed little



enthusiasm for the battle, and after having lost many of her light warships in the first years of the war, had husbanded the remainder of her escort vessels, with the result that shipping convoys had had to be escorted by German bombers. This had meant additional wear and tear on the aircraft, greater demands on the aircrews, and much waste of petrol. Additionally aircraft employed on escort duties had not been available for employment in their operational roles. Whenever a crisis had arisen in the supply system, owing to bad weather conditions or other causes, bombers had had to be diverted from their normal employment and used to bring up supplies.

All these factors had weakened the German squadrons which should have been used to smash the Allies supply installations and traffic on the lines of communication. For all these reasons the German Air Force had flown a diminishing number of sorties against the Allied supply routes as the campaign progressed. The German Air Forces had done their best but had been hampered by political difficulties which the Commanders in control of the campaign were powerless to resolve.

## CHAPTER 13

THE ENEMY AIR FORCE SITUATION PRIOR TO, AND  
DURING THE CAMPAIGNGerman ViewsA.H.B. 6.  
InformationFuehrer  
Conferences  
1942A.H.B. 6.  
Translation  
VII/25

Until the spring of 1942, Hitler had taken little interest in the Mediterranean. The British success in Libya, in late 1940, had led him to send out Rommel with the Afrika Korps as a gesture to help his Italian allies. Later, in 1941, when the British Mediterranean fleet played havoc with the Italian fleet he was prevailed upon to despatch Luftlotte 2 to Sicily and Sardinia. Even so, he still regarded the Mediterranean as the particular responsibility of the Commando Supremo. As late as the end of August 1942 he showed little interest in the successful issue of the war in the Mediterranean. Reviewing the war situation at that time, Hitler considered that it was urgently necessary to defeat Russia, and thus to create a 'lebensraum', which would be blockade proof and easy to defend. In this way Germany could continue the fight against the Allies for years. He was of the opinion, that the struggle with the sea powers, United States of America and the United Kingdom, would decide the length and outcome of the war. Throughout 1942, Hitler feared an allied invasion in Norway. He insisted that Norway was the 'zone of destiny'. It is not surprising, then, that the Germans made little or no preparations to resist or even to forestall the allied landing in North Africa. Hitler believed, indeed, that the French, fearing for the safety of their Empire, would repulse any assaults made by the United States of America or the United Kingdom on their colonial possessions. The O.K.W. (1) endorsed this view and went further; they believed that the French would co-operate with the Axis to maintain the integrity of the French Colonial Empire, even although they were aware through their agents' reports of the proposed Anglo-American landings in North Africa and the possibility of another in Southern France.

Italian ViewsA.H.B. 6.  
Translation  
VII/80A.H.B. 6.  
Translations  
VII/5 and  
VII/80

In discussions with the Commando Supremo, it was made clear to the German General Staff that the Italians were concerned with counter measures to be taken if the allies should make a landing in North Africa. They stressed, repeatedly, the far reaching influence on the further course of the war which would be brought about by such a landing; and they emphasised that every means must be employed against any possible developments in that area. Mussolini himself had a sound knowledge of Mediterranean strategy, and his assessment of the situation, threw into bold relief the futility of relying on the Fuehrer's intuition. He believed that the French will to resist invasion was over emphasised and he forecast accurately that in any attempt by the Allies to land upon the North African coast, the Americans would assume the leadership and after a brief token resistance the French would capitulate gracefully and welcome the Allies with typical Gallic fervour.

A.H.B. 6.  
VII/80

The Commando Supremo with an eye on the old Italian dream of occupying Tunis and Bizerta viewed with considerable concern the possibility of an allied landing in Tunisia or Tripoli, for this would have the effect of cutting off Rommel's forces in Egypt, and the Italian vision of 'Mare nostrum' would be at last placed in jeopardy. However,

(1) O.K.W. was the German High Command.

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Mussolini's views, ex poste facto, the ones which should have been adopted, did not prevail; they did not correspond to those of the German High Command and were contemptuously dismissed.

On 17 October, 1942, the O.K.W. and Commando Supremo were in agreement that the Allies were preparing to attempt a landing near Dakar. They considered that landings in Morocco, especially on the Atlantic coast were probable; but, in their opinion, landings in Algeria and especially near Tunis were less probable. The O.K.W. considered that the defence of the French colonies was a peculiarly French problem, and that the French would defend their Empire in their own interests. Earlier, the Commando Supremo had proposed a move of three Italian Divisions into Tripolitania as an insurance against any possible allied landing in Tunisia. The O.K.W. feared that such an aggressive action would drive the French into the arms of the British and the Americans. 'This must be avoided' at all costs.

German Surprise over North African Landings

Information  
A.H.B. 6.

When in the early days of November 1942, the German Naval Command reported a strong allied convoy protected by major naval units had passed through the Straits of Gibraltar steering an easterly course, the Chief of Operations in the German Army High Command was convinced that it was an attempt by the allies to relieve the island of Malta which at that time was being heavily bombed by the German and Italian Air Forces. There was no fear of Allied landings in North Africa; the British and the Americans lacked the forces and the experience for such an enterprise.

A.F. H.Q.  
G - 2 Report  
9 Nov. 1942

Once their initial surprise was over, however, the O.K.W. acted promptly. On 9 November, some forty German aircraft, principally fighters and dive bombers, were reported at El Aouina airfield near Tunis. Photographic reconnaissance a day later showed that the force had grown to a total of forty-two Ju. 52 and twenty-four Ju. 87, twenty-three Me. 109, three He. 111, two Ju. 90 transport aircraft and three freight carrying gliders. About twenty Macchi 202 fighters were also reported. It was assumed that five hundred German troops had already landed there and that preparations had been made in Tunis harbour to receive seaborne reinforcements.

Reinforcement of the Luftwaffe in the Mediterranean

'Rise and Fall  
of German Air  
Force' and  
Information  
A.H.B. 6.

During the four weeks following the allied landing in North Africa strong reinforcements of Luftwaffe first line units flowed steadily into the Mediterranean and by 12 December the total for the whole theatre had reached a peak of twelve hundred and twenty aircraft of which eight hundred and fifty were based in Sardinia, Sicily and Tunisia. On 8 November the German Air Forces in Sicily and Sardinia amounted to four hundred aircraft. Thus the total reinforcement from October to the middle of December amounted to approximately five hundred aircraft, of which no fewer than four hundred were transferred from the Russian and Arctic front and the remainder from the west. The transfer of forces from the Arctic area was especially important because one hundred and fifty bomber and torpedo carrying aircraft were moved from north Norway where they had been employed mainly in operations against the convoy route to Russia. That area, therefore, became denuded of the striking force which had played such an important part in disrupting the supply route from the western allies to



Russia. Moreover those forces could never again be reconstituted in the far north on a sufficient scale owing to the pressure of events in the Mediterranean, and the consequent weakening of the anti-shipping forces as a result thereof. The Russian front was further weakened by the transfer of one hundred and twenty long range bombers from the central and southern sectors; a small number of single engined fighters was also moved from the same area to the Mediterranean.

Ibid

#### Establishment of the Luftwaffe in Tunisia

By 15 November, 1942, a new Command known as Fliegerfuehrer Tunisia had been set up to command the German Air Force units being rushed into North Africa to meet the allied advance from Algeria. Although the allies had achieved complete surprise in their landing, the German reactions were prompt, and after a week the Luftwaffe strength in Tunisia had been increased to above one hundred, but its resources were inadequate to enable the airfields in western Algeria, for example Constantine, to be occupied at this stage. The following table shows German Air Force fighter and bomber strength by types in Africa on 20 November, 1942:-

#### Fliegerfuehrer Tunis

A.H.B.6.  
Information from  
Quartermaster  
General's Dept.  
of German Air  
Ministry

	Strength	Serviceable
Fw. 190	43	39
Ju. 87	33	30
Me. 109	101	55
Total	177	124

During the second week considerable expansion in the ground organisation took place and the German occupation of airfields was extended to Gabes and Dejedaida, but the supply and servicing facilities had not yet begun to function adequately, and this imposed considerable restrictions on the operational efficiency of the Tunisian based flying units. At this time there was a particular lack of M.T. and personnel for handling the supplies of bombs, ammunition and fuel which the Germans succeeded in bringing over in adequate quantities by sea. These administration difficulties considerably hampered operational activity during the critical early stages of the campaign and it was not until the end of November, when the advance of the allied ground forces threatened to cut off Tunisia, that the daily average effort could be raised to one hundred and twenty sorties. The available German air strength was in the circumstances unavoidably employed largely in defence, for the protection of harbours, and for the escorting of shipping convoys and air transport formations. The lack of good airfields also imposed a considerable handicap on the ability of the German Air Force to operate. The bad weather, which was a noteworthy feature of this campaign, and which created particular difficulties for the allied air forces did not, however, have such adverse effects on the Germans, whose airfields at Bizerta and Tunis<sup>(1)</sup> remained in a better condition during the heavy rains of December than did those of the Allies in eastern Algeria.

(1) The latter was a convenient concrete roadway nearby which served as a runway for dive bombers and fighters.

Rise and Fall  
German Air  
Force and  
information  
from A.H.B. 6.

An important innovation brought about by the Tunisian campaign was the introduction of the Fw. 190 for the first time in the Mediterranean theatre. Although its squadron strength did not exceed some thirty-five aircraft it was the first indication that the Germans had begun to realise that the use of the Ju. 87 against allied air superiority could no longer be maintained, and the Fw. 190 was employed to a larger extent as a fighter and fighter bomber in carrying out low level ground attacks. No attempt was made by the Germans to establish long range bomber forces in Tunisia, partly owing to supply and maintenance problems, but mainly owing to the proximity of well established bases for these aircraft in Sicily and Sardinia. Consequently the aircraft operating under Fliegerfuehrer Tunisia were exclusively of the close support and short range reconnaissance types. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties encountered at the start of the campaign the German Air Forces in Tunisia were by the end of 1942 in the position of being able to maintain an equality with the numerically superior allied air forces owing to the even greater problem of forward supply which the Allies were initially faced with, and which could only be overcome gradually. The German strength at the end of December 1942 is shown in the following table:-

Fliegerfuehrer Tunis

Quartermaster  
General's  
returns

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
Fw. 190	28	16
Hs. 129	7	7
Ju. 87	27	21
Ju. 88	6	5
Me. 109	99	54
Total	<u>167</u>	<u>103</u>

The Attack on Allied Sea and Supply Communications

'Rise and Fall  
of German Air  
Force'

The above table shows that the bulk of Tunisian based German air strength was committed largely to defensive operations. Its fighters had, however, carried out a small number of low level bombing attacks with Fw. 190s against advanced allied harbours and supply installations such as Bone. The main effort by the German Air Forces in the Central Mediterranean was directed chiefly against supply shipping and ports, in both of which the torpedo and long range bomber forces played a considerable part both by day and night as the main hope for delaying the build up and consolidation of the allied forces. The bulk of the German Torpedo bombers and the main long range bomber forces were initially based mainly in Sicily, and to some extent at Grosseto, whereas they used Sardinia as an advanced landing ground.

The German long range bomber forces in the central Mediterranean during November and December 1942 included every possible unit with the experience of anti shipping operations which could be spared from the other theatres of war. Initially, the attacks were directed mainly against shipping at Algiers and convoys at sea in that area. Although not without some success the operations against the Algiers area and to the west thereof were seriously handicapped as far as the Sicilian based units were concerned and the lack of facilities in Sardinia.

As during November and December the more easterly ports, Philippeville, Bougie and especially Bone came into

use by the Allies the main long range bomber effort was directed increasingly against these objectives and played an important part in delaying the build up of the allied forces in the forward area. Every effort was made by the German forces to maintain these operations on the highest possible scale but the consequent long period of sustained operations against the increasingly effective anti-aircraft and fighter defence proved a steadily growing strain upon the long range bomber and torpedo bomber units. Losses were heavy both in aircraft and crews, and moreover, came at a time when the resources of bomber type aircraft were low and when the situation on the Russian front, particularly at Stalingrad was imposing a further strain on Luftwaffe resources.

The bomber units in the Mediterranean fell steadily below their establishment strength, and as few reinforcements could be provided the overall strength of bomber type aircraft in the theatre could be maintained only by the transfer of further units from other operational areas which were thus further weakened. By the end of December, despite the arrival of two further bomber units in the Mediterranean, actual strength was barely maintained at the level existing at the beginning of November. This, however, somewhat disguised the true state of affairs revealed by the fact that the average strength of bombing units in the Mediterranean had fallen to seventy-five per cent of establishment, while their serviceability was little more than fifty per cent - a repetition of the situation at the time of the Battle of Britain. Thus, the only striking force with which an attempt could be made to cripple the allied supply and communication lines underwent a steady deterioration in efficiency and the intense effort of November fell off sharply. Despite the acutely critical situation during December only a relatively low scale of operations could be sustained by a force of considerable numerical sizes.

Information  
from A.H.B. 6

#### German Transport Operations in the Mediterranean

At the end of October 1942 the Luftwaffe had some three hundred transport aircraft in the Mediterranean theatre; of these two hundred were serviceable. At this time practically all its forces were engaged in fuel carrying as the losses in Axis shipping had made the fuel situation in the Western Desert area of operations critical. By the beginning of November the Eighth Army offensive and the operations of the Western Desert Air Forces created new special requirements for Rommel's forces and the air transport units increased their activities although the shortage of aircraft petrol was a limiting factor. Operational units using the He. 111 and Air Sea Rescue units were deployed to transport duties. The allied invasion of French North Africa threw a new strain on Axis transport activities. To deal with the new situation the air transport arrangements were re-organised.

On 12 November, 1942, German Air Transport in the Mediterranean was partitioned into two separate forces each administered by a Lufttransportfuhrer. The H.Q. of Lufttransportfuhrer I at Athens controlled the following Gruppen:-



<u>Unit</u>	<u>Base</u>
I/K.G. z.b.V. 1 (1)	Athens/Tatoi
IIK.G. z.b.V. 1	Athens/Kalamaki
III/K.G. z.b.V. 1	Athens/Tatoi and Tobruk
IV/K.G. z.b.V. 11	Maleme
K.Gr. z.b.V. 500	Athens/Eleusis

Lufttransportfuhrer II, with H.Q. at Rome, controlled the following units:-

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Base</u>
K.Gr. z.b.V. 102	Brindisi
K.Gr. z.b.V. 400	Brindisi
K.Gr. z.b.V. 600	Palermo
B.V. 222 Staffel (See) (2)	Taranto
F.W. 200 Staffel	Lecce
Ju. 90 and 290 Staffel	
and S.M. 82 Staffel	

The staffs for the Lufttransportfuhrer were transferred from the Russian front.

The two divisions corresponded to the two areas of operations. By 20 November, the Afrika Korps had retreated out of range of air transport operations from Crete and subsequently all air supply had to come from Sicily and Italy to Gabes in Tunisia. Losses were heavy, - seventy-one transport aircraft between 25 October and 1 December.

Towards the end of November, additional transport aircraft were transferred to the Mediterranean from training schools, the Russian front and from Germany. These reinforcements amounted to about two hundred and fifty aircraft, of which one hundred and forty were serviceable. The total strength of the air transport units in this theatre was thus raised to nearly six hundred aircraft, of which three hundred and seventy were serviceable.

Documents captured at Tunis/El Aouina show that the bulk of airborne supplies delivered to Tunis was conveyed in Ju. 52's from Naples or Reggio di Calabria. The last leg of both routes was made in large escorted formations. Fighter escorts based at Milo, Borizzo and Castelvetrano met the transport formations near Trapani. The following figures, taken from the same source show the extent of these air transport operations:-

From December 1942 to March 1943 inclusive, 7,371 sorties were flown by Ju. 52's, 434 by Me. 323's and 151 by S.M. 82's, the peak effort being reached on 26 March, when 143 sorties were flown. During these four months, a total of 40,059 passengers were carried to Tunis, of which 26,177 were Army personnel, 13,236 Luftwaffe personnel, 580 Navy personnel and 66 Italians. Deliveries of supplies totalled 14,179 metric

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- (1) K.G. = Kampfgesdwader = bomber unit.  
z.b.V. = special purpose. K.G. z.b.V. units were transport units. The Roman figures indicate "Gruppen" - roughly a Wing. A "Staffel" was the smallest unit and varied between 12 and 15 aircraft establishment.
- (2) The B.V.222 Staffel (See) was especially equipped for sea operations.

tons) of which 10,180 tons were for the Army and 3,902 tons for the Luftwaffe.

### The German Air Forces at the End of 1942

By the end of 1942 the position of the German forces in North Africa had been relatively stabilised. The German High Command was still faced with major problems of supply and it had been compelled to reinforce the Mediterranean theatre on a scale which adversely affected its broad strategic planning. But by vigorous measures it had recovered from the first shock of the allied landings in French North Africa and had established an unexpectedly strong defensive position. In the west, the initial allied thrust towards Bizerta and Tunis had failed, and the allied air forces were faced with the problem of building up a ground organisation in an unfavourable terrain with inadequate communications. This problem was only gradually overcome, and in the meantime the German Air Force, which had shown considerable energy and capacity in developing airfields and ground organisation in Tunisia was able to hold its own against numerically superior forces, particularly as the tardy allied decision to release the latest types of Spitfires for the Mediterranean - contrasted with the immediate allocation of Fw. 190's from the Channel area - gave the Germans for a considerable period the advantage of technical superiority type by type.

The halt of the allied advance towards the end of December gave the Axis a respite which they had put to good use. A thorough re-organisation of the air forces which hitherto had been divided between Tripolitania and Tunisia were placed under a single operational command known as Fliegerkorps Tunis. This change permitted greater flexibility in the employment of forces on either flank as circumstances required, and whilst undoubtedly a factor contributing to the Luftwaffe success in the face of a superior enemy. Its effectiveness became evident in mid February, when the possibility of an allied break through from central Tunisia towards Sfax, threatening to divide the armies of Rommel and von Arnim, compelled the German Command to launch a counter attack to widen the Gafsa-Sfax bottle-neck. In support of this operation a considerable Luftwaffe force was moved down from northern Tunisia to the Kairouan-Sfax area, and on 14 February some three hundred and sixty to three hundred and seventy-five sorties were flown in support of the successful German thrust towards Feriana and Sbeitla. An effort of approximately two hundred and fifty sorties each twenty-four hours was maintained on the following two days, and the scale of air support only fell thereafter as a result of exceptionally bad flying weather. Meanwhile, however, the German Command energetically exploited its success in central Tunisia by opening an offensive beginning on 26 February against the allied First Army in the north. Here also, in spite of its notable contribution to the success of the thrust towards Sbeitla, the Luftwaffe provided effective support with the small forces available averaging some one hundred and fifty close support sorties per twenty-four hours for the first four days in operations. On 10 February the Fliegerfuehrer Tunis had at his disposal the following aircraft:-

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Quartermaster  
General's  
returns

	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
Fw. 190	60	29
Hs. 129	10	5
Ju. 87	47	38
Ju. 88	6	5
Me. 109	168	103
Total	291	180

Moreover, there were the following German aircraft units in the Mediterranean which, it is important to bear in mind as the situation in Tunis became increasingly serious, were switched from one base to another very frequently; and for example we find aircraft of Fliegerkorps X operating in the Tunis area.

Fliegerkorps II

Ibid		<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
	He. 111	19	14
	Ju. 88	234	150
	Me. 109	28	18
	Me. 110	38	17
	Me. 210	46	31
	Total	365	230

Fliegerkorps X

Ibid		<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>
	He. 111	27	22
	Ju. 88	152	96
	Me. 109	11	6
	Total	190	124
	<u>Total in Med.</u>	<u>555</u>	<u>354</u>

The Failure of the Bomber Forces

'Rise and Fall  
of German Air  
Force' and  
Information  
from A.H.B. 6

The German close support in North Africa had proved unexpectedly resilient and effective, but it was the failure of the long range bombers which decided the issue. This failure had many causes. First in importance was the inability to recover from the severe losses incurred in the intensive operations during the month following the allied landings in French North Africa. During December three Gruppen, representing an establishment of ninety aircraft, had to be withdrawn for rest and refitting, and by 1 January, 1943, long range bomber strength had dropped from a peak of three hundred and ten aircraft to some two hundred and seventy, of which only about fifty-five per cent were serviceable. These enforced withdrawals continued throughout the winter months and were only partially offset by the return of re-equipped units to operations. This failure to maintain the flow of newly rested units was due to the dislocation of the training programme, which had occurred in consequence of the Stalingrad commitment. An added cause was the closure of specialised schools, which cut down the supply of highly trained torpedo bomber crews. Hence the operational efficiency of the torpedo bomber arm as well as its operational strength underwent an eclipse.

Thus, the main German weapon for attacking allied convoys, the torpedo bomber, failed totally in its allotted task. The remainder of the German bomber force in the Mediterranean



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suffered scarcely less seriously from the same factors. In addition, shortage of specialist and aircraft suitable for convoy escort necessitated the misemployment of the bomber forces on escort duties. How far this diversion impinged upon the normal offensive duties of the long range bomber force is seen in the following analysis:-

<u>Daily</u> <u>Average</u> <u>Effort</u>	<u>Attacks</u> <u>on</u> <u>Convoys</u>	<u>Attacks</u> <u>on</u> <u>Ports</u>	<u>Ground</u> <u>Targets</u> <u>Tunisia</u>	<u>Miscellaneous</u>	<u>Total</u>
January	11	12	1	6	35
February	8	11	-	6	27
March	8	13	13	12	50
April	2	11	15	11	44
<hr/>					
Average Daily Sorties Jan.-Apr. 1943	7-8	4-12	7-8	8-9	39

By mid April all elements of the Luftwaffe in Tunisia were thrown together on a small number of airfields near Tunis and Bizerta. Vulnerable to allied attack which reduced serviceability, often prevented from taking off by standing allied fighter patrols and beset by maintenance and fuel shortage problems, the performance of the aircraft of Fliegerkorps Tunis declined markedly in the last three weeks.

Gradually units were withdrawn in whole or in part to Sicily in order to avoid losses on the ground. The first withdrawals were bomber reconnaissance types and dive bombers, but later fighters were transferred, flying daily to advanced landing grounds in Tunisia. At the beginning of May the German strength in Africa had fallen to some two hundred aircraft of which all were fighter types. In the following twelve days it declined even further until at the end all landing grounds were over-run and all attempts to provide air cover for the evacuation had to be made from Sicily.

CHAPTER 14Narrator's Comments

Rousseau once remarked that the young historian must beware of giving his opinions. 'Let him stick to facts,' was his advice. Yet, although the facts presented by the documents are of themselves interesting and valuable, the student of any period of history, military or otherwise, gathers impressions which cannot be substantiated by reference to a particular document or series of documents and acquires knowledge which cannot be expressed except in general terms. Furthermore, the criticisms which a dispassionate mind 'with no axe to grind' can offer, are of value in that they may afford some guidance in future operations or campaigns to prevent the recurrence of such mistakes as were made in the North African landings.

General Observations

The student is at once aware of certain obvious peculiarities. Torch was the first combined United States - British major operation in the Second World War. The vast distance at which the landings were made from the United Kingdom and the two opponents, first the French and then the Axis forces are sufficiently obvious. But these are important because they gave a peculiar cast to the operation, and imposed considerable strain and made many difficulties in planning the operation which did not exist in the later combined amphibious operations of the war.

The Allied landings in French North and North West Africa were primarily dictated by the respective political heads of United States of America and the United Kingdom. In fact, it may be said that it was the brain child of the then Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Winston S. Churchill; and the President of America, at that time Franklin D. Roosevelt, greatly welcomed Mr. Churchill's suggestion. It is out with the purpose and extent of this study to comment on whether this was a wise decision or not. It must be obvious that Torch was the culmination of the combined efforts to find a point d'appui for an Allied attack in 1942. It was the only possible offensive operation that could be undertaken at that time. The President of U.S.A. and General Marshall were wise enough to appreciate the worth of the British argument that any attempt to return to the Continent in 1942 by a cross channel invasion was fraught with disaster if not impossible. Such an operation, sound enough strategically, was impossible in 1942; the Allies had not the men, nor the materials, nor the experience. Torch was to provide the initial experience and the passage of time, a sufficiency of men and materials to undertake an invasion of Europe across the English Channel.

It is also pertinent to point out that all three British Commanders engaged in the operation lament the fact that a bolder decision was not taken to launch assaults along the coast as far east as Bone and Djidjelli in the initial landings, and not to relegate their capture to a secondary phase. For the failure to do this, the United States Chiefs of Staff must be held responsible. The American fear of Spain, dictated that large forces had to be deployed in Morocco and Western Algeria in case Spain should open the way to Axis forces for a march down to Gibraltar, thus imperilling the Allied Expeditionary Force's supply line. Despite British assurances that no danger was to be feared from this quarter, the United States authorities refused to be convinced that no threat existed, and a large amount of men and

materials were frankly wasted in Morocco when in British eyes they could have been more profitably employed inside the Mediterranean.

Perhaps the most glaring error in the higher planning was the decision not to have a unified Air Command. The separation of the Air Forces into two separate commands with two distinct areas of responsibility was a stab in the back from which they never recovered until they were completely re-organised under Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder.

#### Detailed R.A.F. Planning

In the detailed R.A.F. planning the surprising thing that at once strikes the student of the operation is that no effort was made to obtain the advice or to use the experience of mobile warfare gained by the R.A.F. in the Middle East. The methods and basis of the planning resembled those used in planning the advanced air striking force in France in 1939. These had not proved to be entirely successful. Proposals were made for two senior officers on the staff of No. 333 Group to visit R.A.F. Middle East and spend a short time with the Western Desert Air Force. This proposal was not followed up.

Whether such experience would have helped in planning the operation may be doubted in view of the short campaign anticipated. It would, however, most assuredly have been of inestimable value when the North African campaign developed, not as was planned into a military promenade from Algiers to Tunis but into a form of warfare akin to that of the Western Desert.

Then the tasks imposed on the Air Forces were such as to preclude the provision of a balanced force. To design a force capable of being adequately prepared, both for a short campaign against an inferior, numerically speaking, Air Force, and at the same time be prepared to meet the certain intervention of the Luftwaffe was indeed a difficult task. For in November the Luftwaffe was being withdrawn from the Russian front for re-equipping and re-inforcing; thus it was a comparatively easy matter to rush units down into Italy. The wonder is that the Air Forces did so well with the resources and supply organisation at their disposal.

#### Specific Criticisms

The lack of an approved outlined plan until early in October, 1942, was a severe handicap to detailed planning, especially on the administrative and organisational side of the force.

Security precautions were over-elaborate. Certain branches of the staff and services of Royal Air Force Commands and also of the Air Ministry, or members of them, were often unaware of the scope of the operation. Had they been taken more fully into the confidence of the planning staff they would have been able to collaborate more effectively with No.333 Group, and in the event matters would have moved more smoothly.

The comparatively short time available for the planning of Torch resulted in the staff being assembled hurriedly. Few of the personnel had worked together previously and by the time the operation was launched they could not be said to constitute a proper team. It is of the utmost importance



that the staff should have adequate opportunity of getting to know one another and of working as a team before any operation.

#### Campaign

A most damaging criticism of the R.A.F. in North Africa has been published.<sup>(1)</sup> From the weird and strange ideas of the use of air weapons the author of this despatch proposed during the campaign, it is patent that he completely misunderstood the use of air power. An umbrella of fighters circling continually over the ground troops seems to have been the acme of his method of using air forces. Indeed, the efforts of No. 242 Group were almost completely subordinated to the demands of the First Army. Instead of co-operation, No. 242 Group were forced to waste valuable aircraft on tasks which were so costly that on one occasion a squadron of Bisleys were lost as a result of injudicious employment.

Torch lacked transport aircraft in sufficient numbers. Had they been available it is more than probable that the airfields at Tunis and Bizerta could have been seized at the outset of the campaign.<sup>(2)</sup> The aim should have been to hold a strategical reserve of transport aircraft and paratroopers in order that any operation of forestalling the enemy could be taken at once. Moreover, in the early stages of an assault operation, transport aircraft in sufficient numbers

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- (1) "Operations in North West Africa" by Lt. General K.A.N. Anderson, G.O.C. First Army, published as a supplement to the London Gazette, 6 November, 1946.
  - (2) Extract from the official history of Airborne Forces approved by the War Office:- "The distances, the nature of the country, and the type of warfare involved, all offered great opportunities for airborne forces in North Africa. There were no other troops who could compare in strategic mobility and their mere presence somewhere within range of an objective had paralysing effects on the enemy. Even if large numbers of gliders could not be provided in this theatre, owing to the difficulty of moving them from England, the airlanding part of the airborne division which was still in England, when equipped and brought up to strength, was ideally suited by training, armament and equipment for ground operations in these areas. Major-General Browning was convinced that if 1 Airborne Division, completed and properly equipped, had been given the responsibility from the first for the campaign from Bone to Tunis, they could have forestalled the Germans by themselves and ended the campaign at one blow. It was generally agreed in the theatre at the time that had it been possible to drop 1 Parachute Brigade on Tunis before about 23 November, the city would have been captured, the French would have been roused to vigorous co-operation and the campaign would have been virtually at an end. In fact the whole brigade was available then but it was used in small parties for comparatively minor objectives. The brigade commander had made almost daily requests that it should be used as a brigade, and conditions in the theatre were such that the delay caused by the necessity to use the same aircraft for several lifts could have been accepted."

are invaluable for supplying vital forward airfields when as often happens, other arrangements for maintenance break down.

The setting-up of an efficient signals organisation ashore at the earliest possible moment was obviously of the utmost importance. The signal equipment used in Torch was far from suitable for landing ashore over beaches and the personnel were untrained and unrehearsed. The need for getting R.A.F. equipment ashore early was clearly demonstrated in the German night attacks upon the ports in Algeria.

The squadrons having worked together as units before, and having some experience of fighting conditions, soon adapted themselves. The same cannot be said of the administrative and specialist units. These must have prior training and practice in living under field conditions<sup>(1)</sup> before proceeding overseas. A heterogeneous collection of men hastily formed into units cannot be efficient under active service conditions in the field, especially when they have never had to fend for themselves. This lack of training and practice in living rough was most apparent.

In a land where communications were difficult, the frequent moves of the Army Headquarters meant that it was almost impossible for the R.A.F. Command post, and later No. 242 Group Headquarters which moved with Army Headquarters, to keep in constant touch with squadrons and airfields. The rapid changes in the position of this Headquarters caused no little difficulty which could have been avoided. There were misunderstandings between No. 242 Group Eastern Air Command which showed that the latter was not as fully informed as it ought to have been and with communications as bad as they were Eastern Air Command attempted in some matters to exercise too close a control over No. 242 Group. The Group were in the throes of organising the air support for battle, which was eventually postponed when they were ordered by Eastern Air Command to withdraw a particular squadron from the line for rest. This squadron had had less fighting and fewer casualties than several of the others, it was fresh and in high fettle and needed resting less than most. In a No. 242 Group 'opsum' reference was made to an attack by one of two Spitfires on enemy motor transport, some of which were destroyed, without loss. A signal was received, personal from the A.O.C. to the effect, 'I note with concern the use of Spitfires for the attack of ground targets, the role of the fighter is to destroy enemy aircraft in the air.'

During the early days of the operation the Allied Commander-in-Chief's expressed intention was to place every unit that he could in the advance to the east on Tunis and Bizerta. Yet while placing American Army units under the command of the G.O.C. First Army, he only placed the Twelfth Air Force under the operational control of the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command. At times this amounted to almost twenty-four hours notice and even when the time was reduced to four hours notice it was frankly useless. There were occasions when it refused to co-operate with the First Army.

#### Personalities

In a combined Headquarters a great deal depends upon personalities and, unfortunately, it is manifest that the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command and G.O.C. First Army were

(1) This was remedied in later operations.

mutually hostile. 'The Admiral and General contracted a hearty contempt for each other and took all opportunities for expressing their mutual dislike; and each proved more eager for the disgrace of his rival than jealous for the honour of the nation.'<sup>(1)</sup> That this was so was patent to most observers and it did not make for easy settlement of differences of opinion on the use of the Air Force. On the other hand, relations between A.O.C. Eastern Air Command and the Commanding General Twelfth Air Force seemed to have been most cordial, and it was because of their happy understanding that the two Air Forces worked together as well as they did.

In the other sphere of the Air-Sea war, the efforts of Eastern Air Command were most successful. There was some criticism but that was unjustified. In the early days the R.A.F. was blamed for the failure to provide air protection at Djidjelli before the full facts were known. The failure to take, as planned, the airfield there had a grievous effect on the campaign. Store ships were lost with their valuable equipment and their loss slowed down the advance to the east. But as the narrative proves this was not due to any failure on the part of the R.A.F.

Lastly, there is no doubt in the narrator's mind that the complex political situation had a retarding effect on the success of the campaign. The Allied C. in C. in addition to running a campaign had to deal with the conflicting claims of the French leaders. Even when agreement was reached in Algiers that did not automatically mean that the Allies were to be welcomed and assisted by every Frenchman in North Africa. There were a considerable number of Vichyites and former collaborationists and the long line of communications needed constant guarding to prevent any possible sabotage.

It must be realised that above all else Torch was a time of trial. It was a rehearsal, the first in the long chain for the eventual return to the Continent. Command arrangements were, in the main, tentative. When experience showed that they were not as efficient nor as effective as they should have been a new Command organisation was set up. The surprising thing is that in so short a time as from November to March all the separate Air Forces had been fused into a powerful weapon which contributed so much to the utter defeat of the hitherto invincible German forces in North Africa. And assuredly it must be obvious that whatever drawbacks, disagreements and disasters took place during the Allied campaign in French North Africa it fashioned the pattern of the Allied Higher Command in the later stages of the war.

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(1) 'History of England' by Smollett on Vernon and Wentworth in 1741.



ORDER OF BATTLE  
ROYAL AIR FORCE  
OPERATION TORCH

Serial No.	Unit	War Estab.	Type of Aircraft	Strength			
				Officers	O.R.	Total	M.T.
1	Air Headquarters, (No.33 Group)	WAR/C/101	-	122	347	469	59
2	No.242 Group H.Q.	WAR/C/102A	-	36	134	170	17
3	Base Area H.Q.	WAR/C/123	-	13	127	140	10
4	No.351 M.U.	WAR/C/123	-	6	89	95	32
5	Base Personnel Office	WAR/C/123	-	3	63	66	3
6	Base Accounts Office	WAR/C/123	-	10	55	65	-
7	Base Reinforcement Pool	WAR/C/123	-	-	250	250	-
8	No.59 Embarkation Unit	WAR/C/122	-	3	22	25	2
9	No.60 Embarkation Unit	WAR/C/122	-	3	22	25	2
10	No.61 Embarkation Unit	WAR/C/122	-	3	22	25	2
11	No.3201 Servicing Commando	WAR/C/114	-	2	144	146	12
12	No.3202 Servicing Commando	WAR/C/114	-	2	144	146	12
13	No.3203 Servicing Commando	WAR/C/114	-	2	144	146	12
<u>Operational Wings</u>							
14	No.322 (F) Wing (Mobile)	WAR/C/104	-	26	286	312	110
15	No.154 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
16	No.81 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
17	No.242 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
18	No.225 (AC) Sqdn.	WAR/C/107A	Hurribomber	28	298	326	22
19	No.133 Air Stores Park	WAR/C/113	-	8	125	133	26
20	No.108 Repair and Salvage Unit	WAR/C/112	-	7	267	274	68
21	No.303 Mobile Signals Servicing Unit	WAR/C/116	-	6	130	136	25
22	No.323 (F) Wing (Non-mobile)	WAR/C/104	-	26	286	312	110
23	No.253 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Hurricane II	21	291	312	22
24	No.43 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Hurricane II	21	291	312	22
25	No.4 (P.R.U.) Flight	WAR/C/111	Spitfire V	15	147	162	13
26	No.131 Air Stores Park	WAR/C/113	-	8	133	141	26
27	No.106 Repair and Salvage Unit	WAR/C/112	-	7	267	274	68
28	No.301 Mobile Signals Service Unit	WAR/C/116	-	6	130	136	25
29	No.324 (F) Wing (Mobile)	WAR/C/104	-	26	286	312	110
30	No.93 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
31	No.152 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
32	No.72 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
33	No.111 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
34	No.255 (N.F.) Sqdn.	WAR/C/108	Beaufighter	32	422	454	27
35	No.135 Air Stores Park	WAR/C/113	-	8	125	133	26

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Serial No.	Unit	War Estab.	Type of Aircraft	Strength			
				Officers	O.R.	Total	M.T.
36	No.110 Repair and Salvage Unit	WAR/C/112	-	7	267	274	68
37	No.302 Mobile Signals Service Unit	WAR/C/116	-	6	130	136	25
38	No.325 (F) Wing (Mobile)	WAR/C/104	-	26	286	312	110
39	No.232 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
40	No.243 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Spitfire V	21	291	312	22
41	No.32 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Hurricane II	21	291	312	22
42	No.87 (F) Sqdn.	WAR/C/106	Hurricane II	21	291	312	22
43	No.241 (AC) Sqdn.	WAR/C/107A	Hurribomber	28	298	326	22
44	No.600 (NF) Sqdn.	WAR/C/108	Beaufighter	32	422	454	27
45	No.136 Air Stores Park	WAR/C/113	-	8	125	133	26
46	No.111 Repair and Salvage Unit	WAR/C/112	-	7	267	274	68
47	No.304 Mobile Signals Service Unit	WAR/C/116	-	6	130	136	25
48	No.326 (L.B.) Wing (Semi-Mobile)	WAR/C/105	-	27	204	231	97
49	No.18 (L.B.) Sqdn.	WAR/C/110	Bisley	33	368	401	34
50	No.114 (L.B.) Sqdn.	WAR/C/110	Bisley	33	368	401	34
51	No.13 (BR) Sqdn.	WAR/C/110	Bisley	33	368	401	34
52	No.614 (BR) Sqdn.	WAR/C/110	Bisley	33	368	401	34
53	No.132 Air Stores Park	WAR/C/113	-	8	125	133	26
54	No.109 Repair and Salvage Unit	WAR/C/112	-	7	296	303	68
55	No.328 (GR) Wing (Non-Mobile)	WAR/C/131	-	32	177	209	56
56	No.608 (GR/LP) Sqdn.	WAR/C/109	Hudson V	32	474	506	35
57	No.500 (GR/LP) Sqdn.	WAR/C/109	Hudson V	31	449	480	35
58	No.134 Air Store Park	WAR/C/113	-	8	125	133	26
59	No.107 Repair and Salvage Unit	WAR/C/112	-	7	267	274	68
60	Beaufort Servicing Unit	WAR/C/131	-	1	219	220	40
61	No.651 A.O.P. Squadron						
	R.A.F. Regt.	WAR/C/129	-	21	153	174	31
62	No.4088 A.A. Flight	WAR/C/120	-	2	60	62	5
63	No.4089 A.A. Flgt.	WAR/C/120	-	2	60	62	5
64	No.4090 A.A. Flgt.	WAR/C/120	-	2	60	62	5
65	No.4091 A.A. Flgt.	WAR/C/120	-	2	60	62	5
66	No.4092 A.A. Flgt.	WAR/C/120	-	2	60	62	5
67	No.2788 Sqdn. R.A.F. Regt.	WAR/C/119	-	7	191	198	21
68	No.2771 Sqdn. R.A.F. Regt.	WAR/C/119	-	7	191	198	21
69	No.2721 Sqdn. R.A.F. Regt.	WAR/C/119	-	7	191	198	21
70	No.2744 Sqdn. R.A.F. Regt.	WAR/C/119	-	7	191	198	21
71	No.2825 Sqdn. R.A.F. Regt.	WAR/C/119	-	7	191	198	21
	Signals Units						
72	No.1 A.L.G. Signals Section	WAR/C/127	-	1	22	23	3
73	No.2 A.L.G. Signals Section	WAR/C/127	-	1	22	23	3

Serial No.	Unit	War Estab.	Type of Aircraft	Strength			
				Officers	O.R.	Total	M.T.
74	No.1 Force H.Q. Signals Section	WAR/C/126	-	1	25	26	3
75	No.2 Force H.Q. Signals Section	WAR/C/126	-	1	25	26	3
76	No.6000 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
77	No.6001 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
78	No.6002 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
79	No.6005 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
80	No.6006 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
81	No.6008 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
82	No.6008 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
83	No.6009 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
84	No.6010 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
85	No.6011 A.M.E.S. (L.W.U.)	WAR/C/117	-		12	12	1
86	No.87 W.O.U.	WAR/C/115	-	3	137	140	25
87	No.88 W.O.U.	WAR/C/115	-	3	137	140	25
88	No.892 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
89	No.893 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
90	No.894 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
91	No.895 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
92	No.896 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
93	No.897 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
94	No.898 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
95	No.8002 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
96	No.8003 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
97	No.8004 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
98	No.8005 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
99	No.8006 A.M.E.S. (G.C.I.)	WAR/C/118	-	2	45	47	12
100	No.380 Wireless Unit "Y"	WAR/C/124	-	15	116	131	17
101	No.381 Wireless Unit "Y"	WAR/C/125	-	8	77	85	10
102	No.226 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/128	-	2	42	44	12
103	No.372 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/128	-	2	42	44	12
104	No.381 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/128	-	2	42	44	12
105	No.387 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/128	-	2	42	44	12



SECRET

4

Serial No.	Unit	War Estab.	Type of Aircraft	Strength			
				Officers	O.R.	Total	M.T.
106	No. 388 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/138	-	2	42	44	12
107	No. 389 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/128	-	2	42	44	12
108	No. 392 A.M.E.S. (M.R.U.)	WAR/C/128	-	2	42	44	12
109	No. 11 Heavy Automatic W/T Unit	WAR/C/121	-	2	80	82	16
110	No. 7 A.A.S.C.	WAR/C/130	-	5	66	71	16
111	No. 9 A.A.S.C.	WAR/C/130	-	5	66	71	16

SECRET

1

APPENDIX 2

COPY NO:

T.51/110/G(CPS).

8th October, 1942

PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT OF AIRBORNE  
FORCES

COPY

A.H.Q./64/AIR

To:- Allied Force H.Q. B-3 (AIR) Section  
Commander First Army  
R.A.X.F.

Outline Plan for the  
Employment of Airborne Forces  
in the Eastern Theatre

Reference Operation Memorandum No. 8 dated 24 September paragraph 3 (Airborne Troops), and memorandum from Deputy C in C to Air Commodore A.P.M. SANDERS dated 3 October paragraph 4, attached is our Joint outline plan for the employment of Airborne Forces in the Eastern Theatre.

2. In making this plan we have given consideration to the following main factors:-

(a) The object of Operation TORCH as set out in Allied Force H.Q. Outline Plan "C" is "to secure FRENCH MOROCCO and ALGERIA with a view to the earliest possible occupation of TUNISIA....."

(b) Intelligence Appreciations from Allied Force H.Q. on Axis reactions to our landing in ALGERIA warn us to expect up to 2,000 airborne troops to be landed in TUNISIA by D plus 7 and this force can be increased to 14,000 airborne troops by D plus 14. It is possible that the Axis powers may transfer to TUNISIA troops by sea to strengthen those conveyed by air. But whatever may be the possibility there is no doubt that the Germans will be able to get sufficient troops into TUNISIA by D plus 7 to prevent us from recapturing those aerodromes with such forces as we could get into that area by that date. Therefore we must forestall the Germans.

3. Sea-borne forces of sufficient strength to capture and hold the aerodromes of BIZERTA and TUNIS would be available after the arrival of K.M.2. on D plus 4. But it would not be possible to operate them East of DJIDJELLI until strong land-based fighter cover was available. If the same forces were sent by land they could not possibly reach TUNIS or BIZERTA by D plus 7. The only possible method of achieving the C in C's object is to use Airborne Troops (of which a proportion should be paratroops to take and hold the aerodromes of BONE, BIZERTA and TUNIS before the Axis troops can forestall us. To achieve this object by D plus 7 the airborne operation must commence on D plus 3. Taking into account a degree of unserviceability of aircraft, three groups of transport aircraft should be concentrated on the operation so that the TUNISIA aerodromes can be captured and used as fighter squadron bases in advance of the German attempt to land troops.

4. We are of the opinion that the type of operation

envisaged above (and referred to as PLAN "Y" in the attached paper) can only be undertaken if the French are either acquiescent or friendly. If they are hostile it is unlikely that we should be able to carry sufficient airborne troops to capture the TUNISIAN aerodrome, and owing to the time it would take for our land sea forces to fight their way East it would be beyond the ability of any air transport force we are likely to be allotted to maintain paper) it would be our aim to meet and hold the Axis forces as far East as possible. For this task, and taking into account a degree of unserviceability of aircraft, we consider that we will require the assistance of two Air Transport Groups from D plus 3 onwards, to enable us to use parachute and airborne troops.

- (a) To capture the essential aerodrome of DJIDJELLI before D plus 4 which is the day on which a proportion of Convoy K.M.2. is due to sail into Bougie harbour.
- (b) To capture the aerodromes at PHILIPPEVILLE and BONE in advance of our land forces so that Naval forces can move East and assist the Army in outflanking the French opposition.

5. To summarise:

We require three Air Transport Groups ready for use on ALGIERS in D plus 3 onwards. Without them we cannot carry out Plan "Y" and reach TUNIS and BIZERTA before the Germans.

If French resistance renders Plan "Y" impossible, we will require two Air Transport Groups to assist in the advance Eastwards. Without these aircraft this advance will be slowed down.

Rear Admiral  
RAXF

Lieut. General  
Commd. 1st Army

A.O.C.-in-C.  
Eastern Air  
Force

AIR PLAN FOR RAPID MOVE EASTWARD

In his appreciation the Commander of the Eastern Task Force emphasises the paramount importance of speed if he is to achieve his main object, to secure TUNISIA, before being forestalled by Axis forces, contingents of which, sufficiently strong to prevent the capture of the aerodromes by Airborne troops, could be in occupation of the aerodromes of BIZERTA and TUNIS by D plus 7.

2. It is appreciated that lack of M.T. and difficult terrain prevents adequate forces and supplies being moved forward, and that the only method of doing so is by sea. The aerodromes necessary for fighter cover must however first be secured by parachute or airborne troops.

3. The Commander of the First Army has prepared two alternative plans by which to achieve his object. Plan "X" is based on serious French opposition; Plan "Y" on French acquiescence. Both of these plans necessitate the use of transport aircraft, as outlined in this paper and appendices.



PLAN "Y"

4. In the event of a sudden French collapse following the assault or the unopposed occupation of ALGERIA, it is imperative that we should be in a position to take full advantage of these favourable developments to move Eastwards as rapidly as possible.

5. The whole problem of the occupation of TUNISIA centres on the time factor; the speedy transportation of a holding force and fighter squadrons to defeat any attempt of the Axis air and ground forces to establish themselves at these places in advance of us.

6. The only possible way to push forward forces with the necessary speed is by the use of transport aircraft on the largest possible scale. In fact it is not too much to say that the success of this vital operation, i.e. the rapid move Eastwards, rests on the availability of adequate numbers of transport aircraft immediately the practicability of the operation become evident. Those aircraft must therefore be available to fly into ALGERIA immediately following the assault on ALGIERS, i.e. as soon as ordered to do so, when the state of the aerodromes and the attitude of the French is known to be favourable.

7. DJIDJELLI aerodrome would first be occupied and fighter aircraft based on it. This could be accomplished by sea on D plus 3 and thereafter fighter protection would be available to cover Naval convoys as far East as Bone.

8. Concurrently with the occupation of DJIDJELLI occupying troops, maintenance personnel, etc., and two fighter squadrons should be flown into the aerodrome at Bone. The number of Transport Aircraft etc., required for this operation is shown at Appx. "A".

9. The occupation of these two essential aerodromes, DJIDJELLI and BONE which open up sea routes to the port of BONE, should be accomplished in one day after the decision is made to do so, provided of course, the transport aircraft are at ALGIERS. Immediately afterwards the occupation of TUNIS and BIZERTA aerodromes should be accomplished.

10. In the case of BONE very limited supplies need be flown in for the occupying troops and squadrons because of the short distance to be covered by our sea convoys and the adequate fighter cover provided.

11. The occupation of the aerodromes at BIZERTA and TUNIS presents a more difficult problem. Not only is the distance to be covered by the Navy and Convoys far greater, but the convoys themselves will be subjected to increased air and possibly sea-borne attack, including attacks by fighters and dive bombers. A stronger force of aircraft (fighters) will therefore be necessary. The Transport aircraft themselves will need a stronger fighter escort near BIZERTA and TUNIS; moreover a greater quantity of supplies must of necessity be flown into the two aerodromes, until such time as the Navy can open the port. It follows, therefore, that a greater number of aircraft will be required for this operation, and may be required for a longer period.

12. There will not be sufficient transport aircraft to occupy TUNIS and BIZERTA on the same day. BIZERTA, being nearer Axis aerodromes, will be occupied first, on D plus 4,

and two fighter squadrons flown in. TUNIS would be occupied and fighter squadrons flown in the following day, D plus 5. The transport aircraft required for the occupation of BIZERTA and TUNIS shown at Appendix "A".

13. The petrol which will be required at ALGIERS to refuel transport to undertake the various operations discussed above is shown at Appendix "A".

PLAN "X"

14. The intention of the Commander is to move forward in stages by road and by sea. The first stage aims at the capture of the port of BOUGIE: the second at the capture of the port of PHILIPPEVILLE, the third the port of BONE and finally the seizure of TUNIS and BIZERTA. As the force moves East, the greater will be the scale of effort of the enemy air force, particularly against our vital transports and escorting vessels. Each stage must therefore be covered by fighter aircraft.

15. In the first stage it is proposed to assault BOUGIE from the sea on D plus  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Fighter cover can be provided for the port of BOUGIE during the hours of daylight by aircraft from ALGIERS, but owing to the distance involved, this will be weak. It is essential therefore simultaneously with the assault on BOUGIE from the sea to capture the aerodrome at DJIDJELLI 30 miles to the East. An assault from the sea and by paratroops is therefore to be launched on the aerodrome at the same time as the assault on the port. The troops and transport aircraft required for this assault are shown in Appendix "B" 1. These troops must be flown from the U.K. shortly after D day or after the capture of the aerodromes at ALGIERS, because no provision has been made for them in the assault convoy.

16. Two fighter squadrons must be flown into DJIDJELLI as soon as the aerodrome is captured. In the first instance, until supplies can be brought into DJIDJELLI through BOUGIE (or the small port of DJIDJELLI) fighter squadrons must be maintained by air. The number of transport aircraft required for this and the time required are shown in Appendix "B" 2.

17. For the further employment of airborne forces to overcome French resistance to our Eastward advance we will require to retain two Air Transport Groups in the Eastern Theatre.

## APPENDIX "A"

Date	Place	Requirement	A/C	Total A/C	Fuel required at Algiers for Transport A/C	Remarks
D plus 3	BONE	1 Para Coy Cp Commando R.A.F.	13 26 35	74	Gallons  25,000	
D plus 4	BIZERTA	1 Para Coy Cp Commando R.A.F. (2 Sqns.) and Wing HQ Sec. 3.7 Hows	13 26 32 3	74	37,000	
D plus 5	TUNIS	2 Para Bn Gp R.A.F. (2 Sqns.)	41 28	99 *	44,000	Maintenance for BONE composed of:- Park Coy Gp ..... 8 A/C Commando ..... 6 A/C R.A.F. .... 16 A/C  * If aircraft for BONE do two trips, this figure is reduced to 15 and the total is reduced from 99 to 84.
	BONE	Maintenance	30 *			
D plus 6	TUNIS	1 Company Paratroops Sec 3.7 Hows	6 3	44	22,000	Maintenance for BIZERTA composed of:- Park Coy Gp ..... 8 A/C Commando ..... 6 A/C 3.7 How Sec ..... 5 A/C R.A.F. .... 16 A/C
	BIZERTA	Maintenance	35			
D plus 7	BONE	Maintenance	30	75	31,100	Maintenance for TUNIS composed of:- Para Bn Gp ..... 21 A/C R.A.F. .... 16 A/C Coy Inf. .... 3 A/C Sec. 3.7 How ..... 5 A/C
	TUNIS	Maintenance	45			



Date	Place	Requirement	A/C	Total A/C	Fuel required at Algiers for Transport A/C	Remarks
D plus 8	BIZERTA	Maintenance	35	35 *	Gallons 17,500	
D plus 9	TUNIS	Maintenance	45	45 *	22,500	BONE TO BE MAINTAINED BY SEA FROM THIS DATE
D plus 10	BIZERTA	Maintenance	35	35 *	17,500	
D plus 11	TUNIS	Maintenance	45	45 *	22,500	
D plus 12	BIZERTA	Maintenance	35	35 *	17,500	
D plus 13	TUNIS	Maintenance	45	45 *	22,500	
D plus 14	BIZERTA	Maintenance	35	35 *	17,500	

\* If sea or land communications with BIZERTA and TUNIS are not established by these dates, additional troops and maintenance supplies may have to be transported by air.

APPENDIX "B"

I

TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT REQUIRED FOR CAPTURE OF DJIDJELLI

Two parachute Coy Gps with nucleus H.Q. 25 A/C

These troops land with 48 hours supplies

No provision is made for their maintenance by air because the sea borne attack is launched simultaneously and they will therefore be relieved within 48.

II

TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT REQUIRED TO FLY IN AND MAINTAIN  
TWO SPITFIRES SQUADRONS ON DJIDJELLI

A.A. Flight, Servicing Commando, Signals, Wing HQ.

and two days petrol and ammunition, etc. 35 A/C

Depending on the intensity at which the Squadrons operate they will require the following Transport A/C for maintenance.

But see note (ii)

NOTES:

- (i) Two days supplies must go in with the Squadrons
- (ii) With the capture of the port of DJIDJELLI (13 of water alongside the quay) sea-borne supply should be available within 48 hours.

ANALYSIS OF ANTI-U-BOAT OPERATIONS - GIBRALTARNOVEMBER, 1942

	Hours	Sightings	Attacks	Hours per sighting	Hours per attack
Escorts	1885	6	3	314	628
Sweeps etc.	3915	103	62	38	63
Other tasks	379	3	2	126	190
TOTAL	6179	112	67	55	92

NOTE: Three sightings on other tasks - all by Met.  
Flight Hudsons to West, two of which were  
attacked by M.G. fire.



## DAILY ANALYSIS OF ANTI-U-BOAT OPERATIONS - GIBRALTAR

NOVEMBER, 1942

Date	Hours on Escort (Hours)	Sightings and attacks on Escorts	Hours on A/S Sweeps, Hunts etc. (Hours)	Sightings and attacks on A/S Sweeps, Hunts etc.	Time - Other Sorties (Hours)	Sightings - Other Sorties	Total Flying Time (Hours)	Total Sightings and Attacks	Sightings in Mediterranean	Sightings in Atlantic
1st	163	-	35	1 (1)	3	-	201	1 (1)	1 (1)	-
2nd	102	-	30½	-	10	1 (by Met. Hudson)	142½	1 (-)	-	1 (-)
3rd	40½	1 (-)	62½	3 (1)	11	-	114	4 (1)	3 (1)	1 (-)
4th	24½	-	23½	-	-	-	48	-	-	-
5th	47	-	33½	-	13½	-	94	-	-	-
6th	90	-	172	9 (6)	11½	-	273½	9 (6)	9 (6)	-
7th	134½	1 (1)	197½	7 (3)	42½	-	374½	8 (4)	6 (3)	2 (1)
8th	89½	-	166½	1 (-)	64½	-	320½	1 (-)	1 (-)	-
9th	24	-	77½	-	18½	-	120	-	-	-
10th	63½	-	161½	2 (1)	30	-	255½	2 (1)	2 (1)	-
11th	82½	1 (-)	108½	5 (5)	39½	-	230½	6 (5)	5 (4)	1 (1)
12th	42½	1 (1)	98½	5 (2)	31½	-	173	6 (3)	5 (2)	1 (1)
13th	53½	-	209½	11 (6)	7½	-	271	11 (6)	9 (4)	2 (2)
14th	69	1 (-)	206	16 (12)	-	-	275	17 (12)	11 (9)	6 (3)
15th	53½	-	218½	15 (8)	9	-	281	15 (8)	10 (6)	5 (2)
16th	127½	1 (1)	215½	4 (3)	9	-	352	5 (4)	4 (3)	1 (1)
17th	106½	-	167	6 (4)	10½	-	284	6 (4)	4 (3)	2 (1)
18th	71	-	155½	3 (3)	-	-	226½	3 (3)	2 (2)	1 (1)
19th	33½	-	155	2 (1)	9½	-	198½	2 (1)	-	2 (1)
20th	91	-	110	3 (1)	-	-	201	3 (1)	1 (-)	2 (1)
21st	47½	-	155½	2 (-)	8½	-	211½	2 (-)	2 (-)	-
22nd	59½	-	209½	-	9	1(1) (by Met. Hudson)	278	1 (1+)	-	1 (1+)
23rd	24½	-	131½	-	7½	1(1) (by Met. Hudson)	163½	1 (1+)	-	1 (1+)
24th	57½	-	204	1 (1)	15½	-	277	1 (1)	-	1 (1)
25th	63½	-	157	4 (2)	-	-	220½	4 (2)	-	4 (2)
26th	22	-	128	-	10½	-	160½	-	-	-
27th	21½	-	19½	-	-	-	40½	-	-	-
28th	4½	-	13½	-	-	-	17½	-	-	-
29th	36½	-	158½	-	-	-	195	-	-	-
30th	37½	-	133½	3 (2)	6½	-	178½	3 (2)	3 (2)	-
	1884½	6 (3)	3915½	103 (62)	379	3 (2+)	6179	112 (67+)	78 (47)	34 (20)

NOTES: (i) Figures in brackets are attacks.

(ii) \*includes two Met. Flight machine-gun attacks.

NAVAL COMMANDER CENTRE TASK FORCEOPERATION ORDER NO.8

(Short Title - TORCH/NC 8)

14 October 1942PLAN FOR OPERATION OF AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

References:- Chart 2437 - Cape TRESFORCAS to Cape IVI  
Map - ORAN, Africa (Air) 4072(A)

OWN FORCES

1.	FURIOUS	24 Seafires, 9 Albacores	} 48 Fighters
	BITER	15 Hurricanes IIB to IIC	
	DASHER	9 Hurricanes IIB to IIC	
	RODNEY	1 Walrus	
	JAMAICA	2 Walrus	
			} 3 Walrus
			} 9 Torpedo Bombers
			} TOTAL AIRCRAFT - 60

25 Spitfires will be ready at GIBRALTAR to provide extra fighter support over ORAN at call. These aircraft will be able to return to GIBRALTAR once. The next sortie they will have to land at ORAN.

250 U.S.A. aircraft, consisting of 160 fighters and 90 bombers, plus one British G.R. Squadron (Hudsons) will fly into ORAN as soon as aerodromes are captured.

A/S patrols and reconnaissance inside the MEDITERRANEAN are being undertaken by the R.A.F. from GIBRALTAR and MALTA.

A.S.V. Swordfish will do A/S patrols from GIBRALTAR.

ENEMY AIR STRENGTH

2.	Vichy	55 Fighters (Dewoitine 520)	} The majority at La Senia Aerodrome
		40 Bombers (Douglas Glen Martin 167 and Potez 63)	

12 Naval Aircraft (Torpedo)

Axis 10 Bombers from SARDINIA. Daily.

INTENTION

3. Naval Air Duties until relieved by U.S.A.A.F. are:-

- (a) Protect the ORAN Convoys and Assault Forces.
- (b) Provide Air Support for the U.S. Army.

4. Fighters are required:-

- (a) To engage French Air Forces at dawn anticipating enemy bombing attacks supported by fighters.
- (b) To maintain a patrol of ORAN area and beaches.
- (c) Carry out tactical reconnaissance.
- (d) Escort bombers.
- (e) Protect Carriers and Convoys from attack by Axis or French aircraft.

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5. Torpedo Bombers are required for A/S patrols and for bombing selected land targets.
6. Walrus Aircraft are required for A/S patrols, Air/Sea Rescue and Spotting for Naval supporting fire.

METHOD OF EXECUTION

7. STATES OF READINESS ON D-2 and D-1

One section of 4 fighters will be kept on deck at "READY" in each Carrier (engines warmed but not running, pilots in cockpits) from first light until dark. Throughout this period T.B.R. aircraft are to be at one hour's notice to range and fly off Striking Force with torpedoes.

OPERATION OF AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

8. Carriers are to operate in two groups:-

- 1st Carrier Group - FURIOUS, DELHI and destroyers  
(FURIOUS Screen)
- 2nd Carrier Group - DASHER, BITER and destroyers  
(Aux. Carrier Screen).

Carrier groups are to remain in V/S touch, operating under orders of FURIOUS, between 20 and 30 miles from ORAN.

Aircraft proceeding to and from the Carriers should approach and leave the patrol areas via the beaches, if possible not below 5,000 feet.

DELHI is to operate her R.D.F. for the benefit of FURIOUS' fighter direction.

AIR OPERATIONS ON D DAY UNTIL CAPTURE OF ORAN OR RELIEF BY SHORE BASED AIRCRAFT

9 TASKS

Aircraft are to be prepared to carry out any or all of the following tasks depending on the situation and the success achieved by parachute troops. The necessary orders will be given by the Naval Force Commander to the Senior Officer Aircraft Carriers.

Task 1 At first light 12 Seafires to attack any aircraft airborne and dispersed aircraft on aerodromes at LA SENIA (see para.12).

Task 2 At first light 9 Albacores escorted by 12 Hurricanes to dive bomb selected Targets (see para.12).

NOTE. It is believed that the majority of Vichy fighters, if not dispersed or airborne, are kept in the 10 easternmost small hangars along the North side of LA SENIA aerodrome. The bombers being kept in the large hangars in the same line.

Task 3 Maintain during daylight a fighter patrol of 6 fighters over the ORAN area extending from the aerodromes at LA SENIA, TAFAROU and OGGAZ towards Z beach. When fighter opposition is eliminated this patrol will split into two, 4 going to Z beach and 2 to X and Y beaches.



NOTE 1. A pair of these aircraft may be detached to carry out short tactical reconnaissance down main roads.

NOTE 2. Fighter patrols are to be relieved every hour over the area at the height ordered and not at the carrier. 15 minutes will be allowed to get from the carrier to patrol and 15 minutes to return. This will leave 30 minutes in hand for fighting.

Task 4 8 fighters to be kept at "Ready" on deck to intercept or reinforce during daylight.

Task 5 Available T.B.R's to be maintained at one hour's notice after return from Tasks 2 and 6 for further bombing or smoke bombing in support of the Army. These must be supported by fighters.

Task 6 At first light 2 T.B.R's (A.S.V.) with D/Cs to patrol to seaward of Port of ORAN, to attack any submarines under way outside the harbour.

NOTE. Walrus Aircraft from JAMAICA and RODNEY will probably do this task.

Task 7 At daylight 2 fighters Tactical reconnaissance down roads from ORAN via LA SENIA and TAFAROU, to (a) MASCARA and (b) SIDI BEL ABBES.

#### 10. ALLOCATION OF TASKS

Carriers share the Daily Air Tasks.

#### 11. SUGGESTED METHOD OF SHARING TASKS

<u>First Daylight till Noon</u>	<u>Noon till Dark</u>
FURIOUS Tasks 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7	FURIOUS and DASHER Tasks 3 and 5
BITER and DASHER Tasks 2 and 3	BITER Task 4

#### 12. PARACHUTE TROOPS

About 500 Paratroops will be flown in 40 Douglas twin-engined transports from the United Kingdom to land near TAFAROU Air Port at H Hour, some of them will proceed to LA SENIA aerodrome to immobile aircraft on the ground. They will retire towards TAFAROU before daylight. It is hoped that paratroops will be in possession of TAFAROU aerodrome before dawn on D. Day. All aerodromes will, however, be assumed to be in enemy hands unless one or more of the following signals are seen:-

- (a) A large white V for Victory sign displayed outside the aerodrome control.
- (b) A white signal rocket from the aerodrome
- (c) R/T or W/T signal.
- (d) Panel with 5 pointed white star on a red background 4' square.

From 1½ hours before H Hour, ALYNBANK stationed of "X" Beach will make W/T Homing Signals, to home the paratroops' aircraft. This will be backed up by a signal and homing light flashing letter V every half minute. ANTELOPE will act as reserve ship.

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13. AIR/SEA RESCUE

Aircraft which must force land or from which it is necessary to bale out should try to do so over the sea near to surface craft which will rescue the crew but not the aircraft. Walrus aircraft from JAMAICA and RODNEY will also be used for Air/Sea Rescue.

14. COMMUNICATIONS - GENERAL

R/T in plain language is to be the normal method of communication between aircraft, Combined H.Q. Ship (LARGS), Fighter Directors and Assault Forces ashore.

Naval fighters R/T is H.F.

R.A.F. and U.S.A. fighters R/T is V.H.F.

There are 4 H.F. frequencies to each Naval aircraft set of which 2 frequencies are allocated to each Carrier. One universal frequency is available for HOMING and one standby guard frequency for Tactical Reconnaissance and fighter direction by ships other than Carriers.

Carriers control on their own frequencies, all other units using the standby guard. Calls for fighter support from ships use the word "HELP" followed by code name of ship or place. Code word for dispatch of fighters is FORTY.

For further details, etc. see TORCH/NC 13.

15. IDENTIFICATION

Identification of aircraft. Naval aircraft in the ORAN area will wear U.S.A. markings, i.e. 5 pointed white star on a circular blue background and surrounded by a yellow band.

Identification of Allied Vehicles. All Allied Vehicles except ambulances will have one large 5 pointed yellow or white star painted on a dark background.

Identification of Own Troops. Each platoon is equipped with a white cloth panel  $8\frac{1}{2}' \times 1\frac{1}{3}'$ . Front line troops display panels along the general direction of line occupied. Paratroops use panel as described in para.12(d) above.

APPENDIX

The aircraft carried by the Air Group were as follows:-

SANGAMON	9 T.B.F. 9 S.B.D. and 12 F4 F-4
SANTEE	9 T.B.F. 9 S.B.D. and 12 F4 F-4
RANGER	54 F4 F-4 and 18 S.B.D.
SUWANNEE	9 T.B.F. and 30 F4 F-4
CHENANGO	76 U.S. Army P-40 F. aircraft.

Designations of aircraft

T.B.F.	Grumman "Avenger" torpedo bomber with single air cooled engine and crew of three.
F4 F-4	Grumman "Wildcat" single seater fighter, with folding wings and a P. and W. air cooled engine.
S.B.D.	Douglas "Dauntless" scout dive bomber monoplane with crew of two.
P-40 F	Single seater fighter monoplane Curtis liquid cooled engine.
SOC.3	Curtis seaplane crew of two.
OS2 U	Vought-Sikorsky seaplane crew of two.

SECRET

II J.15/29

THE FLY-OUT OF AIRCRAFT

II J 15/33/4

The Allied landings in North Africa required the despatch of a large number of both R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. aircraft from the United Kingdom to North West Africa. The responsibility for the despatch of those aircraft was allotted to No.44 Group.(1)

Preliminary Arrangements

C.S. 17007

A conference of Senior officers of the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. Commands concerned was held at A.F. H.Q., Norfolk House, and later at the Air Ministry, early in October 1942. Instructions based on the decisions taken at these two conferences were issued by A.C. A.S. (Ops) on 10 October 1942; and were reissued by A.F.H.Q. as Air Instruction, No.1 to U.S.A.A.F. The Air Officer Commanding No.44 Group (Air Commodore E.T. Kingston McCloughry, D.S.O., D.F.C.,) and General Hunter, Eighth Air Force, were made responsible for the arrangements and execution of the flyout.

In order that the large programme could be carried out as planned, it was necessary to take advantage of temporary periods of good weather in the South-West of England. To this end approximately 400 aircraft would have to be concentrated in that area and a further hundred in forward pools. This concentration had to be defended and the covering fighters had not to be unduly crowded. Protection against air attack was to be the responsibility of the C.-in-C. Fighter Command, who decided to increase the light and heavy A.A. defences of the stations concerned.

ControlAdmin. Plans  
PA/C1/37

A tentative programme of despatches had been worked out by Norfolk House. The method by which it was to be implemented was that the Air Officer Commanding, No.44 Group and General Hunter were to be personally responsible for the despatching of R.A.F. and U.S. aircraft respectively. The Rear Echelon of Allied Force Headquarters was to inform No.44 Group, the D.O. Ops, Air Ministry, and Headquarters Eighth Air Force as early as possible, daily, of the despatches required the following day. Notwithstanding any programme, no despatches were to be made without such instructions. Forecast of despatches up to four days ahead were to be given by the Command Post, A.F.H.Q. when such information could be given; it was also to provide information regarding aerodromes of destination to assist in the briefing of the flying crews. The already existing machinery of No.44 Group for briefing and communication was to be used for routing and the despatching of the aircraft. Headquarters, No.44 Group, were to be responsible for informing the Rear Echelon, A.F.H.Q., Air Ministry (D.O. Ops) and Headquarters Eighth Air Force of the despatches and arrival and of any hitch which occurred (in the despatches). The Rear Echelon would be responsible for informing Command Post A.F.H.Q. of any such hitches.

O.R.B.  
No.44 GroupDetailed Arrangements and Organisation

There were several matters of importance which could only be solved by No.44 Group as the flyout was an R.A.F./U.S.A.A.F. operation, and as several of the R.A.F. and

(1) Headquarters, R.A.F., Barnwood, Gloucester.



SECRET

2

Admin. Plan  
PA/C/1/37

U.S.A.A.F. Commands were concerned, a conference was held at No.44 Group Headquarters to co-ordinate arrangements. Because of the number of agencies involved, communications<sup>(1)</sup> were an all important factor. This necessitated special W/T point to point facilities, air - ground - air organisation, and land line communications between departure airfields, forward posts, and No.44 Group.

Additional problems were meteorological and forecasting arrangements. The meteorological staffs at the departure airfields were strengthened and meteorological Briefing Officers were attached to these airfields; a twenty-four hours meteorological service was provided at each despatching point. Special flights from the U.K. and Gibraltar were arranged in order to provide regular and reliable forecasts of weather en route. Each departure airfield received a preliminary forecast during the afternoon to cover for departures of aircraft on the following morning. Special forecasts of upper winds up to 15,000 feet were prepared four times daily for the route.

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8

Maintenance and Supply

The normal R.A.F. Group arrangements were augmented to provide for Eastern Air Command aircraft and a special forward distribution centre for the U.S.A.A.F. was established at Trebelzue. The U.S.A.A.F. provided servicing parties at the various departure bases, while the already existing R.A.F. units were strengthened, and reserve parties formed and earmarked at Filton and Lyneham in readiness to proceed to Cornwall at a moment's notice in the event of casualties or any other unforeseen eventuality. Additional transport was furnished through the respective commands for the movement of personnel, briefing parties and refuelling. The U.S.A.A.F. which brought many of its ground personnel by road retained this transport and also provided one four thousand gallon refuelling wagon for each departure base. Salvage parties were provided by No.43 Group equipped with cranes at all despatching aerodromes. As numbers of aircraft were scheduled to leave frequently, at short intervals, it was essential to be prepared for the clearance of the runways as quickly as possible in case of accidents.

Progress of the Operation

Ibid

Preliminary arrangements were complete by the 1 November, by which time General O.D. Hunter and his staff were accommodated at No.44 Group Headquarters, with a Joint Operations Room equipped in readiness for the Operation. The briefing parties in Cornwall were assembled at the Departure Airfields with joint R.A.F./U.S.A.A.F. personnel and a central headquarters at R.A.F. Station Portreath.

The first departures took place prior to D-Day. On the 30 October two meteorological flight Hudsons departed for Gibraltar; and on the following day three P.R.U. Mosquitoes of No.540 Squadron. As D-Day approached great anxiety was felt; the weather between U.K. and Gibraltar was unsuitable for flying and the adverse conditions were delaying the departure of the Allied C.-in-C. However, on 5 November he and his staff left R.A.F. Station Hurn for

(1) See Attachment to this Appendix.

his Command Post at Gibraltar in a B-17 (Flying Fortress)<sup>(1)</sup>. But the operation as a whole was entirely successful.

O.R.B.  
No.44 Group  
Nov.2 1942  
II J.15/33/4

The operation began in earnest on the 6 November when aircraft were called forward into Cornwall in considerable numbers. The R.A.F. aircraft arrived individually, whereas the American aircraft arrived in formations. The latter approached in long columns of four aircraft. As each successive column passed over the airfield it circled with the leading flights in turn descending out of the main circuit to land on the runway from an extended echelon. In this way there was always a second aircraft about to land as a first finished its landing run. On one occasion at Portreath 47 aircraft landed in this way in less than thirty minutes.

From the outset of the operation the following numbers of aircraft were despatched.

Admin. Plans  
PA/C/1/37

<u>Departure Airfield</u>	<u>R.A.F.</u>	<u>U.S.A.A.F.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Portreath	141	159	300
Predannack	-	134	134
Exeter	23		23
St. Eval	8	180	188
Chivenor	-	96	96
Hurn	14	151	165
Lyneham	-	12	12
Total	186	732	922

The programme was fulfilled without serious interruption of any kind, the great majority of aircraft arriving safely at their destinations, whether Gibraltar, Casablanca, Oran, or Algiers.

#### Despatch of the American Paratroop Force

A.F.H.Q. File  
No.5/29 in box  
2313 & A.F.H.Q.  
File No.13/8  
in box 2726

The U.S. paratroop force was intended to make an airborne attack upon the airfields at Oran. Two alternative plans had been prepared in advance, which in so far as the flyout programme was concerned affected the time of departure. Plan A called for the despatch of the force to rendezvous over Portreath at 1700 hours on D-1 day; Plan B involved a rendezvous over Portreath at 2300 hours on the same day. The Allied C.-in-C. was to decide which plan was to be employed. He was to signal his decision from his Command Post at Gibraltar as early as possible in the light of the circumstances prevailing to No.44 Group which would communicate it to the Paratroop Force Commander. The decision of the C.-in-C. was to be sent from Gibraltar in plain language in accordance with a pre-arranged code. "Advance Alexis" meant that Plan A was to be undertaken; "Advance Napoleon" meant Plan B was to be put into effect.

(1) American Aircraft are referred to first by their U.S.A.A.F. designation and then followed by the R.A.F. name.

II J15/33/4

Any delay in the plans would be intimated by the code words "Delay Alexis (or Napoleon)". It was anticipated that the signal would arrive at 1615 hours on 7 November.

Tie lines between Portreath, St. Eval, Predannack and No.44 Group were manned and punctually the signal "Advance Napoleon" was sent by the Allied C.-in-C. The signal was retransmitted to the stations concerned within three minutes.

A.F.H.Q. File  
5/29 in box  
2313

The force was composed of twenty C.-47s assembled at St. Eval and nineteen C-47s at Predannack.<sup>(1)</sup> At 2330 hours the C.47s took off one by one from airfields at St. Eval and Predannack, rendezvousing over Portreath by night within a space of thirty minutes. They set course at a thousand feet, in open "Vic" formation.<sup>(2)</sup>

#### The British Paratroop Force

A.F.H.Q. File  
381 in box 1184  
A.F.H.Q. File  
337 in box 1180

The role of the British Paratroops differed from the U.S. in that the former were to be used to capture airfields in the second phase of the operation i.e. the race to seize or occupy Tunisia before the Germans. This force was required to operate in the battle area as soon as they were required. The date of their departure was fixed for the night of 9 November.

IIJ/15/33/4  
O.R.B.  
44 Group

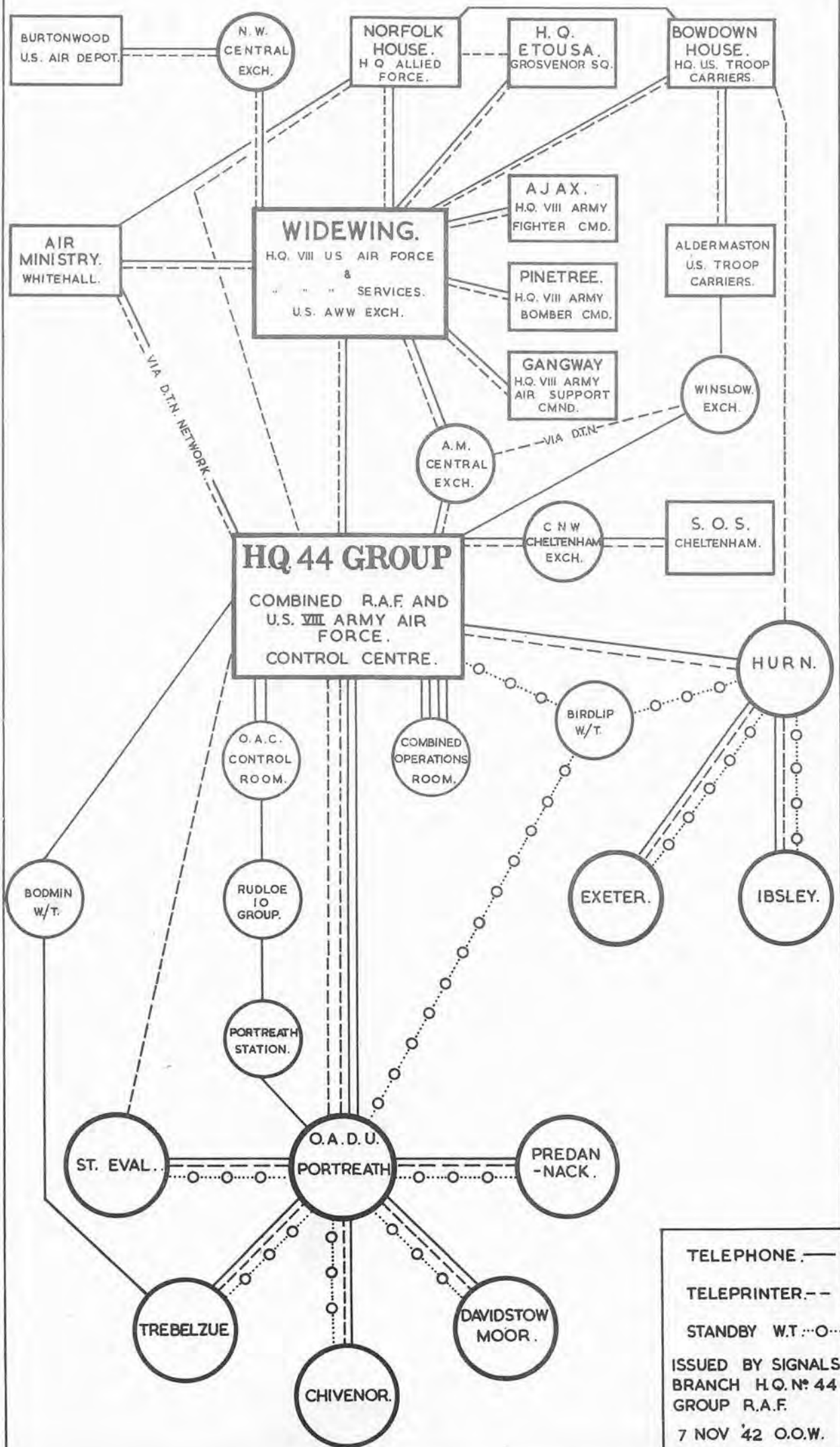
On the night of the 9th, as the time of departure approached, the area around R.A.F. station.....the departure aerodrome became shrouded in a thick fog, in these conditions the force could not take off. Meteorological reports forecasted similar conditions for the next and possible following nights. As the aircraft could not land in Cornwall with the paratroopers and a full load of petrol and as there was no time to empty any considerable amount of petrol and to refuel, advantage was taken of temporarily improved conditions during the morning of the 10 November, to fly the aircraft without passengers to St. Eval which was situated in a fog-free area in the South West and to send the paratroopers to St. Eval by special train. No hitch occurred in this programme and at 2330 hours on the 10th the first aircraft became airborne for Gibraltar.

Apart from these special departures, the despatch of aircraft followed No.44 Group - Air Ministry procedure.

- 
- (1) 25 R.A.F. Navigators were part of the air crews concerned in this operation. They were trained in Dead Reckoning but had no training in Astro-Navigation. C.A.S. letter to Allied C.-in-C. C.A.S. file "Torch - Air Forces for."
- (2) For the completion of the Paratroop attack see Chapter VI The Oran Landings.



# 44 GROUP - SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS CHART



MALTA'S CONTRIBUTION TO TORCHNov. 1942 - Feb. 1943Introduction

Just before "TORCH" took place the R.A.F. fighter squadrons on Malta had won the third and last round of the Axis air offensive against the Island. From the Spring of 1942, Malta had been subjected to almost continual attack from the air which had been intensified (for the last time), in the period 11-19 October 1942. In those few days the air forces of the Island claimed to have taken a heavy toll of over 200 enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged, probably destroyed. The success, however, of R.A.F. did not mean the automatic relief of Malta. The first convoy to reach Malta after the four ships in August<sup>(1)</sup>, did not arrive till 20 November. Of the many commodities that the Island was almost bereft, petrol was the most important from the air point of view; so much so that from the beginning of March 1942, air activity had to be limited to the essential defence of aerodromes and to operations that impinged upon the sea war of supplies.

Assistance to Operation Torch

C.A.S. Folder  
'Malta and  
Torch'

Before the first unmolested convoy arrived on 30 November and the year long siege had been lifted for all time, the R.A.F. forces in Malta had been called upon to afford all possible help to the Allied Landings in North Africa. The ways in which Malta was to render assistance were by:-

- (i) photographic reconnaissance of Italian naval bases, enemy occupied North African ports, and the disposition of enemy aircraft.
- (ii) attacks on enemy air transport between Sicily and Tunisia and on Sicilian and Tunisian airfields.
- (iii) shipping strikes on Tunisia (and Tripolitania) bound convoys and
- (iv) bombing attacks on Tunisian ports and bases.

The R.A.F. Malta proceeded to implement these orders by almost nightly bombing attacks by Wellingtons on Tunisian ports and airfields. Attacks by day by Beaufighters and Spitfire bombers on Sicilian airfields; offensive sweeps by Beaufighters over land and sea; torpedo attacks on any Tunisian bound convoys that could be found; mine laying in the harbours of Tunisia and Sicily; and systematic checks by reconnaissance aircraft of Axis activity in Tunisia, Italy, Sicily and Sardinia.

R.A.F. Strength at Malta

A.H.Q., M.E.  
Table of Ops.  
Nov. Dec. 1942  
and Jan. 1943

The forces at Malta's disposal to fulfil the duties given to her comprised:-

No. 69 G.R. Squadron

Wellington Mk. VIII (A.S.V.)  
and Baltimore

No. 69 (P.R.U.) Detachment

Spitfire (P.R.)

(1) Operation Pedestal, popularly known as "The Malta Convoy".

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No. 89 (Night Fighter) Squadron	Beaufighter (various marks)
No. 126 (F) Squadron	Spitfire Mk. V
No. 185 (F) Squadron	Spitfire Mk. V
No. 229 (F) Squadron	Hurricane Mk. II and Spitfire Mk. V
No. 249 (F) Squadron	Spitfire Mk. V
No. 272 (F) Squadron (Detachment)	Beaufighter
No. 227 (Fighter and Shipping Strike) Squadron	Beaufighter
No. 1435 (F) Flight	Spitfire Mk. V
No. 39 (T.B.) Squadron	Beauforts Mk. Ic
No. 40 (Medium Bomber) Squadron (Detachment)	Wellington
No. 104 (Medium Bomber) Squadron (Detachment)	Wellington Mk. IIc
No. 826 (Naval) T.B.R. Squadron	Albacore
No. 830 (Naval) T.B.R. Squadron	Swordfish

Of these No. 227 Squadron and the detachment of No. 272 Squadron had been moved to Malta from No. 201 Group. The detachments of No. 40 and 104 Squadrons belonged to No. 238 Wing of No. 205 Group; by the end of December the whole of these two Squadrons had been moved to Malta where they were controlled operationally by the A.O.C. through No. 238 Wing.

The transfer of these units to Malta were made to increase Malta's striking power. In pursuance of this policy No. 821 Squadron was moved from No. 201 Group in December and the Headquarters of No. 248 (Naval Cooperation) Wing, of No. 201 Group was also shifted to Malta to operate the T.B./A.S.V. Wellingtons, and the G.R. and F.A.A. Squadrons. In addition to these units, the R.A.F. at Malta was further reinforced at the end of December by No. 23 Squadron (Mosquito Mk. II) from the United Kingdom, and a detachment of No. 46 Squadron (Beaufighter) from No. 201 Group. In January, detachments of Nos. 221 and 458 Squadrons (Wellington Mk. VIII) from No. 201 Group moved to Malta.

Photographic Reconnaissance

Italian Naval Bases and Enemy-occupied North African Ports

A.H.Q. Med.:  
O.R.B. Nov.:  
Appx. 'D'

Air reconnaissance of the Italian fleet was made by Malta-based aircraft prior to and during the Allied landings, and during the first two weeks of November, Taranto, Messina, Navarino and Naples were covered, two or even three times daily, and the movements of all the major Italian naval units were closely checked. During the night of 9/10 November, the P.R. aircraft observed the movement of three 6-inch cruisers



from their base at Navarino across the Ionian Sea to Augusta, and next day these ships were photographed at sea on their way to join the two 8-inch cruisers Trieste and Gorizia, at Messina where all five cruisers remained throughout the month. The concentration of the major naval units in the Western Italian ports was concluded by the movement from Taranto to Naples of three battleships of the Littorio class leaving only three (older) battleships of the Cavour class at Taranto.

None of the major naval units made any movements of an offensive nature throughout the month, and attacks on Allied convoys to North Africa were left to the U-boats, of which ten were seen at Cagliari and five at Trapani.

Ibid: Dec.:

During December and January, the Malta reconnaissance aircraft continued their watch on the Italian warships which had made no hostile movements. The outstanding single reconnaissance of December was made by a Mosquito aircraft (of No. 1 P.R. Unit) which photographed all the principal Adriatic ports. In January, photographic reconnaissance showed that the loading and departure of convoys bound for Tunis and Bizerta continued to be the main feature of enemy merchant shipping, Naples and Palermo being the principal ports of supply and Trapani being a subsidiary base for escort naval vessels, "F"-boats and Siebel ferries. It appeared that the roadsteads of Messina were being used as a protective anchorage for ships sailing to Tunisia from the Italian mainland, but the arrival at Messina of merchant ships which had already been loaded at (the Sicilian port of) Palermo indicated an attempt by the enemy to confuse our reconnaissance.

#### Dispositions of Enemy Aircraft

A.H.Q. Med.:  
O.R.B. Nov.:  
Appx. 'D'

Early in November, the chief feature which the Malta P.R. aircraft discovered was the appearance of large numbers of enemy transport aircraft (mainly JU. 52's and a few JU. 90's, F.W. 200's and ME. 323's) in the Central Mediterranean. These transport aircraft were first seen at Trapani, and also at Tunis, on 10 November, forty having arrived at the latter place on the previous day. It appeared that these aircraft flew in 'convoys' of twenty-five to thirty, escorted by long-range fighters.

During November, numbers of enemy fighters varying from thirty to fifty were seen on the aerodromes at Tunis and Bizerta, and fifteen JU. 87's at Tunis and Djedeida. Tunis was the most active aerodrome in transport aircraft but as a result of Allied bombing attacks the aerodrome (El Aouina) became unfit for large aircraft and comparatively few transports were seen there during the latter part of the month.

Ibid: Dec.:  
Appx. 'D'

Early in December, Malta air reconnaissance established that the following enemy aircraft were in Sicily

Bombers	303
Fighters	222
Transports etc.	110
Total	<u>635</u>

Large numbers of JU. 52's and a few JU. 90's and ME. 323's (transport aircraft) were seen at Naples, Trapani and Palermo. Some S.M. 84's (Italian torpedo-bombers) were also seen at Palermo which, it was thought, might have been employed as transports.

SECRET

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Ibid: Jany.  
(1943)  
Appx. 'D'

In January, the reconnaissance of Sicilian airfields was more complete than in December owing to better weather conditions. The last reconnaissance of the month showed that the numbers of enemy aircraft in Sicily were

German bombers	201
Italian bombers	114
Fighters	182
Total	<u>497</u>

These were in addition to transport aircraft engaged on the Tunisian run. Besides the Sicilian airfields, regular reconnaissance covers were carried out of thirty-two Italian aerodromes south of Rome, the total number of aircraft seen thereon being some 1,100 of all types.

Attacks on Enemy Air Transport and Airfields

From the time of the Allied landings (8 November), an increasing number of German and Italian transport aircraft carrying troops and supplies operated between Sicily and Tunisia. These aircraft were attacked, both in the air and on the ground, by two Beaufighter Squadrons (Nos. 227 and 272 which were transferred to Malta from No. 201 (N.C.) Group early in November) and by Spitfires which were fitted for carrying 250 lb. bombs. An outstanding attack by the Beaufighters occurred on 10 November when nine aircraft (of No. 272 squadron) raided the aerodrome at El Aouina (Tunis), setting on fire two F.W. 200's, five JU. 52's and one JU. 87, one large twin-engined aircraft and one six-engined Messerschmitt glider, and damaging two JU. 52's, three JU. 87's, two ME. 109's, one Messerschmitt glider and eight unidentified aircraft. Two days later the Beaufighters of the same squadron, while on an offensive sweep in the Sicilian Channel, destroyed six S.M. 82's full of Axis troops, and on the following day the Beaufighters intercepted another formation of JU. 52's, escorted by fighters, and destroyed or damaged thirteen of these aircraft.

Ibid: May (1943)  
Appx. 'C'  
(Review of Malta  
Activity during  
the Tunisian  
Campaign)

Ibid: O.R.B.  
Nov.

Effective 'ground-strafting' attacks were also made by the Beaufighters on Gabes and Zliten aerodromes and on the sea-plane bases at Mersa Ksiba (north of Sfax) and Bou Chemmakh (near the Tunisia-Libyan border).

Ibid: Dec.:  
Appx. 'A'

At this period, the Axis main air transport route to Tunis appeared to be from Naples via Trapani, although it was stated by prisoners of war that JU. 52's flying in convoy with fighter escort, did not usually land at Trapani unless they encountered bad weather.

During December, Malta Beaufighters and Spitfires made continuous sweeps, both west and east of Malta, against these Axis aerial reinforcements, and patrolled the Western Sicilian airfields to intercept enemy transports while landing and taking off. On one of these occasions, six Beaufighters and eight Spitfires intercepted thirty-two JU. 52's escorted by ME. 110's and destroyed eight of the JU. 52's, four ME. 110's, and one JU. 88. The "bag" for the whole month (December) amounted to some thirty-two transport aircraft destroyed or probably destroyed, besides many others damaged.

Meanwhile, the Spitfire bombers (carrying 250 lb. bombs, cannons and machine-guns) proved effective against enemy airfields: an attack by these Spitfires on the aerodrome at Lampedusa Island (where a number of S.M. 81's had been

reported by photographic reconnaissance) accounted for one S.M. 81 destroyed, four others probably destroyed and one ME. 110.

Ibid:  
Jan. (1943)

In January, Spitfire bombers, Mosquitoes (of No. 239 squadron) and Beaufighters (of No. 89 squadron) made several attacks on both road and rail enemy traffic in North Africa, causing considerable damage to railway tracks, locomotives and rolling stock which they attacked with machine-gun and cannon fire and 250 lb. bombs. In addition to these operations, they attacked enemy aircraft on Pantellaria Island and the Southern Tunisian airfields by 'ground-strafting' raids.

#### Shipping Strikes on Convoys

Ibid: O.R.B's  
Nov. and Dec.  
1942.  
App. 'C'

As the Middle East forces swept forward into Tripolitania and the TORCH forces contained the enemy in Tunisia, the Axis supply routes were forced further and further into the range of Malta based aircraft. Malta based aircraft and crews took hold of the opportunity to assume an offensive role with both hands and did good work in preventing supplies reaching the Axis in North Africa.

List from  
Enemy Sources  
of Italian  
Merchant  
ships sunk

The offensive opened on the morning of 17 November, a reconnaissance aircraft reported an 8,000 ton tanker and two destroyers 180 miles from Benghazi, and that night two torpedo Albacores and a flare-dropping Wellington found and attacked the tanker (which, later, proved to be the 10,534 ton Giulio Giordani) about 46 miles north-west of Homs. The Wellington dropped three flares and the Albacores then launched their torpedoes from 55 feet at a range of 550 yards. Both the torpedoes struck the tanker amidships which heeled over and began to blaze furiously. Information was then wirelessly to H.M. Submarine Porpoise which found the tanker the next day, still on fire, and sank her.

On the night of 22/23 November, one torpedo Wellington while on an offensive reconnaissance for shipping between Western Sicily and Southern Sardinia sighted and attacked the 3,500 ton merchant ship Favorita, 88 miles east of Cape Carbonara, and scored a hit amidships with a torpedo fired from 50 feet at a range of 800 yards. A red flash, followed by a column of black smoke was seen, and the ship - which was disabled - was sunk later by gunfire from one of H.M. submarines.

During December, the increasing enemy reinforcements which were hurried into Tunisia provided many targets for the Malta shipping strike aircraft. A particularly successful strike occurred on the night of 2/3 December when five Albacores made a torpedo attack on a convoy of two 5,000 ton merchant ships escorted by a cruiser, a destroyer and a sloop, 36 miles east of Melita (Kerkennah Islands). Four hits were obtained on the merchantmen both of which were set on fire and seen to sink<sup>(1)</sup>. Meanwhile, on the previous night, one Albacore had attacked the 4,887 ton Italian tanker Giorgio, some 20 miles west of Marettimo Island, which was hit amidships

(1) These two ships were officially assessed as sunk. (The torpedoes were fired from 60 feet at a range of 800 yards). One of these ships was apparently, the S.S. Veloce (5,464 tons) - stated in the List from Enemy sources to have been sunk by "air attack near Kerkennah", but the second ship is not mentioned.



and set on fire.(1) These successes were followed on the night of 3/4 December by an attack by three Albacores on the Italian S.S. Palmaiola (1,880 tons) and Minerva (1,905 tons), between the Kerkennah Islands and Zuara. One Albacore torpedoed one of the ships and blew her to pieces while the other two attacked the second ship, scoring a hit on the port side which set the stern on fire. The ship developed a list to port and subsequently sank.

Ten nights later (at 21.10 hours on 13 December), one torpedo and one flare-carrying Albacore located the Italian merchant ship Foscola (4,500 tons) - which had been reported by reconnaissance aircraft - escorted by destroyers and M.T.B.'s about 14 miles from Marettimo Island. The first Albacore dropped its flares and, in spite of a smoke screen from one of the destroyers, the other Albacore launched a torpedo from 50 feet at 800 yards range and scored a direct hit. A violent explosion followed and the ship was left on fire, the flames being visible for 80 miles; she subsequently sank.

At 01.00 hours on 22 December, three Albacores attacked the 2,633-ton Italian merchant ship Etruria (which was accompanied by three escort vessels and some Siebel ferries and "E"-boats) about 22 miles north-west of Marettimo Island. The Etruria was hit by one torpedo which sank her while another torpedo hit one of the escort vessels which disappeared, a large patch of oil being observed in the vicinity.

Meanwhile, several successful attacks had been made by the Beaufighters which usually operated in pairs. On 29 November, two of these aircraft attacked a 1,000-ton vessel, 20 miles east of Sousse. The aircraft raked the vessel with their cannons, causing serious damage and bringing down the funnel. On the following day, two Beaufighters attacked a merchant ship, off Pantellaria Island, with 250 lb. bombs from mast height and scored two direct hits which were followed by a heavy explosion and large columns of smoke. One of the Beaufighters was slightly damaged by striking the ship's funnel with its propeller. On 1 December, two Beaufighters made a cannon attack on the Italian S.S. Audace (1,459 tons), which had been sighted by a reconnaissance Baltimore, in the Gulf of Hammamet. The ship, which was carrying a cargo of oil, was set on fire and subsequently blew up and sank.

The temporary abandonment of major ground by the Allied Torch forces in January had little effect upon the air/sea war where the Allies were making every effort to cut the enemy's line of communication to Tunisia. The enemy's policy for transporting men, reinforcements and supplies across the Sicilian "Narrows" was as follows:-

- (a) The employment of destroyers making passage by night at high speed.
- (b) Merchant ships sailing by day under fighter cover.
- (c) Transport aircraft.

These methods rendered night attacks by Allied Naval forces impracticable, and the Allied tactics were, therefore, confined to submarine action, strikes at night by torpedo

A.H.Q. ME.  
D.AOC/CC/4

(1) This was officially assessed as "severely damaged". (The torpedo was launched from 40 feet at a range of 450 yards).

aircraft, daylight attacks by bombers shipping in enemy ports. It had been found by past experience in the Mediterranean that bombing attacks on ports and bases did not achieve decisive results. The most effective was to locate and sink supply ships at sea, for which adequate air reconnaissance and air striking forces, under the requisite fighter cover were essential factors.

A.H.Q. Med.  
(Malta) O.R.B.  
Jan. 1943 A.H.Q.  
Op. Summaries  
O.R.B's of  
Squadrons.  
Enemy Sources  
of Italian  
Shipping Sunk

During January, the Squadrons operating under No. 248 (N.C.) Wing against enemy shipping on the Naples - Palermo - North African route achieved several successes. These included an attack on the night of 18/19 January by three Wellingtons and a Beaufort on four enemy vessels off Marettimo Island. The largest of these vessels (8,000 tons) was hit by a torpedo from a Wellington of No. 69 Squadron after an explosion on the Starboard bow, while a five thousand ton vessel was torpedoed by another Wellington. Other results could not be observed but a four thousand ton ship was subsequently seen moving at a reduced speed. On the following night four Albacores of No. 821 Squadron torpedoed two north-bound Italian vessels of five thousand and two thousand tons off Cape Turgueme. The smaller ship blew up and sank and an escorting destroyer was damaged. On the same night two Wellingtons torpedoed a small merchant vessel north of Djeiba.

On the night of 23/24 January six Wellingtons and six Beauforts attacked a southbound convoy, N.N.W. of Ustica, consisting of the Italian merchant ships Verona (4,459 tons) and the Pistoia (2,448 tons) escorted by two destroyers. Both these merchantmen were torpedoed, and set on fire - the Verona breaking in two - and sunk, while one of the destroyers was bombed by Beauforts and hit. A week later Wellingtons went to attack an eastbound merchantman of five thousand tons which was escorted by two destroyers and three "E" Boats. They found the convoy obscured by a smoke screen. A torpedo attack on the merchantman was followed by a large orange flash. The vessel listed heavily and was seen to be abandoned by her crew. She subsequently sank.

Ibid

In February, the enemy's intensified efforts to run supplies to Tunisia provided good targets for the Malta squadrons on the Naples - Tunisia supply route. Eighteen strikes were made during the month. On the night of 15/16 February, Wellingtons, Beauforts, Albacores, were sent to attack a convoy of merchantmen, escorted by destroyers which had been sighted by a reconnaissance Baltimore outside Palermo harbour. One Wellington sighted the Italian tanker Capo Orsa (3,149 tons) south of Marettimo Island and scored a torpedo hit amidships which set the ship on fire from stem to stern and sank her. Another Wellington, two Beauforts, and two Albacores, found and attacked three other merchantmen in the convoy but results could not be observed owing to poor visibility. Meanwhile another Wellington bombed two destroyers but only obtained near misses.

Ibid

On the night of 17/18, three Wellingtons of No. 221 Squadron attacked the eastbound Italian motor vessel Col Di Lana (5,891 tons) which had been sighted by a reconnaissance aircraft north of Trapani. At 05.00 hours one of the Wellingtons scored a direct hit on this vessel which burst into flames and sank by the stern. The most noteworthy strike during this month was made on the Italian (former Norwegian) tanker Thorseheimer (9,995 tons) which was first sighted in a convoy by a reconnaissance Baltimore at 0812 hours on the 20 February south of Naples. The same

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night Wellingtons, Beauforts and Albacores were sent to the attack and located the tanker some forty miles north of Trapani. Several torpedoes were fired, and probably because of damage the tanker delayed its attempt to cross to Tunisia until the following night. It was discovered at 2010 hours about half way between Trapani and Cape Bon. Four Beauforts attacked it with torpedoes, obtaining three direct hits, which set the tanker on fire. A fourth torpedo hit the vessel amidships and sank it.

Three nights later 24/25 February the Wellingtons and Beauforts attacked a west bound convoy comprising the Italian vessel Alcamo (6,987 tons) and another merchantman of five thousand tons with three escorting destroyers south of Marettimo Island which had been previously sighted by a reconnaissance Wellington. Two of the Beauforts fired their torpedoes, one of which hit the Alcamo amidships and sank her, while the Wellington scored a hit with a bomb in the other vessel. Meanwhile another Beaufort torpedoed one of the destroyers. Considerable 'flak' was experienced and two Beauforts and one Wellington were missing from this operation.

Bombing Attacks on Tunisian Ports and Bases

Intruder Operations

A.H.Q. Med.:  
O.R.B. Nov.

Ibid: Dec.:  
Appx. 'B'

Bombing attacks on Tunisian ports and bases were made by Wellingtons of No. 238 Wing (Nos. 40 and 104 Squadrons), the principal targets for November being Tunis and Bizerta. At the same time Malta Beauforts made several mine-laying sorties in the harbours of Tunis, Bizerta and Palermo. During December, the Wellingtons concentrated on Tunis and the adjacent harbour of La Goulette, leaving Bizerta to the bombers of the Eastern and Western Air Commands. On the last two nights of the month they made heavy attacks on Sfax, and they also visited Sousse on several occasions. On two nights, when the weather was unfavourable for operations in Tunisia, the Wellingtons switched their attacks to Palermo where a considerable amount of shipping for North Africa was assembling. By the end of the month severe damage had been caused to the enemy-occupied Tunisian ports which were beginning to look as heavily battered as the harbours in Libya. Several ships were sunk in Tunis, La Goulette and Sousse harbours and a merchant vessel which was set on fire, and capsized in Tunis harbour burned for three days. Moreover, large fires were started among the petrol dumps at La Goulette, and warehouses and port and railway installations at all the harbours were damaged considerably.

Ibid: and R.A.F.  
Anti-shiping  
Ops. (Merchant)  
Vol.4 and List  
from Enemy  
Sources of  
Italian merchant  
shipping sunk in  
the Med.

One of the heaviest attacks was made on the docks at La Goulette by thirteen Wellingtons on the night of 13/14 December, during which the 2,000 ton merchant ship Caucaso was sunk and two other merchantmen of 6,000 and 4,000 tons respectively were set on fire.

During their attacks on ports and harbours the Wellingtons encountered accurate "flak" from six/eight heavy batteries at Tunis and La Goulette, but only sporadic light "flak" over the southern harbours. On the 21 January the Wellingtons of No. 238 Wing were withdrawn to Cyrenaica but in the first three weeks of the New Year continued their attacks on ports and bases in Tripolitania, Tunisia and Sicily including a series comprising 72 effective sorties from the 8th onwards against Tripoli harbour.

The New Year found Malta's squadrons in an aggressive



mood. The long months of defence now gave place to determined offensive work. Enemy air attack decreased and dwindled to such an extent that even when fighters and bombers trailed their coats over enemy airfields the Luftwaffe and Reggio Aeronautica, showed no disposition to defend their own bases.

A.H.Q. Malta  
O.R.B. Nov. and  
Dec. 1942

Spitfires and Beaufighters often working together made five or six sweeps daily. During November they destroyed over 70 aircraft in transit and many more of the transport aircraft on the ground, which the enemy was forced to use to rush men and materials over to Africa. Spitfire bombers which had been prevented from operating earlier by the embargo on the use of aircraft petrol except for defence of the Island, now went into operation. Although many enemy fighters were in Sicily they seldom attacked the Spitfire bombers, and those that did were dealt with by the Spitfire escort.

O.R.B's Jan.  
and Feb. 1943  
and A.H.Q. ME.  
Op. Summaries

During January, Spitfire bombers (carrying two 250 lb. bombs) made almost daily sweeps against enemy ground targets in Southern Sicily and shipping north of Malta. The chemical factory at Marsemini was put out of action, the power station at Cassibele, and hits were obtained on war houses at Ipsica and on the aerodromes at Gela and Comiso. Mosquitoes of No. 23 Squadron carried out several intruder operations over Sicily and they also attacked suitable land targets, especially railways and locomotives.

Towards the end of the month the Mosquitoes extended their offensive patrols to cover the 'toe' of Italy with considerable success. This activity increased in importance as the campaign progressed. The enemy relied mainly on his railways to carry supplies and reinforcements to Sicily where they could be loaded on to small craft bound for Tunisia. From both Naples and Taranto the railway followed the coast southwards, the two tracks meeting opposite the Messina train ferry, from which point the railway led westward, along the north coast of Sicily to Palermo. These railway lines were ideal targets for the Mosquito, Spitfire and Beaufighters the Mosquito proving itself an ideal 'train buster'.

Ibid

Similar operations were flown over enemy territory in North Africa and considerable damage was done to both road and rail traffic with 250 lb. bombs, cannon and machine gun fire. The attacks were usually made at night time, but the Spitfire bombers and fighters operated during the day time against railways, stations bridges and sidings. The results of these attacks were gratifying, fourteen locomotives being destroyed or severely damaged during the month.

In February, Mosquito intruder patrols were concentrated over the Comiso-Catania and Castellaretrano - Trapani groups of aerodromes. Poor weather conditions limited the Mosquitoes programme to only eighteen nights during which eighty-seven sorties were made. Five enemy aircraft were destroyed in these sorties and others were attacked and probably damaged but the results could not be observed owing to the violent evasive action which the attacking aircraft were forced to adopt because of the intense fire from the ground.

The attacks on the Italian and North African railways were increased in February, thirty locomotives being destroyed or seriously damaged. The majority of these results were achieved by cannon fire but a few were obtained by the Beaufighters 250 lb. bombs. Attacks by the Beaufighters

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included the bombing of the railway bridge, trucks and sidings at Termini and a bridge and railway buildings at Cefalu in Sicily and on the railway junctions at Micaastro and Marina di Gioiosa in Italy.

Meanwhile the Spitfire bombers and fighters continued their offensive against Sicilian targets. They also attacked the aerodromes at Lampedusa Island and Comiso; numerous hits being obtained in the dispersal areas. On the return flight from one of these sorties a U-Boat was sighted and attacked five miles East of Avola. Other Spitfire operations included a bombing attack on 27 February on Syracuse when a seaplane's hangar was destroyed and hits were scored on railway yards and buildings.

## SUMMARY OF SHIPPING LOSSES

(in E.A.C. Area of Responsibility)

1. Number of Ships that have entered Algiers since 11/11/42. 328
2. Number of Ships that have proceeded east of Algiers since 8/11/42. 233
3. Number of Ships sunk and damaged by enemy aircraft both at sea and in ports:-
 

Sunk at sea	8)	Total sunk	14)	Total sunk and damaged	25
Sunk in Harbour	6)				
Damaged at Sea	3)	Total damaged	11)		
Damaged in Harbour	8)				
4. Total number of passages escorted to and from Cape Tenez since 8/11/42 1,116
5. Names of ships sunk and damaged:-

<u>Date</u>	<u>Ship</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
<u>Sunk at Sea</u>			
9/11	U.S.S. Leedstown	S.W. of Matifou	Bombed and sunk at sea
14/11	Narkunda	Off Cape Carbon	-do-
23/11	Trentbank	Off Algiers	-do-
28/11	Selbo	Off Bougie	Torpedoed and sunk
9/12	(Fr.) Mascot	Off Cape Carbon	-do-
7/1	Benalbenach	Off Bougie	-do-
7/1	Akabahra	Off Bougie	-do-
21/1	Hampton Lodge	Off Algiers	Bombed and sunk
<u>Sunk in Harbour</u>			
11/11	Awatea	Bougie	Bombed and sunk in harbour
11/11	Cathay	"	-do-
12/11	Karanja	"	-do-
7/12	French Tug	Bone	-do-
1/1	St. Meniel	"	Bombed and sunk in harbour total loss
1/1	Empire Metal	"	-do-



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<u>Date</u>	<u>Ship</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
<u>Damaged at sea</u>			
17/1	Tasajera	Off Bone	Torpedoed and damaged at sea
20/1	Walt Whitman	Off Algiers	--do--
21/1	Ocean Rider	"	Bombed and damaged at sea
<u>Damaged in Harbour</u>			
13/11	Glenfinlas	Bougie	Bombed and damaged in Harbour
20/11	Dewdale	Algiers	--do--
23/11	Scythia	Algiers Bay	Torpedoed and damaged in Harbour
24/11	Aurora	Philippeville	Bombed and damaged in Harbour
8/12	Ousel	"	--do--
1/1	Novelist	Bone	--do--
1/1	Dalhama	"	--do--
17/1	Recorder	"	--do--

PHOTOGRAPHIC ORGANISATION IN THE NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGNS

History  
M.A.P.R.W.  
in Film 200  
and file  
II J1/200/9

At the time when the landing operations in North Africa were being planned, Photographic Reconnaissance Units (P.R.U.) and Central Interpretation Units (C.I.U.) in the United Kingdom were already developed and their working methods well established. A detached P.R. Squadron and interpretation section was based on Gibraltar, a P.R. unit served the Middle East Command, and an efficient P.R. unit based on Malta executed its well defined tasks, by these means photographic intelligence was provided for operation Torch.

The British had decided to support the landings and subsequent operations with a P.R. Squadron plus a mobile photographic section (No.4 P.R.U.). Only very limited tasks had been allotted to air photographic reconnaissance and its role and development had only been incompletely anticipated. A plan had been formulated which, although a useful guide in the early stages of the campaign, soon ceased to be of any value. Yet the notably small number of Air Force and Army interpreters was at first scattered among several Commands, their only equipment being their stereoscopes and their enthusiasm.

The Americans ideas were more definite, although based on a misconception of the role of photography in modern war. Equipped with Flying Fortresses and superb photographic apparatus, the 3rd Photographic Group was intended to serve the Twelfth Air Force. The Assistant Chief of Staff (A-2) of this air force had defined its need for photographic intelligence as follows:

- (a) Damage assessment.
- (b) Planning and air intelligence.

Ibid

That definition became even more enigmatic in view of the fact that the 3rd Photographic Group possessed no qualified photographic interpreters.

After a period of confusion, and chiefly owing to the representations made by Major W. E. Almond (O.I.5) G-2 of A.F. H.Q., all the scattered elements of photographic reconnaissance were brought together to co-ordinate their possibilities and efforts. Leaving two of the seven Royal Air Force interpreters with No. 4 P.R.U. for "first phase" work, the remaining five were assembled together with the British Army interpreters to form a Central Intelligence Unit (Northwest African Central Intelligence Unit) (N.A.C.I.U.) at the Eastern Air Command Headquarters at Maison Carree. All the air photographic resources were placed under the command of one officer (Lieutenant Colonel Elliot Roosevelt), who was made responsible to the G-2 of A.F.H.Q. for the execution of sorties and the proper exploitation of the results. The responsibility for the co-ordination of all air photograph demands and for obtaining and distributing the results of the activities of N.A.C.I.U. remained with G-2 assisted by O.I.5. The satisfaction of the tactical requirements of the First Army, which up to then (19 December 1942) had not been provided by any special organisation, was undertaken.

Ibid

In order to provide guidance a "P.R.U. Committee" was set up comprising:

One member of the Air Staff (A.F.H.Q.)

The Chief of G-2

The Assistant Chief of Staff (A-2) of the Twelfth Air Force

The C.I.O. of Eastern Air Command

The Commanding Officer N.A.C.I.U.

and monthly meetings of the committee were planned the first to take place on 21 December.

In this period regular contact was established between N.A.C.I.U. and the P.R. organisation in the Middle East and in Malta. Photographic spheres of responsibility were defined and the exchange of photographic intelligence between the organisations co-ordinated.

Thus the air photographic resources of the Northwest African forces were organised along quite definite and logical lines, but the results were still inadequate, as the potential beneficiaries had only a limited appreciation of the value of photographic intelligence and an incomplete knowledge of its technical rudiments.

Ibid

On 27 February 1943 the Northwest African Photographic Reconnaissance Wing was formed under Lieutenant Colonel Roosevelt which comprised all the photographic resources available in the theatre. These were:

3rd Photographic Group (U.S.)

No. 4 P.R.U. (renamed No. 682 P.R. Squadron)

and N.A.C.I.U. (Wing Commander E. L. Fuller) as deputy commander assumed responsibility for photographic intelligence. Simultaneously the control of air photographic intelligence passed to the newly formed Headquarters Northwest African Air Forces (N.A.A.F.) in collaboration with the former controlling body the G-2 O.I.5.

Thus the elements of the photographic Intelligence machine were consolidated. The Wing was authorized to draw up a routine schedule of P.R.U. commitments and was made responsible for detailing P.R. aircraft and personnel to work with the air forces controlled by the Headquarters of the Northwest African Air Forces.

The following P.R. resources were available in immediate support of the Tunisian battle:

Ibid

No. 682 P.R. Squadron	) Eighth Army
No. 60 (S.A.) Survey Squadron (2 Mosquito)	
No. 154 Observation Squadron (U.S.)	XII A.S.C.
No. 225 (R) Squadron	No. 242 Group
P.R.U. detachment (one flight Spitfire)	) N.A.T.A.F.
3rd Photo. Group detachment (5 P-38s)	

The P.R.U. and 3rd Photo Group detachments were served by a newly arrived "Photographic Army Co-operation Train" together with the advanced interpretation section (later called the Fifth Army Photo centre). They were located at Souk El Arba alongside the First Army Headquarters.



In March 1943 the photographic organisation was called upon to provide data for the planning of the invasion and campaign in Sicily, in addition to its current operational commitments. At the same time American P.R. squadrons, suitably equipped for the purpose, undertook a vast mapping programme of future arenas.

These new demands emphasized the need for the control of photographic intelligence from a higher level, with the result that on 28 April a new committee was formed composed of representatives of the Commanders of the following formations:-

Mediterranean Fleet

Allied force Headquarters

Mediterranean Air Command

Northwest African Air Forces

Northwest African Photographic Reconnaissance Wing.

Control still remained in a confused state owing to an apparent division of responsibility between M.A.C. and N.A.A.F. Headquarters. This confusion had repercussions on the work of the Wing with its limited technical resources. Difficulties were increased by the distance between the Wing headquarters and those of Commands as well as the inadequate system of communication.

In May 1943 the programme to be undertaken by the Wing was as follows - to provide, in collaboration with P.R.U. Malta strategic and planning photography for all Services in the following areas - Tunisia, Sicily, Italy (as far as lat. 44° 30'N) Sardinia, Corsica, Southern France (within the bounds of long. 2°E and lat. 44°N) the Balearics and all the islands adjacent.

Ibid

Operating from the airfield at Maison Blanche as the main base the Wing had three detachments:-

One in Souk El Arba - with First Army photo centre

One in Malta (mapping)

One in Le Kroub (Constantine) serving directly the Army H.Q. and N.A.S.A.F.

and the following resources -

(i) The Wing base unit with its headquarters, and C.I.U., and main (Static) photographic facilities located in Algiers

(ii) The flying strength of the Wing was - No.682 P.R. Squadron equipped with twelve Spitfires, 3rd Photo. Group equipped with seventeen P-38s. (Lightning)

The Central Interpretation unit consisted of forty-three Royal Air Force interpreters (including twelve W.A.A.F. officers) and four U.S.A.A.F. interpreters. The detached section at N.A.S.A.F. comprised four R.A.F. interpreters and another was attached to the advanced Army section (the newly created First Army Photo section) at Souk El Khemis. A pool of twenty-five British Army interpreters was borne on the

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strength of A.F.H.Q. together with five U.S. Army interpreters undergoing instruction.

Ibid

In the last stages of the Tunisian campaign the Photographic Wing was working in close co-operation with the P.R.U. in Malta, pilots taking off from Malta and landing at Le Kroub flew daily sorties covering Sicilian ports and airfields, while the 5th P.R. Squadron (U.S.) with an American field laboratory and a British interpretation section based on Le Kroub, searched anxiously for signs of and preparations for a suspected enemy attempt at withdrawal from Tunisia.

MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR IN NORTH AFRICATHE PLAN TO INVADE NORTH AFRICA BY COMBINED  
ANGLO-AMERICAN FORCES

While the Desert Air Force in the Middle East was being built up in the Summer of 1942 for the advance to Tripoli, preparations were commenced in London for a landing in French North Africa by combined Anglo-American forces.

The possibility of such an expedition had been under discussion since the entry of the U.S.A. into the war in 1941 and the idea was explored during the Churchill - Roosevelt conference in Washington in December of that year. The two leaders and their advisers at the meeting made a thorough survey of the tasks confronting the Allies and of the strategy which offered the best prospects of victory. It was obvious that while a full scale invasion of Europe would be required and must be the ultimate goal, a campaign in North Africa would provide a preliminary move by means of which methods, men and machines could be tested, and which, if successful would secure to the Allies control of the Mediterranean and pave the way for an invasion of Italy.

In July, 1942, a scheme was finally approved which had as its main objects the securing of French Morocco and Algeria with a view to the earliest possible occupation of Tunisia and the re-establishment of our former communications through the Mediterranean. The success of the enterprise depended partly on surprise and partly upon the degree of opposition or assistance which might be offered by the French forces in North Africa.

In considering the forces to be employed on the operation it was thought that a United States expedition would find more local support in North Africa than an expedition in which British troops were foremost because, whereas the United States had maintained relations with the Vichy Government, the British Government had recognised the movement headed by General De Gaulle. On the other hand it was obviously advisable that British troops with their more recent operational experience should play a leading part in the early stages of the campaign.

In the light of the above it was decided to appoint an American officer, Lieutenant General Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief and to arrange for the initial assault landings to be undertaken entirely by United States troops except at Algiers where a British Infantry Brigade Group with two Commandos were to land simultaneously with a United States Infantry Division.

The plan of campaign was briefly as follows:-

An American "Western Task Force" (Commander Major General G. S. Patton) was to sail direct from the U.S.A. to capture Casablanca. An American "Centre Task Force" (Commander Major General L. R. Fredendall) would be transported from the United Kingdom with the primary mission of capturing Oran. After accomplishing their initial missions, the Western and Centre Task Forces were to establish and to maintain communications between Casablanca and Oran and to build up land and air striking forces to occupy Spanish Morocco if that should



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be necessary. Subsequently the Centre Task Force was to turn westwards to link up with the Western Task Force to form a single wholly American Army ready to meet the threat of a German attack through Spain.

An "Eastern Task Force", composed of both British and American troops to be transported from the United Kingdom, was charged, in the first place, with seizing Algiers and the airfields at Blida and Maison Blanche. In order to establish the impression that the whole enterprise was American, the Eastern Task Force was to be commanded by Major General C. W. Ryder of the U.S. Army. At a suitable time, the units concerned were to pass to the command of Lieutenant General K. A. N. Anderson, General Officer Commanding the British First Army, who was then to thrust eastwards to capture the airfield at Djidjelli and the port of Bougie.

The force was then to be quickly transformed into the British First Army and to advance towards Tunisia.

To the British and American Navies fell the vast and complex task of escorting the various convoys to their destinations, protecting them from possible intervention by hostile surface ships and submarines, and giving direct fire support to the assaulting forces. Initial air support too was to be given from aircraft carriers until landing grounds had been captured and the Allied air forces established ashore. The U.S. Navy was to be responsible for carrying out these duties in support of the Western Task Force and the Royal Navy was to act in a similar manner with respect to the operations inside the Mediterranean.

As regards the Allied Air Forces, the 12th U.S.A.A.F. was to form a Western Command with Headquarters at Oran, while the R.A.F. assigned to the operation was to form an Eastern Command with Headquarters at Algiers.

Although the initial assaults were to be supported by seaborne aircraft it was essential that the maximum possible strength of aircraft should be available. Consequently it was proposed to fly from Gibraltar 160 fighters to each of the Oran and Casablanca areas and 90 fighters to the Algiers area within three days of the attack. Thereafter the build-up was to reach at the end of seven weeks a total in all types of aircraft of 1,244 in the Western Command and 454 in the Eastern Command.

The role of the Allied air forces was to provide air cover as soon as possible for shipping and ground forces, to protect bases and communications against air attack, to assist the Naval forces in the protection of convoys and finally to provide air co-operation and support for the land operations subsequent to the assault phase.

The Difficulties of the R.A.F. Planners  
during the Preparation Period

Planning for operation Torch (the name given to the expedition) did not start until August 10, 1942, and, as the assaults were originally intended to take place on October 7 the planning staffs, particularly those engaged in the administrative and shipping arrangements, were compelled to

File No. CFS/404/Org.  
Progress Reports on  
Preparations made for  
Operation Torch  
15.8.42 to 26.10.42

work against time in order to arrive at a decision on the composition of the forces to be employed.

The difficulties encountered during the early days of planning were, of course, numerous. Torch was the first large-scale amphibious operation to be attempted by combined Anglo-American forces. Many different services were engaged which included the British Army and Navy, the United States Army and Navy and an air element drawn from the British Air Force, the British Fleet Air Arm, the American Naval Air Force and the American Army Air Force. Each force had its distinctive system of organisation and command and the Americans had different conceptions of planning.

General Eisenhower set up his Headquarters originally in London. The Staff organisation and methods adopted at the Headquarters were those of the U.S. Army but the personnel consisted of both British and American officers.

The two Air Forces, British and American, remained separate, the power of co-ordinating their activities resting in theory with the Commander-in-Chief. Air Marshal W. L. Welsh was placed in command of the British Air Force (known in the first instance as No. 333 Group and afterwards given the title of the Eastern Air Command) General Doolittle headed the American 12th Air Force or Western Air Command. Air Vice-Marshal A. P. M. Sanders was appointed Air Adviser at Allied Force Headquarters. Details of the staffs at Command Headquarters and Headquarters 333 Group are shown in the following Diagrams 1 and 2.

At the commencement of the air planning, the staffs of the British and American Air Forces engaged in major problems, both operational and administrative, were merged in order that similar questions which arose could be approached from the same angle. In the case of detailed organisation and administration, where the systems employed were entirely different, the staffs, although maintaining close liaison, had to work out their difficulties separately. As the planning developed and the roles of the two Air Forces, one working in the East and the other in the West were defined, the United States Air Force considered that their responsibilities in the West were so divorced from those of the R.A.F. that they gradually separated themselves from the R.A.F. staff.

Ibid

During the preparation period, the administrative planners, in particular, were called upon to face vast problems from the provisioning and maintenance aspect alone. For instance, the original plan for which calculations commenced aimed at seizing simultaneously the ports of Bone, Algiers and Oran, followed by Casablanca. On September 2, the planners were instructed to prepare for two outline plans - "A" and "B". Outline plan "A" had as its aim the capture of French Morocco with a view to controlling the Straits of Gibraltar and building up a striking force for the subsequent occupation of Algeria and Tunisia. The first objectives in Plan "A" were the ports of Casablanca and Oran, which were to be seized simultaneously. Plan "B" had a similar aim but the first objectives were the simultaneous capture of Oran and Algiers, followed rapidly by the seizing of Casablanca and the advance into Tunisia. Later, on September 5, a third plan - "C" - was issued and finally adopted. This plan had the same

aims as "A" and "B" but involved the simultaneous assault on Casablanca, Oran and Algiers. The date of the assault was then postponed to November 4 and finally amended to November 8. All these changes, which included alterations in the types of squadrons to be employed, affected the shipping tables and called for a re-casting of loads. From the date of the issue of the final plan, only 13 days remained in which to decide on the amount and type of equipment required and the order in which it would be needed. This having been worked out it was found that the shipping shortage was so acute that drastic cuts had to be made in the provisioning arrangements. Indeed, the first plans for the immediate and complete mobility of the air force had to be jettisoned, and the mechanical transport establishments were reduced by 50%.

Ibid

The difficulties of the administrative planners were also enhanced by the lack of suitable establishments for the expedition envisaged. At that period of the war, no field establishments excepting those introduced by the Middle East Command were in existence and considerable delays were caused during the planning period by the need to prepare suitable scales for all the types of units comprising the R.A.F. component.

Report by  
Wg. Cdr. B. S. Cartmel  
Senior Equipment Staff  
Officer Eastern Air  
Command. Equipment  
Plans File EP/1  
Enc 3A

A further handicap was the degree of Secrecy imposed during the preparation period. Extraordinary precautions were taken to ensure that no leakage of information regarding the proposed operation could occur and only a few senior officers were kept fully informed of the development and changes in the plan. Many junior officers in key positions were not informed of what was happening and consequently were unable to make the necessary alterations and adjustments in the administrative arrangements. Moreover since several of the equipment and engineer officers lacked staff experience and were not acquainted with Air Ministry organisation and Departments, they wasted a great deal of time endeavouring to find out which Departments were concerned with the operation and which individuals were "in the know".

C.F.S./404/Org.  
Enc. 13A

One surprising aspect of the administrative preparations was the failure on the part of either the Air Ministry or the Torch planners or both to provide a realistic training scheme for the ground maintenance units (with the exception of the Servicing Commandos) to ensure that they would be able to operate efficiently under overseas war conditions. The question of what training was necessary was raised as early as August 24, 1942, i.e. two and a half months before the operation was launched but it was decided that the point would be covered by selecting as far as possible personnel who were already trained in the type of equipment which they would be called upon to use and to arrange for further training to be carried out as the individual units were formed. Actually little or no training for the role they were intended to perform was given to the majority of the ground personnel.

#### The Role and Composition of the Eastern Air Command

The role of the British Air Forces in the North African landings was to:-

A.M. File  
Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/9  
App. A

- (a) Provide air cover and support for the initial assaults.



- (b) Protect the bases and communications against air attack and, in conjunction with naval forces, against attacks by submarines and surface raiders.
- (c) Disseminate propaganda by leaflet dropping.
- (d) Provide air co-operation and support for the land operations subsequent to the assault.
- (e) Provide an offensive air striking force for strategic bombing.

To fulfil the role, shore-based units of the R.A.F. had to be provided for many varying tasks. As previously stated, however, the size and composition of the forces required for the operation were governed almost entirely by the limitation of available shipping. Personnel and material considered necessary were available in quantities far in excess of the amount of shipping that could be escorted by the Navy in each convoy.

The composition of the Eastern Air Command was:-

Air Headquarters.

Headquarters No. 242 Group.

No. 322 (Fighter) Wing (Mobile) controlling:-

- No. 154(F) Squadron
- No. 81(F) "
- No. 242(F) "
- No. 225(A.C.) "
- No. 133 Air Stores Park
- No. 108 Repair and Salvage Unit
- No. 303 Mobile Signals Servicing Unit.

No. 323 (Fighter) Wing (Con-mobile) controlling:-

- No. 253(F) Squadron
- No. 43(F) "
- No. 4(P.R.U.) Flight
- No. 131 Air Stores Park
- No. 106 Repair and Salvage Unit
- No. 301 Mobile Signals Servicing Unit.

No. 324 (Fighter) Wing (Mobile) controlling:-

- No. 93(F) Squadron
- No. 152(F) "
- No. 72(F) "
- No. 111(F) "
- No. 255(N.F.) "
- No. 135 Air Stores Park
- No. 110 Repair and Salvage Unit
- No. 302 Mobile Signals Servicing Unit.

No. 325(F) Wing (Mobile) controlling:-

- No. 232(F) Squadron
- No. 243(F) "
- No. 32(F) "
- No. 87(F) "

SECRET

6

No. 325(F) Wing (Mobile) controlling:- (Contd.)

No. 241 (A.C.) Squadron  
No. 600 (N.F.) "  
No. 136 Air Stores Park  
No. 111 Repair and Salvage Unit  
No. 304 Mobile Signals Servicing Unit.

No. 326 (Light Bomber) Wing (Semi-mobile) controlling:-

No. 18 (L.B.) Squadron  
No. 114 (L.B.) "  
No. 13 (B.R.) "  
No. 614 (B.R.) "  
No. 132 Air Stores Park  
No. 109 Repair and Salvage Unit.

No. 328 (G.R.) Wing (Non-mobile) controlling:-

No. 608 (G.R./L.P.) Squadron  
No. 500 (G.R./L.P.) "  
No. 134 Air Stores Park  
No. 107 Repair and Salvage Unit  
Beaufort Servicing Unit.

No. 651 (Air Observation Post) Squadron

Other Units

Three Servicing Commandos.  
Three Embarkation Units.  
One Equipment Maintenance Unit.  
R.A.F. Regiment consisting of five Squadrons and five  
A.A. Flights.  
Four Signals Sections.  
36 W/T Stations of various types.  
Base Area Headquarters.  
Base Personnel Office.  
Base Accounts Office.  
Base Reinforcement Pool.  
Details of these units are given in Appendix "A".

The Arrangements for the Provision of Aircraft

The only means by which the necessary number of fighter aircraft could be brought to North Africa was to ship them to Gibraltar, assemble them there and fly them over. During the three weeks prior to D-Day, 300 aircraft were off-loaded, erected and air tested ready for the operation. Other aircraft which had been flown to Gibraltar were also based on the aerodrome there, and on the 7 November (the day prior to the assault) there were upwards of 350 aircraft around one runway. This excellent target for the enemy was fortunately not attacked.

The preparation of the aircraft at Gibraltar did not proceed without difficulty. The establishment of personnel

O.R.B., R.A.F.  
Station North  
Front Gibraltar  
Sept.-Nov. 1942

S.M.15/S/99/  
3/4 Part I

and the accommodation provided for the work was totally inadequate. The first batch of aircraft arrived before the necessary tools and spares were received. There was not sufficient erection and other equipment. Many aircraft had been despatched from the United Kingdom with small but essential items missing. Some components and equipment had been mishandled whilst being removed from aircraft for packing purposes before despatch. It was only by improvisation, local manufacture, the conversion of aeroplane cases into workshops and utilising the stores and personnel of the other Services that the scheduled programme was met. A detailed report by R.A.F. Station, North Front, Gibraltar, on the Torch preparations is given in Appendix "B".

Report by  
Headquarters  
No. 44 Group  
Admin. Plans 4/  
PA/T/8 dated  
1.4.1943

The other types of aircraft (both British and American) required were flown from the United Kingdom to North West Africa under arrangements made by No. 44 Group. From the outset of the operation to the 31 December, 1942, the following numbers of aircraft were despatched:-

<u>Departure Airfield</u>	<u>R.A.F.</u>	<u>U.S.A.A.F.</u>	<u>Total</u>
Portreath	141	159	300
Fredannack	-	134	134
Exeter	23	-	23
St. Eval	8	180	188
Chivenor	-	96	96
Hurn	14	151	165
Lyneham	-	12	12
Total	186	732	918

The programme was carried out without serious interruption of any kind, the great majority of aircraft arriving safely at their destination. The normal 44 Group arrangements were augmented to provide spares for the R.A.F. A forward distribution centre for the U.S.A.A.F. was established at Trebelzue in Cornwall. Salvage parties with cranes were established by 43 Group at all departure bases which were also provided with both R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. servicing parties.

#### The Maintenance Organisation of the Eastern Air Command

The Air Officer in charge of Administration (Air Commodore A. MacGregor) was made responsible for the supply, servicing and repair of all equipment used during the Torch operation<sup>(1)</sup>

A.M. File  
CPS/401/Org.

(1) This was in accordance with the normal procedure which, although it had failed in the Middle East and had been replaced by an arrangement whereby the Chief Maintenance Officer was upgraded to have direct access to the A.O.C.-in-C., was still considered by the Air Ministry as the ideal organisation.



He was provided with a Chief Maintenance Officer (Group Captain A. Allen) whose functions were the co-ordination of the engineering and equipment branches.

The staff of the Chief Maintenance Officer for engineering duties consisted of one Wing Commander, two Squadron Leaders and three Flight Lieutenants. A similar establishment of equipment officers was allowed for supply duties.

Details of the maintenance and supply arrangements for the Torch operation were contained in "The Administrative Orders and Instructions for No. 333 Group". For security reasons the distribution of these orders was restricted. Up to the time of sailing, they were only issued to Officers Commanding Wings, Air Stores Parks and Repair and Salvage Units.

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/9

#### The Supply Arrangements

A.M. File  
Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/9.

Each unit was ordered to proceed overseas complete with its war equipment plus a maintenance reserve for seven days. All tradesmen were to take their own tool kits.

An Air Stores Park was attached to each Wing. The initial equipment for each of these Parks was 30 days' maintenance for all the units it served. Arrangements were made for a second consignment of 30 days' maintenance to follow each Park approximately 14 days after landing.

An R.A.F. Base Maintenance Unit holding 90 days' maintenance supplies for all the units in the Eastern Air Command was formed to proceed overseas at a later date. This was intended to be the main stores holding unit in the theatre of operations. It included a section to provide for the needs of units not served by the Repair and Salvage Units.

The Army was made responsible for landing, holding and distributing for the R.A.F. all petrol, oil, lubricants, small arms ammunition, bombs and pyrotechnics. The R.A.F. provided, held and distributed its own aircraft reinforcements, vehicles and technical stores.

The scale of provisioning for small arms ammunition, bombs, petrol, oil and lubricants was:-

First 8 days.	Maximum effort, i.e. one day's supply for each Squadron for each day in the country plus 100 per cent. reserve up to "D" Day plus seven.
Subsequent 30 days.	Maximum effort.
Thereafter.	Sustained effort, i.e. 90 days reserve at sustained rates to be built up by stages.

The equipment for the operation was packed at Maintenance Units in the United Kingdom in accordance with schedules prepared by the Equipment Branches of the Air Ministry. The Engineer Branch of the Torch staff tried to ensure that all essential items of maintenance equipment were being shipped. Their efforts were, however, not successful. War Equipment

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8.

Schedules only were produced, and it was apparently impossible for the Branch concerned (E.16) to say what was actually being packed. It was reported by the units making up the packs that there were 72% inabilities.

Ibid

All "pack-ups" of equipment were given in the interests of secrecy "Field Unit Serial Numbers". The code for these numbers was also given a very limited distribution, and was not included in the administrative instructions.

#### The Aircraft Servicing, Repair and Salvage Arrangements

The arrangements for the servicing, repair and salvage of aircraft were:-

A.M. File  
Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/9

##### (a) Servicing Commandos

This was the first occasion on which Servicing Commandos were used for the maintenance of aircraft. Their duties were to undertake the daily servicing, refuelling and re-arming of aircraft during the assault stage and until such time as the squadrons ground personnel had been landed and were ready to operate. It was intended that the Servicing Commandos should render only the most urgent and simple servicing assistance as the range of their tools and equipment was necessarily limited. (A brief account of the manner in which these units came into being and the adjustments made in their organisation as experience with them was gained is given in Appendix C).

##### (b) Squadron Maintenance Personnel

Squadrons were to resume aircraft minor and major inspections and unit repairs on the arrival of their equipment and ground personnel. Unit repairs were defined as repairs which could be:-

- (i) Undertaken on or adjacent to the Squadron's base landing ground.
- (ii) Completed within a period of five days in the case of single-engined aircraft and ten days for twin-engined machines. (Engine changes were considered to be within these categories.)

##### (c) Repair and Salvage Units

Each Wing was allocated a Repair and Salvage Unit the personnel of which were to undertake salvage, repair on site and repair at base of aircraft not falling within the category of unit repair. No minimum or maximum limit of repairs was prescribed as it was considered that the scope of the work to be performed would depend upon the availability of spares and tools, the initiative and skill of the personnel and the operational conditions existing. When called upon to do so by the officer commanding the Wing, the R.S.U.s. were to assist squadrons to carry out major inspections and unit repairs subject to the approval of the Chief Maintenance Officer at Command Headquarters. The R.S.U.s. were also to undertake the salvage and light repair of mechanical transport.

Airframes, engines, ancillary equipment and mechanical transport damaged beyond repair were to be:

- (i) Reduced to components and, if serviceable, sent to the Air Stores Parks for reissue

or

- (ii) Returned in the complete state to the Base Equipment Depot for ultimate return to the United Kingdom.

Attached to each R.S.U. for administration was a Mobile Signals Servicing Unit.

(d) The Policy as Regards Major Repairs

Report No.  
78/1943  
of the R.A.F.  
Establishments  
Committee

The plan of the campaign was based on the assumption that the whole of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia would fall into the hands of the Allied forces by D + 46, consequently no preparations were made to set up back areas and base facilities for dealing with major repairs of an order beyond the capacity of the six repair and salvage units.

Other factors which led to the decision to provide no major repair facilities were:-

- (i) The limited amount of shipping available.
- (ii) The possibility of replacing casualties by air.
- (iii) It was doubtful whether the civil population would co-operate in supplying labour if existing French factories were taken over.

Information from  
A. V. M. MacGregor  
1947

The Initial Landings and the R.A.F. Maintenance  
Difficulties that Accompanied them

The Allied landings in North Africa, like the similar invasions of enemy territories which followed subsequently, were successful. The success of operation Torch was, however, mainly due to the lack of enemy activity at Algiers during the early days and to the fact that little opposition was offered by the French. Had it been otherwise, it is probable that the serious mistakes made in our administrative and maintenance services would have brought about a catastrophe. At the same time, the errors made did provide some very valuable lessons which were applied during the planning of the operations which followed later in the war.

O.R.B.  
Eastern  
Air Command  
November, 1942

It had been decided that the Allied Force Headquarters would remain in London but that a Command Post would be established at Gibraltar until the Force Headquarters could move into North Africa. Eastern Air Command Headquarters was divided into three echelons. The first, consisting of the Senior Air Staff Officer (Air Commodore Lawson) and three staff officers joined the Naval Commander Eastern Task Force in H.M.S. Bulolu. (Air Commodore Lawson was to assume command of the advanced elements of the R.A.F. immediately after the assault). The second echelon comprising the Air Officer Commanding, the Air Officer in charge of Administration and the Group Captain Operations proceeded to the



Command Post at Gibraltar on 1 November. The third echelon of the staff travelled to Algiers by various convoys.

A.H.B.  
Narrative on  
Operations in  
North Africa

The Western and Central Task Forces met little sustained opposition. The landing of the Eastern Task Force was also on the whole unopposed, although nominal resistance was offered in some quarters. Maison Blanche aerodrome was captured by the American Army soon after dawn and at 1030 hours No. 43 R.A.F. Fighter Squadron (Hurricanes) landed. The squadron had taken off from Gibraltar at 0800 hours without knowing that Maison Blanche was in our hands, but with the knowledge that the assault was going well.

O.R.B. 5  
322 and  
323 Wings

The first R.A.F. ground personnel to land were the advance parties of Nos. 322 and 323 Wings, together with Nos. 3201 and 3202 Servicing Commandoes, two A.A. Flights, four Signals Sections, two L.W.S. units and Nos. 59 and 60 Embarkation Units. They disembarked from landing craft with the Army assault troops over the beaches in the neighbourhood of Algiers at dawn on D-Day, November 8, 1942. The role of this R.A.F. personnel was:-

(a) To establish an Advanced Wing H.Q. near the beach from where fighter aircraft could be controlled, W/T communications set up and Embarkation Units operated.

(b) To proceed to Maison Blanche aerodrome to provide servicing and refuelling facilities, communications and A.A. defences to enable aircraft to operate from that aerodrome immediately after its capture by the Army.

The disembarkation of the R.A.F. advance party did not go according to plan because the sea conditions off the beaches were such as to preclude a satisfactory landing. Many assault craft were wrecked, the signals equipment was lost and it was not possible for communications to be set up as desired.

O.R.B. 3201  
Servicing  
Commando

No. 3201 Servicing Commando was handicapped from the start because the majority of its equipment, tools and orders instead of travelling with the unit had been sent in another ship which was sunk by enemy action. The landing beach also proved to be unsuitable for the disembarkation of mechanical transport and it was only possible to get one vehicle ashore on D-Day. Having no transport the personnel of the Commando thereupon marched the eight miles to the aerodrome at Maison Blanche, arriving there at 0900 hours. At 1030 hours they commenced to service the aircraft of No. 43 Squadron. Twenty-four hours later the remainder of No. 3201 Servicing Commando's transport was discharged at the docks at Algiers but proved of little value to the unit as all the vehicles were commandeered by senior officers.

O.R.B. 3202  
Servicing  
Commando

The personnel of No. 3202 Servicing Commando were also unlucky. Little care had been given to the loading of their ship in the United Kingdom with a view to priority of landing and much of the unit's transport containing technical equipment was stored in a manner that prevented its unloading until D plus 2. The derricks of their ship also proved to be unsuitable for off-loading vehicles. Many of the stores that were discharged were lost by the overturning of landing craft when approaching the beaches. Most of the petrol was saved, however, because one craft, owing to an error on the part of

its navigator, landed on the wrong beach which proved to be more suitable for getting stores ashore. The saving of this petrol was fortunate because it enabled the aircraft of No. 43 Squadron at Maison Blanche and also those of Nos. 81 and 242 (Spitfire) Squadrons which arrived later in the morning of D-Day to be refuelled without delay. The petrol was landed over the beaches by the personnel of No. 3202 Servicing Commando and the R.A.F. Regiment. It was taken to Maison Blanche in requisitioned French lorries.

O.R.B.s 59  
and 60  
Embarkation  
Units

Nos. 59 and 60 Embarkation Units too had their difficulties. After getting ashore on the "personnel" beach, the units made for what had in England been called, somewhat euphemistically, the "hard" beach, to land the necessary vehicles and stores. This beach proved to be as soft as the "personnel" one and when the first vehicle was driven off a landing craft it immediately sank into soft sand. Although "tracking" had been included in the equipment for the force it was not landed with the assault troops and it became necessary for officers and men of all the units in the neighbourhood to take off their coats and take part in the tugging necessary before this and the remainder of the transport could be manhandled on to the one path which ran from the shore to the cliff top. It was not until 10.00 hours that the first petrol laden lorry was safely conjured on to the narrow path and sent forward to Maison Blanche aerodrome. Worse still, the first of the W/T lorries, which should have been landed at dawn did not reach the shore until late in the afternoon.

Throughout the whole of D-Day the personnel of the Embarkation Units were called upon to use superhuman efforts to complete their task of getting equipment ashore. During the afternoon, the Americans provided sufficient ground netting to lay one track across the soft sand to the foot of the path up the hill but the weather deteriorated, the wind freshened alarmingly and it became increasingly difficult to bring the landing craft to the spot where the netting commenced.

At dusk No. 59 Embarkation Unit received a message from Maison Blanche to the effect that a further supply of petrol was essential to keep fighter aircraft in the air. The landing craft that brought the petrol ashore was swung violently by the furious breakers on the beach, making it extremely difficult for personnel to walk its length unburdened and almost impossible for those called upon to carry an 80 lb. case of petrol in their arms. There was a foot of water in the craft when it arrived and heavy seas broke over it continuously while it was being unloaded. When at last the cases were on shore, the sweat-and-sea-water soaked men of the unit formed a chain and manhandled the cases up the hill to the nearest point at which a lorry could be loaded. The petrol was taken to Maison Blanche by an American vehicle driven by an American driver who lost his way during the night but reached the aerodrome at 0500 hours the next morning. When the petrol was unloaded it was found that there was just sufficient to enable all the aircraft of the three squadrons to get into the air. During an attack on Algiers by approximately 30 enemy aircraft that took place at 0930 hours Nos. 43, 81 and 242 Squadrons between them inflicted the following casualties:-

O.R.B.  
No. 323 Wing

Destroyed	9 J.U.88.
	3 H.E.111.
Probably destroyed	2 J.U.88.
Damaged	8 J.U.88.

Resistance on the part of the French ceased at Algiers at mid-day on D-Day, and equipment from the assault vessels was brought into the harbour on D + 1 (9 November).

A.M. File  
C.26023  
Enc. 1A

No advance beyond Algiers was made on D + 1 as parleys with the French were still being carried on. On the following day, however, information was received that small numbers of Axis troops had arrived in Bizerta and Tunis and it became all the more imperative for the advance eastwards to be accelerated and for the aerodromes at Djidjelli and Bone to be seized without delay in order that the necessary air protection for the assault forces moving by sea and road could be provided.

Unfortunately, the seizure of the aerodrome at Djidjelli did not go according to plan and the breakdown in the aircraft refuelling arrangements that followed not only produced disastrous results but in all probability lengthened the North African campaign by several months. The circumstances were as follows.

O.R.B.s of H.Q. E.A.C.,  
232 and 233 Wings,  
3202 Servicing  
Commando,  
Gen. Anderson's  
Despatch,  
Admiral Cunningham's  
Despatch, plus verbal  
information obtained  
from  
A. V. M. MacGregor,  
A.O.A., E.A.C.,  
Gp. Capt. Passmore,  
Signals Officer  
E.A.C.,  
F/Lt. Wheadon, O.C.  
3202 S.C. and  
Gp. Capt. Edwardes-  
Jones, O.C.  
233 Wing

On 10 November (D + 2) a convoy left Algiers carrying the 36th Army Brigade for the capture of Port of Bougie. Also on the same day the S.S. Awatea left Algiers with one Army Battalion (the 5th Buffs), half of No. 3202 Servicing Commando, a supply of stores, oil, etc. and approximately 500 tons of petrol for Djidjelli. The plan was for the Battalion and the Servicing Commando to capture the aerodrome at the latter place to enable air protection to be provided over Bougie, some 36 miles distant. The Servicing Commando was to be disembarked over the beaches at Djidjelli with 30 tons of petrol and the R.A.F. stores to meet the initial requirements of No. 154 Squadron due to land on the aerodrome in the early morning of November 11. After discharging the initial supply of petrol, the Awatea was to proceed to Bougie harbour to off-load the remainder for normal transportation by road by the R.A.S.C. The Awatea carried no vehicles for the conveyance of petrol as it was intended that the Servicing Commando would manhandle the initial supply. Vehicles for the transportation by the R.A.S.C. of the main petrol supply were carried in M.T. ships which were included in the Bougie convoy.

E.A.C./211/1/Air  
Encl. 3

The Awatea reached Djidjelli at approximately 0200 hours on the morning of November 11 when the Senior Naval Officer on board decided that the surf on the beaches was too heavy to permit a landing, although in the opinion of some of the R.A.F. and Army personnel the conditions were not too unfavourable. The Awatea then proceeded to a point off Bougie where, with the rest of the Bougie convoy, she waited for several hours while the Naval representatives argued with the Bougie civil authorities. During this period of waiting, enemy P.R. aircraft appeared over the convoy and it was obvious that enemy attacks would follow. Despite this warning, however, the off-loading of Awatea did not commence until the forenoon and was not completed until 1625 hours.

In the meanwhile, the news that the capture of the aerodrome at Djidjelli had not been achieved as planned was



received at Eastern Air Command Headquarters and the move of No. 154 Squadron was postponed until November 12 on the understanding that the servicing commandos with the initial supply of petrol would be sent to Djidjelli from Bougie by road on the afternoon of November 11.

The arrangements for the air protection of the Bougie convoy during the assault stage were that the Navy would be responsible by means of carrier borne aircraft until 1200 hours on November 11, after which No. 154 Squadron would take over the charge. Unfortunately, the aircraft carrier with the Bougie convoy (H.M.S. Argus) was damaged during the morning of November 11 and although No. 154 Squadron had not been established at Djidjelli as planned, the Navy withdrew their air protection at 1200 hours in accordance with the original scheme. Attempts were then made to provide air protection by squadrons working from the Algiers district but the round trip of nearly 400 miles only permitted aircraft to operate for a few minutes over the convoy.

The first wave of enemy bombers appeared over Bougie harbour soon after 1300 hours on November 11. This was followed by a very heavy raid at dusk during which a number of the transports and supply ships of the assault force were sunk. From then on complete chaos appears to have reigned in the Bougie harbour area for the next twenty four hours.

The Servicing Commando, after completing the unloading of the Awatea, which was continued throughout the enemy attacks, attempted to find transport to convey themselves and the initial supply of petrol to Djidjelli by road. Vehicles could not, however, be provided because, although the M.T. ships containing transport entered Bougie harbour during the afternoon of November 11, no attempt was made to unload these ships, or what was left of them after the enemy had taken his toll, until November 13. A few vehicles, mostly Bren gun carriers, were discharged from other than M.T. ships during the afternoon of November 11 but these were immediately taken by the 5th Buffs to enable them to carry out their original task - the capture of the aerodrome at Djidjelli.

The Officer Commanding No. 3202 Servicing Commando, having failed to secure transport for his unit and petrol, contacted in turn both the Army and Naval authorities in an endeavour to find some means of achieving his task. Eventually he was able to obtain from the Navy the assurance that another attempt would be made at dawn on November 12 to take his party by sea to Djidjelli by means of six small landing craft. He then withdrew with his men to the hills behind Bougie to obtain a night's rest away from the bombing area. At dawn the promised landing craft had not materialised but he was able to secure, on an Army vehicle going to Djidjelli, sufficient room for an advance party of 1 Sergeant and 10 men.

Early on the morning of November 12, heavy enemy bombing again occurred and much damage to our shipping in the harbour resulted. Owing to the chaos that still reigned it was not until between 1100 and 1200 hours that the Navy was able to make the second attempt to carry the Servicing Commando and its valuable petrol to Djidjelli by sea. The small fleet of landing craft was attacked repeatedly during the voyage but reached their goal where a successful landing was made at midnight on November 12/13.

In the meanwhile, owing to the lack of communications, Eastern Air Command Headquarters was not informed that the alternative scheme to send petrol by road on November 11 had also failed and No. 154 Squadron was dispatched to Djidjelli aerodrome early on November 12. The aircraft were serviced on arrival by the advance party of the Servicing Commando. The Squadron then carried out one sortie with a limited number of aircraft by using petrol drained from the tanks of the remainder. During this sortie three enemy aircraft were destroyed and one damaged. The squadron was then immobilised until the arrival of the main servicing commando with the petrol. It commenced operating again at dawn on November 13, but by this time the 36th Brigade had lost much of their equipment and, for some time to come, were compelled to operate only with what they could carry and in the clothes they wore when they left the ships.

The capture of Bone aerodrome on November 12 was more successful. It was secured by two companies of No. 3 Parachute Battalion dropped by air while No. 6 Commando landed by sea and seized the port of Bone. This was followed up on the 13th by the transport by air of light A.A. guns and crews, ammunition and supplies, and by flying in No. 84 (Spitfire) Squadron. The aircraft of this and No. 111 Squadron which arrived a day later were serviced by personnel of No. 3202 Servicing Commando who were flown in by transport aircraft together with fuel, oil and ammunition from Maison Blanche. The amount of petrol available, however, was only sufficient to enable aircraft to be partially refuelled due to the fact that the Army who were responsible for major supplies failed to meet their task. On November 15 it became necessary to obtain more petrol by air from Maison Blanche in order to keep aircraft operational and it was not until the night of November 16, i.e. four days after Bone was captured, that the Army delivered their first supplies.

Petrol shortage was also experienced at Djidjelli for the first few days as the result of the Army failure to maintain supplies. When the first Army supply column did arrive on November 16 it was found that they had brought Diesel oil instead of the aviation spirit which had been urgently requested. A supply of the correct fuel was delivered during the night of November 16 but it was not until November 18, (D + 10) that sufficient petrol became available to meet all requirements.

The sections of No. 3202 Servicing Commando, both at Djidjelli and Bone, were called upon to work under hazardous conditions as the result of enemy activity during the early days of the campaign. Many aircraft crashes occurred at the former aerodrome due to its small dimensions and the heavy rain which played havoc with the landing surface. Salvage became a problem and unorthodox methods of recovering aircraft had to be adopted. At Bone the task of the personnel was rendered difficult by the wide dispersal policy necessitated by the enemy bombing and aircraft ground attacks which commenced immediately the aerodrome was captured. On November 15, thirteen bombing attacks were experienced and the servicing of aircraft was continually interrupted by enemy assaults during the days that followed. Despite these conditions and the fact that they lived and slept in the open without any form of cover in weather that at times was bad, the health and morale of all ranks suffered no ill-effect.

A.M. File  
C.26023 Enc. 1A

As Air Marshal Welsh described it in his report on the operation - "their conduct and efficiency was beyond all praise".

The Breakdown of the Maintenance Organisation that Followed the Landings

(a) The Lack of Information

A.M. File  
Admin.  
Plans 4/  
PA/T/8

The limited circulation given to the administrative orders and instructions for the Force and the key to the field unit service numbers was the cause of many of the troubles that were experienced. Insufficient copies of these documents had been prepared for issue when secrecy was no longer a ruling factor. Many units remained in ignorance of the arrangements for supply, servicing and repair after the landings had taken place and considerable confusion resulted owing to the inability of units to identify their equipment.

(b) The Unsatisfactory Supply Arrangements

Ibid  
Enc. 1A

The distribution of supplies was handicapped from the commencement of the operation by the chaos which reigned in the docks at Algiers for the first few weeks after D-Day. The R.A.F. embarkation staff consisted only of 3 officers and 23 other ranks who were quite unequal to the task of sorting the mountains of equipment discharged by the 3/4 ships unloading at each of the 14 quays. There was no organisation and no control. Senior officers came down to the docks, appropriated the first vehicles that took their fancy, and drove off in them. Units, having no key to the F.U.S. numbers were unable to identify their own equipment and took the first that came to hand. They discarded at leisure items that they did not require. They went to the length of appropriating signals vehicles to transport stores, tearing out and throwing away the fitted wireless sets and other gear.

The war schedules of equipment in accordance with which stores had been provisioned bore no relation to the needs of a combined operation in the early stages. The establishments laid down catered for all the requirements of a unit and not for the minimum essentials. The result was that not only were the docks swamped with piles of equipment which would not be needed for many weeks but, as there was no means of distinguishing between cases, much unnecessary equipment found its way to the forward areas in place of items urgently required. As an example of this, advanced units wanting aircraft spares for immediate use received large quantities of tropical clothing which would not be necessary for six or seven months, while a mobile stores park was inundated by 500 M.T. tyres, the loading of which alone took more than the lift of their available vehicles. (As each vehicle sent to North Africa carried three spares, the demand for tyres was negligible.)

EP/1  
Enc. 3A

No allowance had been made in the War Equipment Schedules for a reserve of certain items of squadrons equipment to be included in the pack-ups of the Air Stores Parks and Base Depot to meet losses by enemy



action. Several squadrons lost either all or part of their unit equipment through the sinking of shipping and had to borrow from other units or improvise until replacements could be effected from the United Kingdom.

Ibid  
Enc. 2A

The provision of bombs, ammunition, explosives, aviation fuel and lubricants proved to be adequate mainly because allowances had been made for heavy losses at sea which did not materialise. The earlier consignments of bombs, however, arrived without components, or with wrong components. No fusing links were available in the first month, or if available were not recognised. By the end of January, the process of marrying up bombs and tails had not been completed satisfactorily.

Ibid  
Enc. 3A

Losses of petrol were occasioned by leakage from the flimsy four gallon tins used as containers which also admitted water and provided a source of much engine trouble. (In comparison, the United States Air Force used 50 gallon steel drums for their petrol and motor-driven pumps for refuelling purposes. As the campaign developed the R.A.F. squadrons were able to obtain the loan of the American equipment and dispensed with their old-fashioned man-handled refuelling methods.)

Ibid  
Enc. 3A

The packing of the equipment was very bad. The majority of the cases employed were too large even when, as it often happened, the contents consisted of a comparatively small item surrounded by many cubic feet of shavings. Several crates of equipment each weighed 30 cwt. and could only be lifted by a crane which was not available.<sup>(1)</sup> The following examples read like a fairy tale:-

(a) A case weighing 28 lbs. contained nothing except three linen bags each holding  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of split pins.

(b) A number of 15 cwt. cases were packed with small M.T. spares of various kinds. No vouchers or other means of identifying the items were included.

(c) 30 cwt. cases (not very strong) were used for clothing. Many of these cases were broken whilst being off-loaded at Algiers. (From then on the Arab population was well clothed.)

(d) A case weighing 15 lbs. contained only two fly papers.

A.M. File  
S.73942  
24/8/1942

- (1) A general instruction was issued on 24 August, 1942, by the Director of Movements, Air Ministry, to the effect that in order to facilitate quick discharge, all packages containing the equipment of units sent overseas must be packed in cases which could be easily manhandled. This instruction was not specifically referred to in the special orders applicable to the Torch preparations and consequently would appear to have been overlooked.

(e) A case weighing 28 cwts. which should have held an aircraft mainplane contained small tools, fabric parts, general hardware, rusty armament spares and other items.

(f) A case marked "Distilled Water" contained 7 lbs. of mineral jelly, 12 bottles of ammonising tablets, 2 tins of mauve, 2 tins of green and 2 tins of blue ink,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. of aluminium welding flux, 1 lb. of powdered graphite and a box of red chalk.

(g) Two containers marked "Acid with Care" held M.T. spares.

Much equipment was damaged owing to containers being left in the pouring rain at Algiers. The root-end bolts for spare Spitfire wings were so badly corroded through lack of protective paint that they had to be discarded as useless. The same conditions applied to many M.T. parts.

The lack of sufficient vehicles for the transportation of equipment was aggravated by the fact that the M.T. drivers for the most part travelled apart from their vehicles and were often disembarked at different ports. With the need for each unit to obtain its transport quickly, a number of unskilled personnel were given vehicles to drive over difficult roads. This caused much unserviceability and a breakdown of convoy discipline.

Equipment distribution difficulties did not end at the docks area. The R.A.F. movement staff was entirely inadequate, with the result that when R.A.F. equipment reached rail junctions further forward, there were Army movement personnel only to deal with it. These did their best, but they had no key to the unit serial numbers and could only surmise for whom the equipment was intended. This generally ended in it being sent to the wrong R.A.F. unit who again, knowing no unit serial number but its own, could not dispose of the stores to their proper destination. Much of the equipment off-loaded from the first convoy did not reach the correct units until many weeks had elapsed.

Office stationery was completely missing from all units' pack-ups in the early stages of the campaign. It subsequently came to light that it had been sent to Hamble near Southampton instead of "Hamble" the code name for Algiers. Essential publications were also not available for some months after the commencement of the operation, but some units received:-

"Trumpet Calls" (A.P.162).

"Dress Regulations" (A.P.1358).

"Officers Messes" (A.P.128).

Air Ministry Weekly Orders from 1918 to 1933.

These publications that did arrive were not up-to-date and were accompanied by numerous loose amendments sheets attached to their outer covers. The Headquarters

Ibid  
Enc. 2A and 3A.  
Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T8 Enc. 1A

Engineer Staff having omitted to take essential publications with them were without a technical library for some considerable time.

EP/1. Enc. 3A

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8.  
Enc. 4A

The majority of the equipment personnel had not served overseas before under active service conditions. Like many others, they were lost and incapable of looking after themselves, the officers in particular, lacked powers of command and leadership.<sup>(1)</sup>

Difficulties were caused in certain squadrons owing to the lack of equipment officers. These were not provided as it was presumed that squadrons would be located on the same aerodrome or in close proximity to a Wing Headquarters, and that all equipment matters would be centralized through the wing equipment officers. In certain instances this procedure worked, but the squadrons in some Wings were located on aerodromes from 150 to 220 miles apart.

Equipment officers, qualified in explosives, and senior N.C.Os. were attached to some of the Army Ammunition Depots to assist and advise in the storage, handling, identification, receipt and issue of R.A.F. bombs, ammunition and explosives. These attachments proved invaluable but there were not enough of them and errors occurred where this liaison was not provided.

EP/1  
Enc. 3A

A number of R.A.F. equipment officers formerly employed on petroleum duties in No. 42 Group were also attached to Royal Army Service Corps bulk petrol companies for the identification of R.A.F. petrol. This arrangement was made on the recommendation of the 1st Army as the result of experience gained in France in 1939/40. In actual fact, however, it was discovered that the R.A.F. officers were no more qualified to certify 100 octane or any other fuels than the R.A.S.C. officers employed on similar duties.

#### (c) The Technical Troubles

Ibid

The seven days' supply of aircraft spares with which the squadrons were provided proved to be inadequate to keep aircraft serviceable as nearly a fortnight elapsed from the time the Air Stores Parks landed, found suitable accommodation, collected their equipment and were ready to make issues. (This period might have been extended had the docks been subjected to heavy enemy bombing during the disembarkation.)

The lack of sufficient spare propellers in the early stages was the cause of considerable unserviceability. The soft state of the aerodromes when the rains commenced caused a large number of aircraft to nose over and break their propellers without any other damage to the machines. Unfortunately, no allowance had been made for this unforeseen expenditure of propellers.

Ibid

- (1) A series of "Beach Organisation" courses for equipment officers was arranged early in 1942 to provide suitable officers for invasion operations. Although several officers passed through these courses, none was sent on Operation Torch.



A large number of Spitfire V aircraft were received fitted with hydromatic propellers. According to the information available this type of airscrew was not standard for the Spitfire V and no provision had been made for the spare propellers or hydromatic tool kits. The difficulty was overcome by the local manufacture of tools for the removal of the airscrews and arrangements were made for standard De Havilland type bracket propellers to be fitted. The work had only just commenced when a supply of hydromatic propellers was received from Gibraltar.

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8.  
Enc. 4A

Maintenance schedules, aircraft log books and serviceability forms were not available for a considerable time after operations commenced, consequently squadrons had at first no knowledge of the flying times of their aircraft and no information to assist them in carrying out the necessary servicing. Command Headquarters was not provided with a list of the aircraft despatched to North Africa or given details of the replacements that followed. It was therefore only with difficulty that the engineer staff were able to balance the casualty signals received from units with the known wastage in the Command, work out replacement programmes and render the returns called for by the Air Ministry.

EP/1.  
Enc. 3A

The lubricating oil provided for the aircraft engines was not correct. Instead of oil suitable for temporary climates being sent out for Merlin and Bristol engines, oil "for emergency use only" arrived for the former while the latter was given a lubricant designed for employment under tropical conditions.

(d) Mechanical Transport

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8.  
Enc. 1A  
and 4A

The condition of the mechanical transport vehicles allotted to the operation was far from satisfactory. One Humber "utility" had run 72,000 miles and was almost ready for the scrap heap on arrival. Of the remainder of the utility vehicles, the newest had completed 29,000 miles and the average had run from 50,000 to 60,000 miles before being sent out. (These old vehicles gave endless trouble by breaking down continually in the early stages.) A considerable number of vehicles required attention before they could be used. In some cases the accumulators had run down, in others, the water proofing had been too liberally applied. The water trailers had apparently been standing at maintenance units in the United Kingdom in a neglected state for long periods: their auxiliary pumping plants and filters were completely rusted up and unemployable. The equipment in the mobile cooking tenders was also unserviceable. Many of the vehicles provided were far too large for use on the bad and narrow roads of North Africa while the employment of trailers was found to be quite impracticable.

(e) Marine Craft

Many of the craft of the Air Sea Rescue Service arrived in a bad state and several weeks elapsed before they could be brought into use. Before the operation the boats had been handed over by their crews to

EP/1.  
Enc. 1A

No. 213 Maintenance Unit, Dumbarton, for the fitting of V.H.F. wireless and for packing for despatch to North Africa by sea transport. When handed over they were in good condition and fully equipped. The crews travelled to Algiers without the boats. When the craft were unloaded at Algiers it was found that a number had not been fitted with V.H.F.; several were in a filthy condition; some had unserviceable engines while others arrived with their engine tools, wireless tools and essential equipment missing. In one instance the gun turrets had been removed and stowed but the bolts necessary to replace the turrets had apparently been lost. Since no spares for marine craft had been provided it was only by robbing some that a proportion of the craft were made serviceable.

(f) Repair and Salvage Units

Ibid

The Repair and Salvage Units were unable to commence work on their arrival owing to the difficulty of locating their mechanical transport and equipment: some of this was lost by enemy action and some had been left behind owing to the shortage of shipping space. One R.S.U. made an effort to operate with tools borrowed from its mechanical transport and with improvised equipment. It achieved a limited amount of success but much more could have been done had it arrived with its complete establishment.

The Operation and the R.A.F. Maintenance Difficulties  
Continued. (Period 16 November, 1942 to 16 February, 1943)(1)

A.H.B.  
Narrative  
Operations in  
North Africa

The campaign after the landings in North Africa can be divided into three main phases:-

(a) A race for Tunis and Bizerta, undertaken by a small Army force on assault or light scales and consequently much under strength in men and equipment. (The Army just failed to win this race, after some bitter fighting in bad weather and Tunisian mud.)

(b) The period 28 December, 1942 to 27 March, 1943 during which both the Axis and the Allies were building up their forces and attempting to hold on to or seize ground important for the future while we also struggled incessantly to improve our immensely long communications. We were mainly on the defensive while the enemy staged attack after attack against the British, French and American forces.

(c) The Allied forces offensive period, starting on 28 March and ending with the final destruction of the Axis forces in Africa on 13 May, 1943.

This Chapter only covers, however, the maintenance of R.A.F. aircraft up to the 16 February, 1943, because on that date the Eastern Air Command was disbanded and its units were absorbed in the North West African Air Force which formed part of the Mediterranean Air Command. Under that Command

(1) For full details of R.A.F. operations during this period see A.H.B. Narrative on the Operations in North Africa.

the maintenance of the Royal Air Force in North Africa was re-organised.<sup>(1)</sup>

A.H.B. Narrative  
on Operations in  
North Africa

During the period 10 to 19 November, the First Army had moved forward, and first contact with the Axis troops was made on the 16 November (D + 8) in the Beja area and some 35 miles east of Tabarka. On 19 November (D + 11) the Army Commander decided, while leaving his Headquarters at Algiers where the Allied Force Headquarters, Headquarters Eastern Air Command and Headquarters Naval Forces were stationed, to move forward with a Command Post. This was established on 20 November at Jemmappes, near Philippeville. The R.A.F. were represented by the Senior Air Staff Officer and a small staff who joined the Post from Eastern Air Command Headquarters. The Post moved on 22 November (D + 14) to Constantine, on the 26 (D + 18) to Guelma, between Constantine to Bone, and on the 28 (D + 20) to Ain Seynour, in the mountains near Souk Ahras. Owing to the deficiencies in the signals system and to the many moves, communications between Headquarters and the Command Post and between Command Post and squadrons were extremely difficult.

O.R.B.s of  
appropriate  
Squadrons and  
Wing H.Qs.

Souk el Arba aerodrome was captured by British parachute troops on 16 November, making with Maison Blanche, Blida, Djidjelli and Bone, five aerodromes available for our aircraft. Consequently, while the 78th Division proceeded to move eastwards as fast as the troops and equipment were disembarked, the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command decided to accelerate the move-in of a number of squadrons. This calling forward of squadrons in advance of the plan, however, threw up two problems. One was that of aircraft servicing and repair facilities and the other the provision of petrol and small arms ammunition. The following chart (Diagram No. 3) shows the planned and the actual build-up of the units employed in Torch. It will be seen from this chart that under the planned arrangements the majority of the squadrons should have been joined by their maintenance personnel, air stores parks and repair salvage units within a few days of landing in North Africa. Actually, however, owing to squadrons being flown in regardless of maintenance considerations plus the fact that the technical personnel and units were not able to commence work immediately on arrival due to the causes previously described, the squadrons were compelled to operate for some time without unit equipment, adequate servicing and repair arrangements, transport and signals sections. The fighter squadrons of No. 324 Wing suffered in particular in this respect. It will be noted that it was originally planned that they should land the same day as their ground staffs and supporting A.S.P. and R.S.U., i.e. on D + 14. The flying elements of the squadrons were, however, called in on D + 3, 5, 6 and 8 respectively. They were not joined by their ground personnel until between D + 29 and D + 32 while their

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- (1) The formation of the Mediterranean Air Command which entailed a complete re-organisation of the Allied air forces not only in N.W. Africa but also in the Middle East and Malta, resulted from one of the decisions of the Casablanca Conference which took place in January, 1943. The manner in which the maintenance of the R.A.F. in North Africa was organised under the Mediterranean Air Command is described in Chapter 4 of this Volume.



maintenance units were not in a position to function on their behalf until D + 28.

O.R.Bs. of  
3202 and 3203  
Servicing  
Commandos

The lack of adequate maintenance facilities naturally had an adverse effect on the serviceability of aircraft but the gap was filled to a limited extent by the servicing commandos who were called upon to undertake the servicing of more squadrons and for a considerably longer period than had been originally intended. Instead of being relieved within a few days of the assault, the commandos were compelled to operate for five weeks without rest. Moreover, their activities were not confined to the maintenance of single seater fighter aircraft for which they had been provided. In turn they serviced Bisley, Beaufighter, Hudson, Wellington and U.S.A.A.F. Mitchell 1 aircraft. They were also forced to assume the responsibility of maintaining the stocks of petrol and small arms ammunition at aerodromes when the Army failed in their task of keeping up supplies. The following diagram shows the movements of the servicing commandos from the time they landed until they were absorbed in the base maintenance organisation.

O.R.Bs.  
of 255 and  
600 Squadrons

Maintenance difficulties also occurred when the first night-fighter operations commenced. It was decided during the planning stages of Torch that it would not be possible to provide night-fighter facilities early in the operation owing to the demand on shipping space for equipment (both Army and Air Force) which was more appropriate to the Army's advance eastwards. Nos. 255 and 600 Squadrons were initially detailed to provide a night-fighter cover but they were scheduled not to be brought into use until D + 28. The Air Ministry also decided from the security aspect that the Radar installations in the Beaufighter aircraft of the squadrons should be removed for the flyout from the United Kingdom and taken to North Africa by sea with the ground parties due to arrive at Algiers on D + 28. With the rapid advance of the First Army and the difficulty of securing forward aerodromes, the A.O.C. Eastern Air Command decided to employ the two Beaufighter squadrons as long-range day fighters. They were therefore called in on D + 7 and D + 10 respectively but the attempt to operate the aircraft without the highly specialised maintenance procedure which the type demanded was not successful. The result was poor serviceability and an excessive rate of wastage.

A.H.B.  
Narrative on  
Operations in  
North Africa

On 20 November (D + 12) the enemy made his first attacks by night on Algiers, and continued for five nights round the full moon. It was then decided to employ the Beaufighter squadrons in their proper role of night-fighting, but without Radar the aircraft were, of course, of little value. When the enemy attacks by night continued, Headquarters Middle East was called upon for assistance. As a result, one flight of No.89 Squadron, fitted with Radar, arrived on D + 17. A supply of Radar equipment was also flown out from the United Kingdom in a Fortress bomber and efforts were made to fit it in a number of aircraft of both 255 and 600 Squadrons. At this juncture the squadrons were being maintained by members of the aircrew, the ground personnel of No.608 (Hudson) Squadron and mechanics from No. 106 Repair and Salvage Unit. These found the task of equipping the aircraft for night-fighting extremely difficult as they lacked the specialist knowledge and gear essential for the work. The ship carrying the sea parties of 255 and 600 Squadrons with the night-flying equipment did, in

O.R.Bs. of  
255 and 600  
Squadrons

fact, arrive at Algiers on the scheduled date - D + 28 - but the R.A.F. personnel were not permitted to land as the ship was ordered to proceed to Bone where urgently needed elements of the Army (who formed the major part of the ships company) were required for the fighting area. The ground personnel of the two squadrons were disembarked at Bone but experienced the same difficulties as the R.A.F. units at other ports.

No. 255 Squadron lost a proportion of its equipment during unloading and had to call on No. 600 Squadron to make up the deficiencies in order that a number of 255 Squadron's aircraft flown in to Bone could be made operational. The personnel of 600 Squadron eventually returned to Algiers by sea and joined their aircraft on D + 35.

Ibid and  
O.R.B. of  
153 Squadron

In the middle of December an additional night-fighter squadron (No. 153) was flown out from the United Kingdom. This squadron also arrived without its Radar equipment but was joined by a small percentage of its ground crews with the necessary items three days later, i.e. on D + 46. The maintenance personnel and spares provided for this squadron were quite inadequate and it was only by drawing on both Nos. 255 and 600 Squadrons for men and material that No. 153 was kept operational.

A.H.B.  
Narrative on  
Operations in  
North Africa

In the meanwhile the advance of the First Army continued. The Army Commander had hoped to launch his attack on Tunis by 22 November. He was, however, not in a position to do so owing to delay in moving supplies forward. In addition to the fighter squadrons, the two Bisley bomber squadrons (Nos. 18 and 114) allotted to the operation were called forward. No. 18 arrived from England on the night of November 11 and was operating on the night of the 12th. No. 114 Squadron followed on November 15. For the first few days, these two squadrons were maintained solely by their air crews and yet with great vigour pressed home their attacks by day and night on the aerodromes at Bizerta and Tunis. With their small bomb load and poor performance, their capacities were, however, somewhat limited. On the 18 November they were augmented by two bomber reconnaissance Bisley squadrons, Nos. 13 and 614. The R.A.F. bomber effort, light as it was, was concentrated on the enemy aerodromes of Tunis and Bizerta and their satellites in order to secure some measure of air superiority and allow the troops more freedom to move. When the proposed attack on Tunis on the 22 November was postponed, the bombers were switched on to the ports in order to delay as much as possible the Axis build-up.

Ibid

Towards the end of November the R.A.F. bomber effort was increased by the addition of from 12 to 18 B.17s and one squadron of D.B.7. day bombers which the Americans made available. The Americans were, however, handicapped by the fact that their supplies were being brought in through Oran and Casablanca. Moreover, they operated by day only and it was necessary to increase the night activities. It was not until the 18 December that the night bomber force was augmented by the arrival of Nos. 142 and 150 (Wellington) Squadrons from the United Kingdom.

After postponing the battle on 22 November, General Anderson decided to attack on 2 December but he was forestalled by the enemy attacking on the 1st. Up to this time our fighter squadrons had been working at maximum effort in the defence of ports. During the period of the concentration



of the Army for the attack on 2 December, heavy air fighting developed in the forward area and because of the inefficiency of the maintenance organisation it became difficult to keep the strength of squadrons up to establishment. At times, particularly when the enemy attacks on our aerodromes became more frequent, our aircraft strength dropped dangerously; the small reserve at Gibraltar proved insufficient, and the state was still unsatisfactory even after Spitfires allotted to the Americans had been diverted to R.A.F. squadrons.

The Army attack planned for 2 December was postponed to 9 December. Weather, however, forced a further postponement until 24 and again to 26 December, when with a final break in the weather, it was postponed indefinitely. By the end of November our forces had reached a line roughly Mateur - Djedeida - Tebourba. By the end of December they were forced to withdraw to a line roughly Cape Serrat - Medjez el Bab - Djebel Mansour. In January, 1943, with the rapid advance of the Eighth Army into Tripolitania a regrouping of the armies in North Africa was decided upon and it was resolved that no further advance would be made by the First Army until about the middle of March.

Admin. Plans/  
4/PA/T/8  
Enc. 1A and 9A

Throughout the period of the Army's attempt to reach Tunis, the R.A.F. maintenance organisation was still trying to find its feet. The Base Equipment Depot (No. 351 Maintenance Unit) arrived on 23 November. It had been intended that an advance party for the depot should land 14 days before the main component and first pack-ups of stores in order to select a suitable site, settle accommodation for personnel and make all preparations for the receipt, sorting and storage of equipment. Owing to the disorganisation at the docks, however, the advance party had to be used to run an "Equipment Transit Dump" which was not clear of other units' stores for some seven or eight weeks afterwards. The result was a most serious congestion within the area allotted to the Base Maintenance Unit and a considerable delay in the unpacking and ultimate functioning of the unit.

A.M. File  
1673/Org.  
22.2.1943

The delay in bringing the depot on to a working basis was also aggravated by the complete lack of suitable R.A.F. arrangements in North Africa for the reception of both personnel and equipment. (The Base Personnel Office did not commence to function until five weeks after the first landings were made.) The equipment required by the Base Depot in the initial stages was in many instances the last to be off-loaded from the ships. Furthermore, when the cases had been discharged and stacked, most of their markings were found to have been obliterated and it was not possible to identify the equipment. The difficulty of manhandling heavy packages without proper lifting tackle resulted in the damage of many items. The equipment received for squadrons from home stations had in many instances been badly packed, the cases containing an assortment of heavy and delicate items without any form of insulating material to prevent damage.

When the Depot was eventually established, the personnel establishment and the accommodation allocated to it proved to be totally inadequate. Approximately 150,000 square feet was required to house the equipment received, but only a space of 20,000 had been provided. Extreme difficulty was experienced in obtaining additional storage room because the allocation of buildings was in the hands of the Army who naturally gave



priority to their own requirements. Eventually some more space in farm buildings was found by the unit commander and the R.A.F. Base Commandant.

The troubles of the Repair and Salvage Units also grew apace. As the result of the delay in their coming into action there was accumulation of aircraft casualties before they had become established and in their efforts to cope with the situation they became practically immobilised. Then the fact that no repair depot had been included in the force compelled them to take on repairs which would normally only be undertaken by a base depot.

Another cause of embarrassment from the mobility aspect was the rapidity with which Morocco and Algeria were occupied followed by the stiffening enemy resistance in Tunisia which called for more intensive and protracted air warfare on an essentially mobile basis. It was in these circumstances that the Chief Maintenance Officer of the Eastern Air Command might have been expected to redistribute his resources in the manner so successfully employed by the Middle East Command during the Libyan campaign. That he did not do so may, in part, be accounted for by his lack of experience of overseas modern warfare. Incidentally, however, the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, through his C.M.S.O., offered the services of one of his officers experienced in the maintenance requirements of mobile warfare and actually despatched him on such a mission, but the results were disappointing as the Eastern Air Command were of the opinion that their own methods were satisfactory. It is also noteworthy that the Director of Servicing and Maintenance, Air Ministry cabled the Eastern Air Command on 17 November, 1942 as follows:-

"Secret. TX.6503 17 Nov. For C.M.O. We are considering repair backing best suited to meet your requirements behind R.S.U.s. Present intention to form one advanced depot approximately 300 technical personnel with same range of tools and general equipment as R.S.U. but double quantity. Scope of repair would be limited to repair by replacement of major components both engine and air-frame. We lack knowledge of existing civil or other engineering facilities which might be very valuable to meet R.A.F. requirements and so increase scope of repair. Request you advise as soon as opportunity offers prospect of so using local facilities and whether you consider exploitation of these facilities should take priority of formation of advanced depot."

A "hastener" on 4 December, 1942, failed to produce a reply. Eventually an officer from the Directorate of Servicing and Maintenance Air Ministry, was sent out but his visit was too close to the Casablanca Conference for its consequences to be fully effective.

The state of the aerodromes in North Africa presented considerable difficulty both from the operational and maintenance aspect. The two near Algiers - Blida and Maison Blanche were good but the congestion of aircraft and equipment sent there in the early stages was aggravated by the large number of French aircraft which had not been evacuated. Other aerodromes were small with no facilities of any kind and barely adequate for modern aircraft. That at Bone, one of the most important, consisted of two narrow

Report No.  
78/1943 of  
the A.M.  
Establishments  
Committee.  
Section V

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U.S. Publication "The  
Air Force Engineer"  
No. 24, 1945

runways, one of 600 yards, and the other of 800 yards. It was impracticable to move aircraft off these runways, even in dry weather, owing to the rough nature of the ground. Moreover there were no satellites and no satisfactory dispersal facilities until Summerfield track was laid as hard standings. During December, weather seriously affected air operations. The aerodromes became waterlogged with the incessant rain and although various methods of laying Summerfield track on rushes or on cork were tried out, they proved to be abortive. At Bone aerodrome a bomb crater revealed that the mud at that particular spot was 18 feet deep.

The Alterations made in the Maintenance Organisation  
in January, 1943

Report No. 78/  
1943 of the A.M.  
Establishments  
Committee

The Eastern Air Command did, of course, take some steps to re-organise its maintenance organisation in the light of the experience gained during the first two months of the campaign and to meet the needs of the military situation at that date, but actually the resources of the R.S.U.s. and, in some measure, the squadron servicing personnel, were not used to the best advantage. Furthermore beyond the introduction of a small engine repair shop nothing was done to provide the adequate base repair organisation which by the beginning of 1943 had become so urgently necessary.

E.A.C.  
File 2426/  
1401/S.  
Enc. 8A

The Command's estimation of the maintenance requirements were contained in a memorandum issued by the new Air Officer i/c Administration (Air Commodore MacFadyen) on 19 January, 1943. The policy was governed by:-

- (a) The distance from the main military base at Algiers and the aerodromes in the forward area at Souk-el Arba, Souk-el-Khemis and Canrobert.
- (b) The limitations imposed upon supply owing to the restricted transport facilities available and the fact that those facilities - road, rail and sea - had to be shared with the First Army and the 12th U.S. Air Force.
- (c) The physical contour in North Africa which rendered difficult and restricted the use of road transport to and from the forward area.

To overcome these limitations three maintenance areas were introduced. They were:-

- (i) The Forward Maintenance Area including the aerodromes above-mentioned plus Bone and any other landing grounds in the above forward area brought into use at a later date.
- (ii) The Line of Communications Maintenance Area including the aerodromes at Constantine, Philippeville, Djidjelli, Setif and any other aerodromes constructed at a later date within the boundary of the L of C area.
- (iii) The Base Maintenance Area including aerodromes at Maison Blanche, and Blida, and any new ones in that area.

The maintenance personnel in the forward area were reduced to a minimum to enable squadrons to be placed on a mobile basis capable of movement with their own M.T. at short

notice. The remainder of the personnel were withdrawn and absorbed into rear echelons.

Air Stores Parks in the forward area were also reduced to hold "immediate issue" stocks only, the surplus personnel being used to form an Advanced Maintenance Unit in the L of C area. The Repair and Salvage Units were divided between the L of C area and the Base area, leaving only small mobile sections to work with the squadrons in the forward area.

The L of C Maintenance area was designed to support the units in the forward area, to relieve that area of heavy equipment and to avoid the long haul from Algiers. Units in the L of C area being mainly static, pooling of R.S.U. and A.S.P. resources was possible. Beside supporting the forward units, the L of C area required to maintain the squadrons operating in that area, following generally the Wing Organisation pattern.

In the Base Maintenance Area the Wing Organisation became eclipsed, squadron ground personnel being absorbed into the station organisation. A Base Maintenance Unit was established at Hussein Dey together with two Air Stores Parks which were amalgamated. Two Repair and Salvage Units were located at Maison Blanche and Blida respectively.

Aircraft repairs were effected at all aerodromes where the work was possible, otherwise the aircraft were withdrawn either to the R.S.U.s. in the L of C area or to the Base area.

The memorandum, although containing a considerable amount of detail, left the squadrons in doubt as to the amount of servicing work they were to undertake and the R.S.U.s. lacked guidance as to the amount of work they were to perform. Consequently instead of concentrating their energies on maintaining the aircraft of the Wings to which they were attached, the R.S.U.s. wasted a great deal of time in reducing to components for return to No. 351 (Equipment) Maintenance Unit through their Air Stores Parks, all the aircraft which they considered were beyond their repair. They were also told to strip for examination and report engines suspected of failure. Two R.S.U.s. were located at sites at which there were no airfields and none was allotted its own salvage area, an error which at times resulted in salvage parties from two different R.S.U.s. arriving to deal with the same crash.

To quote a few typical examples of the rate at which unserviceable equipment accumulated as the result of the failure of the Command to appreciate the need for setting up an adequate repair organisation, there were at Maison Blanche (No. 106 R.S.U.) by the middle of February, 1943:-

- 50 Spitfires in a dismantled state
- 100 Propellers awaiting repair
- 100 Merlin engines requiring overhaul

(with a further 100 in the forward area).

In addition to the lack of direction, the difficulties of the R.S.U.s. in North Africa were intensified by reason of the fact that their personnel were only manned and equipped to undertake the repair and servicing of the types of aircraft contained in the Wing to which they were attached. As the operations developed, it became necessary to make certain

Report No. 78/  
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Committee  
Section V

Ibid

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8  
Enc. 4A



adjustments in the composition of the Wings and the R.S.U.s were called upon to handle types of aircraft with which they were inexperienced. In the case of No. 107 R.S.U. which was responsible for the maintenance of the Hudson aircraft used by No. 328 Wing for anti-submarine patrols, owing to the excessive amount of flying carried out by the squadrons of the Wing, the R.S.U. had not the facilities to perform the major inspections of the Hudson aircraft when they became due. Eastern Air Command consequently recommended that the aircraft should be flown to the United Kingdom for the work to be done. The Air Ministry, however, ruled that Middle East Command should undertake it instead. This procedure was introduced but proved unprofitable as North Africa required a steady flow of two major inspections per week which the Middle East were not able to produce. Eventually the policy was renewed and Hudson aircraft were thereafter flown to the United Kingdom for their major inspections.

The Reasons for the Failure of the Maintenance  
Arrangements during Operation Torch

The breakdown of the maintenance arrangements during operation Torch is attributed to the following:-

- (a) The lack of appreciation by the Air Staff planners of the importance of the maintenance arrangements in relation to the operational scheme.
- (b) Insufficient time being allowed before the operation for the organisation of maintenance on adequate lines.
- (c) The excessive degree of secrecy imposed during the planning period.
- (d) The employment of inexperienced staff officers at Eastern Command Headquarters.
- (e) The use of out-of-date and unrealistic war equipment schedules.
- (f) Inefficiency of the personnel of the maintenance units in the United Kingdom responsible for providing the "pack-ups" for the force.
- (g) Lack of training of the ground units in the role they were called upon to perform.

Air Staff Methods

Narrator's  
investigations

As regards (a) every student of history and almost every schoolboy must have heard of Napoleon's adage "An army marches on its stomach." It would appear, however, from the errors made in the administrative arrangements connected with R.A.F. operations during the first years of the war that few officers

appreciated the full significance of the old saying or realised that its modern counterpart was (to coin a phrase) "An air force flies on its ground organisation". A study of the methods adopted by the high level planners of the R.A.F. during the period from the outbreak of the war to the launching of Torch indicates a tendency for the Air Staff to over-emphasize striking power at the expense of maintenance and for many senior officers to become tactics-conscious to the exclusion of other considerations.(1)

In contrast to the system used in the Army whereby no operations were planned without the Quarter Master General first being consulted as to whether the equipment for a project envisaged could be made available, R.A.F. high level planners did not as a rule consult the Heads of the Engineering and Equipment branches before deciding on a plan of campaign to be followed. Both the Director of Equipment (A) and the Director of Servicing and Maintenance at the Air Ministry, when asked in May, 1943 to comment on the failure of the Torch maintenance arrangements, drew attention to the disadvantages of the R.A.F. method of planning. D. of E.(A) said:

A.M. File  
EP/1  
Enc. 6B

"The heads or heads of the equipment service should be consulted and be present to advise on supply matters at all high level initial meetings for projects of this kind. In the Air Force the Director General of Equipment is frequently not asked, and, when he is, his advice is just as frequently set aside."

D.S.M.'s comments, after strongly recommending that a repair depot should be put into the field as soon as possible after the striking force had moved forward, were:-

A.M. File  
LM/PDDSM/  
MS/5 dated  
8.5.1943

"D.S.M. was not consulted in the planning stage of Torch and was not therefore able to advise on the repair and servicing requirements. In the past it has been most apparent that the planning branches and Director of War Organisation attached little importance to repair requirements."

- (1) The following two incidents alleged to be true which bear some relation to this contention are considered worthy of record. (The information was obtained by the narrator from reliable sources but, for obvious reasons, the names of the informers and the officers concerned are not stated.)

The first story concerns a certain Air Officer Commanding who on being presented in the early days of the war with a maintenance plan by his chief engineer officer, retorted: "Don't you people realise there's a war on. We can't be bothered with this bloody silly maintenance nonsense!"

In the second incident another A.O.C. who on being told that his demand for 100% aircraft strength to be available at all times could not be met because certain inspections were necessary from time to time, replied: "We don't need inspections in war time. I expect my aircraft to be in the air not on the ground undergoing inspections!"

One surprising aspect of the maintenance preparations for Torch is the fact that although drastic steps (instituted at Cabinet level) had been taken twelve months earlier to place the servicing and repair organisation in the Middle East on a proper footing and that a team of some of the most experienced engineer officers in the R.A.F. had been working to that end in Cairo since June, 1941, no advice on overseas methods under war conditions, or the services of a technical staff officer from the Middle East Command were obtained by the Torch planners. Before Torch was launched, the Middle East maintenance organisation was already a going concern. Vast changes in the R.A.F. overseas system of supply, servicing, and repair were introduced during 1941 and 1942, but no attempt appears to have been made by the Torch planners to ascertain the reasons for the alterations or to take heed of the lessons to be learned from Middle East experience. A case in point is the failure to include in the North Africa maintenance organisation such units as Supply and Transport Columns, Air Ammunition and Fuel Parks, Equipment Transit Dumps, an M.T. Light Repair Unit and a Base Repair Depot, all of which had been found necessary by the Middle East for mobile operations. As regards the Base Repair Depot, it will have been observed from Chapter 1 of this Volume that one of the major reasons for the breakdown of the maintenance arrangements in the Middle East was because the Director of War Organisation advised the elimination of the Base Depot in favour of Repair and Salvage Units. In preparing for the Torch operation D.W.O. again decided that a base repair depot was not necessary and that R.S.U.s. would meet all requirements. In coming to this decision it would appear that either D.W.O. or his advisers had little conception of the capabilities of an R.S.U. as constituted or knowledge of the fact that it was not possible for such units to function efficiently for any length of time without a base backing.

In the administrative instructions issued for Torch it was stated that the R.S.U.s were to undertake repair on site and repair at base of aircraft not falling within the category of unit repair. They were also to reduce to components airframes, engines, ancillary equipment and mechanical transport damaged beyond repair. Actually, however, they were not organised or given the tools to perform much of work detailed which required the facilities and special equipment only to be found at a depot. In attempting to undertake depot work the R.S.U.s became, of course, immobilised and failed to achieve the purpose for which they were designed.

It is difficult to understand why the experience of the Middle East was ignored during the planning period - the information was available. A number of reports had been forwarded to the Air Ministry, the Establishments Committee spent several weeks in the Middle East in the Autumn of 1941 and the Air Officer Commanding the Egyptian Maintenance Group (Air Commodore Cooke) returned to the United Kingdom whilst the Torch preparations were in progress.<sup>(1)</sup> At a later date,

Information  
from  
A. V. M. Cooke  
1946

- (1) Air Commodore Cooke, when reporting to the Air Ministry on his return from overseas duty, enquired whether information was required on the manner in which the Middle East maintenance arrangements had been reorganised. He received a negative reply and was not informed that preparations for a landing in North Africa were under way.



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Establishments  
Committee

i.e. in February 1943, Air Marshal Coningham, the former A.O.C. of the Desert Air Force, on assuming command of the Tactical Air Command was surprised to find that the arrangements in Tunisia were exactly as they had been when he took over the command of the Western Desert Air Force and that no attempt had been made to apply the lessons of the Western Desert warfare, although, in many respects the conditions in Tunisia were similar.

The Time Factor

It will be remembered that from the date of the issue of the final plan, only 13 days remained in which to decide on the amount and type of equipment required and the order in which it would be needed. Under those circumstances it is not surprising that the arrangements made proved to be unsatisfactory. Equipment requirements, both as to types and quantities must be established early enough to provide ample time for the procurement and distribution of the necessary items and for the training of the personnel to handle them. Before Torch was launched it had already been decided that certain types of equipment in use in the R.A.F. such as trailers, cooking vehicles, etc. were not suitable for overseas operations, but the supply position did not permit of the correct type of equipment being made available in the limited period allowed for the preparation and the expedition had to "make do" with what was to be found in the home maintenance units.

Secrecy

During the planning of Torch the need for secrecy was of paramount importance. Secrecy was certainly maintained but owing to the degree of security imposed certain branches of the staff and services of the Command, and also of the Air Ministry, or members of them, were unaware of developments. Had they been taken more fully into the confidence of the planning staff, they would have been able more effectively to carry out their responsibilities and undoubtedly matters would have worked more smoothly once the operation was mounted. It appears to have been forgotten that once an expedition sails, responsibility changes hands and that it is therefore imperative that throughout every aspect of administrative planning the specialist branches must be kept informed of every stage of development and change in the operational plan.

One of the many unfortunate features of the security arrangements was that officers called upon to provide equipment for the expedition were kept in ignorance of the destination of the Force. As a result, the "pack-ups" included many items not suitable for North Africa and left out equipment which was urgently required. Another was the confusion caused by ignorance on the part of units of the supply and maintenance arrangements after the landings had taken place, due to the restricted issue of the administrative instructions for the Force. A third was the inability of units to identify their equipment because for security reasons they had not been provided with a key to the field units service numbers with which their "pack-ups" were marked.

To the excessive security measures may also be attributed the reason why certain equipment arrived in North Africa in an

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8  
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A.M. File  
Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8

A.M. File  
Equipment  
Plans EP/1  
Enc. 3A

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8.  
Enc. 6A

Narrator's  
experience

unserviceable condition. Take, for instance, the Humber utility vehicles, some of which were only fit for the scrap heap. The decision to use that particular type of vehicle was made apparently regardless of the supply position. No new vehicles were available so they were taken from those units in the United Kingdom which possessed them. To properly understand how a vehicle could be sent on an important expedition such as Torch in an unserviceable condition, it is necessary to explain in detail what happens under normal conditions when a vehicle is taken from a unit at short notice. "A" is the officer at Air Ministry who is responsible for the allocation of Humber vehicles. "B" is the M.T. officer at a Command Headquarters, "C" is the M.T. officer at a Group Headquarters, "D" represents the M.T. officers at units. "A", "B", "C" and "D" are completely ignorant of the fact that a landing in North Africa has been planned. "A" is instructed by his superior officer to obtain, say 50 Humber utilities from home units and send them to "X" M.U. Owing to the secrecy measures imposed he is not informed of the purpose for which they are required. He passes the information on to "B" who informs "C" accordingly. "C", in order to avoid, if possible, leaving some units without a "utility", selects those which possess two or more of the type required and instructs them to send one to the maintenance unit. "D" has two Humber utilities on his charge, one good, one bad. He is told to give up one of them. Human nature being what it is he, of course, gets rid of the bad one and is probably thankful to see the last of it. All the other "D"s behave in exactly the same manner with the result that the worst vehicles in the country arrive at the maintenance unit and are despatched on the expedition. Had any one of the officers in the chain responsible for the provision of the vehicles been advised that they were to be used on an overseas operation, the best and not the worst would undoubtedly have been sent.

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8.  
Enc. 10A

Excessive security or lack of detailed knowledge of the planning although responsible for the state of some of the equipment sent out, cannot be blamed for the condition of much of it or for the mistakes made such as faulty packing, marking of packing cases, bad organisation, disregard of loading priorities, etc. It is conceivable, however, that supervision at the maintenance units which provided the "pack-ups" would have been better had they possessed the knowledge for what purpose the "pack-ups" were intended. When as in Torch, the landing is made in a potentially friendly country, some risk of subsequent delays, disorganisation and inconvenience must be accepted, in order to safeguard the principle of initial surprise. The degree of efficient organisation must always, however, be balanced against the claims of security. As the Director of Equipment (A) remarked when it was all over:-

A.M. File  
EP/1 Enc. 6B.  
dated 2.5.43

"Secrecy becomes a fetish with some people, and the effect upon the provision of the right equipment for the job in hand is usually disastrous."

#### Inexperienced Staff Officers

Information from  
A. V. M. MacGregor  
and Gp. Capt. Cartmel  
1947

In selecting officers to deal with maintenance problems at Eastern Air Command Headquarters, little consideration was apparently given to their capabilities as staff officers.

The equipment branch with the exception of the Senior Equipment Staff Officer comprised officers of the Volunteer Reserve who had received no staff training. The officers appointed to the engineer branch, although all good engineering officers, had very little knowledge of staff work. All but the Chief Engineer Officer were drawn from Bomber Command and were not conversant with the types of aircraft (60% fighters) employed. None had previous overseas experience under war conditions. (1)

#### War Equipment Schedules

The equipment "pack-ups" used for the Torch operation were unfortunately based on war schedules prepared under peace conditions. Although attempts were made by the Director General of Equipment's staff during 1941 and 1942 to amend the scales to meet actual war needs, little progress had been made by the time Torch was launched. In May 1943, the Director of Equipment (A) drew attention to the fact that the schedules were still neither realistic nor up-to-date.

EP/1  
Enc. 6B

The Army 5th Corps employed in Torch paid considerable attention to the question of "light scales" and, as a result, their troops landed with balanced unit equipment which was sufficient to maintain them until the units' second and third echelons of stores arrived. In contrast, the R.A.F. went ashore with full-scale equipment which included large quantities of domestic articles, clothing and other non-priority stores which occupied valuable shipping space and caused confusion during the early days of the build-up.

Ibid  
Enc. 2A

Apart from the fact that the R.A.F. schedules of equipment bore little relation to the actual needs of the expedition, there was undoubtedly a great deal of "loose thinking" on the part of D.G.E.'s staff responsible for issuing instructions to the Maintenance Units which packed the equipment. No consideration was apparently given to the fact that the multiplications of quantities which are necessary when the provisioning for a large number of units is calculated produces figures which are all out of proportion to future requirements, otherwise the overloading of an Air Stores Park with a vast number of unwanted tyres or the issue to a unit of 4,500 tins of metal polish (which also occurred) would not have taken place.

Ibid  
Enc. 4B

The lack of provision for losses en route or during the landings also shows that little thought was given by the equipment planners to the needs of an expedition proceeding overseas under conditions of war, although this mistake may in some measure be attributed to the fog of secrecy which prevailed.

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- (1) The Director of Servicing and Maintenance, Air Ministry, who selected the officers, stated afterwards - "The limited capabilities of the Engineer Staff of Eastern Air Command were all too apparent but, owing to the short notice given we had to post those officers who were readily available. It takes time to extract the suitably qualified officers from the Commands."



### Inefficiency of Home Maintenance Units

The condition in which equipment arrived in North Africa due to faulty packing, incorrect marking of cases, the use of boxes of a size out of all proportion to their contents, indicates a considerable degree of inefficiency at those maintenance units responsible for providing the "pack-ups." As previously stated, had there been less secrecy, better results might have been obtained, but the fact remains that during the Torch preparations, the supervision at maintenance units and the quality of the work of their personnel was not all it should have been.<sup>(1)</sup>

### Training of Ground Units

Admin. Plans  
4/PA/T/8  
Enc. 1A

Apart from the operational squadrons and servicing commandos the majority of the units sent to North Africa were formed ad hoc for the occasion and were landed over the beaches as a crowd of individuals who had not only never worked together before, but were still uncertain as to each others' names and faces. The result was that, at a time when the maximum efficiency was required from everyone, a large number of units were still in the process of "finding their feet."

Narrator's  
experience

The reason why the administrative units employed in Torch arrived in North Africa in an untrained state was because no organisation was in existence in the R.A.F. whereby the personnel of newly-formed units such as Air Stores Parks, Repair and Salvage Units, etc. could be given the operational training necessary to enable them to perform their role efficiently under active service conditions. Whereas flying personnel received elementary training, advanced training, operational training, and finally squadron experience before they went into battle, technical and equipment personnel were posted direct from their training establishments to operational units where the extent of their subsequent usefulness depended upon the past experience and efficiency of their unit and whether or not the unit took the trouble to continue their training on operational lines. There was, however, no declared policy on the matter. In the case of the Torch ground units, since they were formed especially for the operation and consequently had never previously been employed on the work they were intended to perform in North Africa, some arrangement should have been made by either the Director of War Organisation or Eastern Command Headquarters whereby they could have gained operational experience before proceeding overseas. For instance, each Air Stores Park and Repair and Maintenance Units, whose role in North Africa was to maintain a number of squadrons under a Wing organisation, a system not used for home units, should have been attached to their respective wings soon after they were formed and given

Narrator's  
experience

- (1) After America entered the war it was observed that their methods of packing equipment were considerably in advance of those practised in the R.A.F. and remained so until the end of hostilities. Whereas the Americans "tailored" their cases to meet the job and took various measures according to the type of equipment to prevent damage en route, the R.A.F. system was often to employ "any old box" that came to hand and use straw, paper, etc. to take up the unoccupied space.

practice in their duties until the time came for their departure. Such a measure was not, however, considered necessary by the planners although sufficient time was available for it to be implemented. The R.S.U.s were formed at maintenance units well in advance of their embarkation dates and after a short period of technical instruction were transferred to Personnel Despatch Centres where some of them remained for as long as two months before sailing. The A.S.P.s received no equipment training. They were formed at the P.D.C.s and stayed there for from ten to twelve weeks. Their instruction before embarkation consisted mainly of drill and defensive measures.

It is interesting to record that the necessity for providing operational training for R.A.F. ground units forming part of an expeditionary force was still not appreciated when the question of the lessons to be learned from the Torch failures was discussed by Air Ministry Directorates in 1943. On April 29, the Director of Manning, commenting on statements made that the Torch ground units were untrained said the reports were exaggerated because units were formed and given intensive training at P.D.C.s for periods varying from four to twelve weeks before embarkation. He added that he himself had visited the P.D.C.s when the training was going on and saw it in progress. The Director of Manning did, of course, see some form of "toughening" training going on but as the training was under the direction of the Director General of Ground Defence it was entirely non-technical. What the Director of Manning did not see was Air Stores Parks practising landing their supplies over beaches and issuing stores to mobile squadrons under active service conditions, or Repair and Salvage Units gaining experience in the servicing, repair and salvaging of aircraft under the difficulties imposed by overseas warfare. The P.D.C.s had not the facilities to provide such instruction.

D.W.O./1651  
dated 29.4.43

Narrator's  
experience

Official  
History of  
the Original  
XII Air Force  
Service Command  
from August 1942  
to January 1944

The ideas of the American XII Air Force employed in Torch on the subject of the training necessary for ground maintenance units appear to have been considerably in advance of those of the R.A.F. Although many of the American troops arrived in North Africa in only a partially-trained state and, as their historian put it, the 72nd Signal Company had "teletype operators who could not type and linemen who had never been up a pole", the majority of their aircraft maintenance sections were trained as complete units and did actually operate with squadrons in England, undertaking the issue of supplies and the servicing and repair of aircraft before proceeding to North Africa.

Even so, the training arrangements of the Americans for Torch were far from ideal. The history of the XII Air Force Service Command states that during the preparation for the operation their units encountered the following major deficiencies and problems which limited or retarded their training programme:-

- (a) Lack of general or special equipment.
- (b) Shortage of officers.
- (c) Shortage of vehicles both for general use and special training.

- (d) Enlisted men lacked sufficient basic training.
- (e) Enlisted men not capable of taking specialized training because of lack of intelligence or lack of aptitude.
- (f) Officers lacked training experience.
- (g) Training period too short.

#### The Lessons Learned from Operation Torch

Operation Torch provided many lessons for study by the planners of future combined operations. The following were the major points which were of interest to the R.A.F. from the maintenance angle:-

- (a) The Director General of Servicing and Maintenance and the Director General of Equipment should be consulted in the first instance by the high level planners of the Air Ministry before a proposed plan of campaign is decided upon. They should attend all meetings of the high level planners and be kept fully in the picture throughout the development of the plan.
- (b) The Chief Maintenance Officer of the Force should be one of the first of the Headquarters staff to be selected. He should be an officer of considerable experience and able to give advice on all equipment and engineer problems. He should be kept fully aware of all changes in the plan of operations and be consulted before the Air Ministry issues orders on matters affecting the maintenance of the Force.
- (c) When selecting engineer and equipment officers for Command Headquarters, consideration should be given to their capabilities as staff officers, as well as to their experience on the types of aircraft to be employed in the operation.
- (d) More heads of branches should be put on the highest category of security.
- (e) All units forming part of an assault force should assemble and train as complete units. They should be fully conversant with the types and functions of the equipment, mechanical transport etc. to be used. A period of at least three months should be allowed for the training of ground units in their operational role.
- (f) War Equipment Schedules should be specially prepared to meet the needs of the operation. They should be divided into assault and follow up scales. The Chief Maintenance Officer should be informed of all inabilities in order that items in short supply could be conserved and evenly distributed.
- (g) The establishments of technical personnel of mobile fighter squadrons should be just sufficient to enable them to carry out daily inspections, minor inspections and very minor repairs. The surplus personnel thrown up by the reduction should be added to the inspection and repair sections of the Repair and Salvage Units.



(h) The personnel of Repair and Salvage Units should be trained and have the tools to handle all the types of aircraft employed with the Force in addition to those of the Wings to which they are attached.

(i) The "pack-ups" of the Air Stores Parks should be carefully considered in relation to the plan. Their equipment should be divided into:-

(i) Assault Scales to include one month's supply of airborne ranges of equipment essential for the maintenance of operational aircraft and for special signals and radar units.

(ii) Follow-Up Scales to include one month's reserve of aero-engines, mainplanes and other aircraft spares, M.T. spares, tentage, clothing etc. not vital for the maintenance of the force in the assault stage. Such equipment to be landed in the convoy following that carrying the assault scale equipment.

The A.S.Ps. should carry a reserve of Unit equipment to meet the needs of units sustaining losses by enemy action.

The Commanding Officers of A.S.Ps. should be supplied with details of the equipment held by their units.

(j) The use of secret F.U.S. numbers for the marking of equipment "pack-ups" should be discontinued. All packages should be clearly marked with the known number of the unit and should give some indication on the outside of their contents. Each package should include a complete list of the items contained therein.

(k) Cases containing equipment should where possible be of a size and weight which would enable them to be manhandled without the use of cranes. Cranes should be included in the follow-up equipment to deal with spare engines and other items whose weight prohibited manhandling.

(l) Squadrons should take with them 14 days' supply of spares instead of seven. Experience showed that it was not possible for Air Stores Parks to settle in and commence issues under 14 days.

(m) Every aircraft sent on an overseas operation should carry its own log books and maintenance schedules so that the necessary servicing could be carried out by personnel unfamiliar with the type.

(n) An aircraft repair depot should be put into the field as soon as possible after the assault force has moved forward.

(o) All mechanical transport vehicles should be in a sound serviceable condition and be equipped with camouflage nets. Only vehicles suitable for the type of country in which they are to operate should be employed. Drivers should travel in the same ship as their vehicles. Mechanical transport should, as far as possible, be standardised for all three Services to assist in the provisioning of spares.

(p) An adequate and efficient embarkation staff should be provided at the docks to supervise the unloading of personnel and equipment.

(q) An M.T. Company of at least 100 vehicles should be included in the convoy immediately following the assault primarily for dock clearance work. The vehicles should afterwards be used to form a Supply and Transport Column and the nucleus of an M.T. reserve pool.

(r) The arrangements for the supply of petrol and ammunition should be given the highest priority and be rendered as foolproof as possible.

SECRET

40

Diagram No. 3.

OPERATION TORCH. BUILD-UP

<u>Squadrons by Air from Gibraltar</u>			<u>Ground Elements by Sea</u>	
<u>Unit</u>	<u>Planned</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Planned</u>	<u>Actual</u>
<u>No. 322 (F) Wing</u>				
No. 154 (F) Squadron	D Day	D Day	D + 1	D + 14
No. 81 (F) Squadron	D Day	D Day	D + 1	D + 12
No. 242 (F) Squadron	D + 1	D Day	D + 1	D + 13
No. 225 (AC) Squadron	D + 4	D + 6	D + 4	D + 13
No. 133 A.S.P.			D + 4	D + 6
No. 108 R.S.U.			D + 4	D + 6
<u>No. 323 (F) Wing</u>				
No. 43 (F) Squadron	D Day	D Day	D + 1	D + 5
No. 253 (F) Squadron	D Day	D + 2	D + 1	D + 5
No. 4 P.R.U.	D + 4	D + 5	D + 4	D + 6
No. 131 A.S.P.			D + 4	D + 6
No. 106 R.S.U.			D + 4	D + 6
<u>No. 324 (F) Wing</u>				
No. 93 (F) Squadron	D + 14	D + 5	D + 14	D + 29
No. 152 (F) Squadron	D + 14	D + 6	D + 14	D + 31
No. 72 (F) Squadron	D + 14	D + 8	D + 14	D + 33
No. 111 (F) Squadron	D + 14	D + 3	D + 14	D + 32
No. 255 (NF) Squadron	D + 28	D + 7	D + 28	D + 38
No. 135 A.S.P.			D + 14	D + 28
No. 110 R.S.U.			D + 14	D + 28
<u>No. 325 (F) Wing</u>				
No. 232 (F) Squadron	D + 28	D + 29	D + 28	D + 29
No. 243 (F) Squadron	D + 28	D + 29	D + 28	D + 29
No. 32 (F) Squadron	D + 28	D + 32	D + 28	D + 29
No. 87 (F) Squadron	D + 28	D + 29	D + 28	D + 29
No. 241 (AC) Squadron	D + 14	D + 21	D + 14	D + 17
No. 600 (NF) Squadron	D + 28	D + 10	D + 28	D + 35
No. 136 A.S.P.			D + 28	D + 29
No. 111 R.S.U.			D + 28	D + 29
<u>No. 326 (LB) Wing</u>				
No. 18 (LB) Squadron	D + 4	D + 3	D + 4	D + 5
No. 114 (LB) Squadron	D + 14	D + 7	D + 14	D + 15
No. 13 (LB) Squadron	D + 14	D + 7	D + 14	D + 16
No. 614 (LB) Squadron	D + 14	D + 10	D + 14	D + 13
No. 132 A.S.P.			D + 14	D + 16
No. 109 R.S.U.			D + 14	D + 16
<u>No. 328 (GR) Wing</u>				
No. 608 (GR) Squadron	D + 4	D + 16	D + 4	D + 6
No. 500 (GR) Squadron	D + 28	D + 6	D + 14	D + 11
No. 134 A.S.P.			D + 14	D + 21
No. 107 R.S.U.			D + 14	D + 16
<u>Additional Units</u>				
No. 89 (NF) Squadron		D + 17		D + 46
No. 142 (MB) Squadron		D + 40		D + 46
No. 150 (MB) Squadron		D + 40		D + 46
No. 153 (NF) Squadron		D + 43		



APPENDIX "C"THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE R.A.F. SERVICING COMMANDOS

LM/670/  
DGO

It was decided in January 1942, to form 3 Servicing Commandos in Fighter Command and instructions to this effect were given by the Director of Organisation on January 31.

AOC/S.182/  
Air 2A

The object of these units was to be the occupation of advanced landing grounds, as soon as they had been captured by the Army. The commandos would be disembarked into landing craft and put ashore over the beaches with its equipment and transport. They would then advance to occupy the aerodrome as soon as the Army declared it clear of the enemy. It would not be the duty of Servicing Commandos to fight for landing grounds but in the circumstances under which they would be operating opposition might be encountered and the men would have to be prepared to defend themselves and their aircraft. On reaching the aerodrome they would arrange petrol and ammunition dumps and prepare to receive and service forward support fighter aircraft until the arrival of the squadron servicing echelons, whereupon they would leapfrog forward in their own transport to a more advanced aerodrome. The minimum of essential equipment would be carried, sufficient for refuelling, rearming, between flights, and daily inspections, minor repairs and replacements and the necessary gear for aircraft pickets, ground marking, entrenching and cooking. Individual rations would be carried for 48 hours with additional supplies for 10 days. The total strength would be approximately 2 officers and 150 other ranks, all volunteers.

Immediately following the issue of the Air Ministry authority, volunteers were called for in Fighter Command. Nos. 3201, 3202 and 3203 Commandos were formed and the first battle course was opened at Inverary on April 26.

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On April 6, the Director of Military Co-operation at Air Ministry was requested by the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Army Co-operation Command to sanction the formation of 2 further Commandos for the servicing of Army Co-operation aircraft. The request was at first refused since D.M.O. did not consider that the scale of operations in 1942 would call for the employment of such units. The A.O.C.-in-C. pressed his point, however, stressing that the forward operation of reconnaissance aircraft in support of the Army was as necessary as close fighter support. He won his case and approval was given on May 19. It was considered that smaller units would suffice in Army Co-operation Command and the establishment was fixed at 2 officers and 74 other ranks. Sufficient volunteers had been obtained by July 17 and Nos. 3225 and 3226 Commandos were formed and assembled on August 1.

A.M. File  
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The Fighter Command and Army Co-operation Command Servicing Commandos, though serving similar purposes, had differing establishments and equipment and were trained to service different types of aircraft. It was soon realised that, even though a forward landing ground might be allocated to specific squadrons, it would very likely be necessary to use the same airfield for both fighter and reconnaissance aircraft and even for light bombers, while in an emergency any type of aircraft might land if the aerodrome were suitable.

It was, therefore, decided that the Commandos should be known as R.A.F. Servicing Commandos and should all have identical establishments and be able to service aircraft of any squadron likely to use a captured aerodrome. The establishment and training of a Commando would be based on the carrying out of daily and between flights inspections and all repairs and adjustments normally undertaken by flight personnel in a squadron, limited in extent to supporting the equivalent operational effort of 3 fighter squadrons plus 2 light bomber or one medium bomber squadron operating simultaneously throughout the hours of daylight. Technical personnel would come under two groups:-

- (a) Those familiar with all of a list of specified types, the list being subject to periodical amendment but then including certain marks of Spitfire, Hurricane, Typhoon, Mustang, Blenheim, Boston.
- (b) A limited number of selected experts on each specified type.

Following the completion of No. 5 Beach Course at Inverary it was considered desirable to organise the Commandos rather more on Army lines. The wisdom of this decision is open to debate in view of the criticisms made later, that the units were too much commando-minded to the detriment of their technical skill. It is beyond doubt, however, that the new organisation had its advantages and the fact that the Commandos were capable of assuming a military role for local defence was a safeguard, which the development of the campaigns did not in fact demand to any extent, but which, nevertheless, might under different circumstances have proved invaluable. Under the re-organised scheme the commando was divided into 4 flights and a headquarters flight, each of the five having 3 squads of approximately 12 men.

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Plans 6  
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The first three commandos, Nos. 3201 and 3202 were used in North Africa. Nos. 3201 and 3202 disembarked from assault craft at dawn on November 8, 1942 in the vicinity of Algiers and marched 12 miles to Maison Blanche airfield. During the first week the commandos serviced every aircraft that landed at Maison Blanche, including Hurricanes, Spitfires and Lightnings. No. 3203 S.C.U. disembarked at Bone on December 10 and arrived at Blida on 19, subsequently joining No. 110 Repair and Salvage Unit at Ghardimaou on February 12.

The reports of the Commanding Officers of Nos. 3201 and 3202 S.C.U.'s contained many criticisms of the arrangements of the operation, mainly concerning the supply organisation. Repeated assurances had been given in London that delivery of petrol and stores was an army commitment. By the end of the second day, however, stocks were so low that all available vehicles and airmen had to spend the night collecting essential supplies from the docks. The men had to resume the servicing of aircraft at dawn and had, in fact, to work in this manner continuously for 72 hours. The efficiency of the units was seriously impaired by lack of transport. Three reasons were given for this. Waterproofing of vehicles had been carried out so badly that 50% were unserviceable on arrival at the aerodrome; unit transport was all on one ship and owing to the unsuitability of the derricks and the prevailing sea only one vehicle was put ashore over the beaches, the remainder being landed at the docks over twenty-four hours later; finally such

transport as the units were able to obtain was depleted by the action of certain senior officers who commandeered vehicles for their own use. After 17 days constant use technical equipment began to show the effects of transportation in vehicles other than its own.

It was considered that the commandos should have more control over the loading of their equipment. Unit personnel were extensively employed during the voyage in re-arranging the cargo but much of the technical equipment was stowed with the vehicles in such a manner as to preclude its unloading under any circumstances until D + 2. Further troubles were experienced as a result of the absence of an organised beach party; the major part of all unloading was done by the commandos, assisted by other R.A.F. personnel.

Recommendations were made for increased personnel establishments: in particular 3 M/T mechanics and additional electricians and instrument repairers were suggested. Units had been split into two sections for a large part of the time, the sections operating at different airfields. This had led to administrative complications and the Commanding Officers had been unable to give sufficient time to their technical work while coping with rationing, pay and other domestic duties. The addition of a junior (A. and S.D.) officer, as Adjutant, was proposed. The technical equipment provided was found to be generally satisfactory and no major alterations were suggested. One notable point was that aircraft and engine spares were no problem, adequate supplies being available from wrecked and category B aircraft. Plug servicing equipment would, however, have been of value.

In spite of difficulties the units did magnificent work and were required to undertake the maintenance of more squadrons and for a considerably longer period than originally intended, owing to the difficulty in assembling the ground echelons and equipment of the fighter squadrons and moving them to the forward area to join their aircraft.

Ref. EAC/1639/  
Org. 26.1.43

In the opinion of Air Commodore MacGregor, the Air Officer-in-Charge of Administration at H.Q. Eastern Air Command, "The success achieved by the fighter squadrons during this period was undoubtedly due very largely to the loyal and extremely hard work of the servicing Commandos who have most certainly proved their value in a campaign of this nature."

Moving from Maison Blanche as the campaign developed, the Commandos were subsequently in operation at Djidjelli, Souk-el-Arba, Bone and other airfields under most difficult conditions. Airfields and road surfaces were bad, the weather was far from ideal, living conditions were at times severe and units had still to contend with supply problems in addition to servicing aircraft. They serviced, during the advance, Spitfires, night flying Hurricanes, Wellingtons and U.S.A.A.F. Mitchells, frequently under enemy air attack.

The conditions in Tunisia in March, 1943, were reviewed by Squadron Leader Nelson Edwards in a report circulated by D.A.T. on April 4. Although not specifically covering the work of the Commandos the report contains much which bears on their activities. The serviceability of the Spitfire VB was remarkably good but it was not surprising that in the first



large scale invasion to be attempted, mistakes were made in the organisation. In particular, the immediate supply of certain essential items of equipment had been overlooked. Most of these might well have been supplied to the squadrons - chiefly for the use of the servicing commandos. The most noteworthy deficiencies were listed in the report:-

1. A large supply of screwdrivers - at least one for each pilot. Penknives very often had to be used. Other useful tools could profitably have been carried in the aircraft themselves.
2. Refuelling funnels would on several occasions have enabled a quick refuel with important operational consequences. Most primitive substitutes had been used.
3. Airscrew tool kits for Rotal - De Havilland and Hydromatic propellers. There had been very great trouble from airscrew leaks and many serviceable aircraft had stood idle solely on that account. An instance of the lack of knowledge at Eastern Air Command of activities at the front was reported by Gp. Capt. Lees: highest priority demands for Hydromatic tool kits had eventually elicited the reply that since no Spitfires in Tunisia were fitted with this type of propeller, such tool kits were unnecessary.
4. More adequate R/T servicing equipment was necessary; possibly a specially light kit for invasion purposes.

Squadron Leader Edwards concluded with a word of praise for servicing Commandos who "worked splendidly under pretty rotten conditions with very little equipment to do it". Squadron ground crews arrived only just in time, he continued, for the Commandos were getting into a pretty bad state, with bombing casualties, long hours and no real comfort or cooking facilities.

Although the above report was written at the end of March the work of the Commandos in Tunisia was far from over. At the end of April 1943, Commando personnel moved to a new airfield under construction near Medjez-el-Bob. They were less than eight miles from the front line but by May 3, the advanced ground was ready for use. It was not actually needed to any extent until May 8 when 184 aircraft were serviced in the one day. This was their last major effort in North Africa but, after a short refresher course near Oran, the three units were again ready for action in Sicily by July.

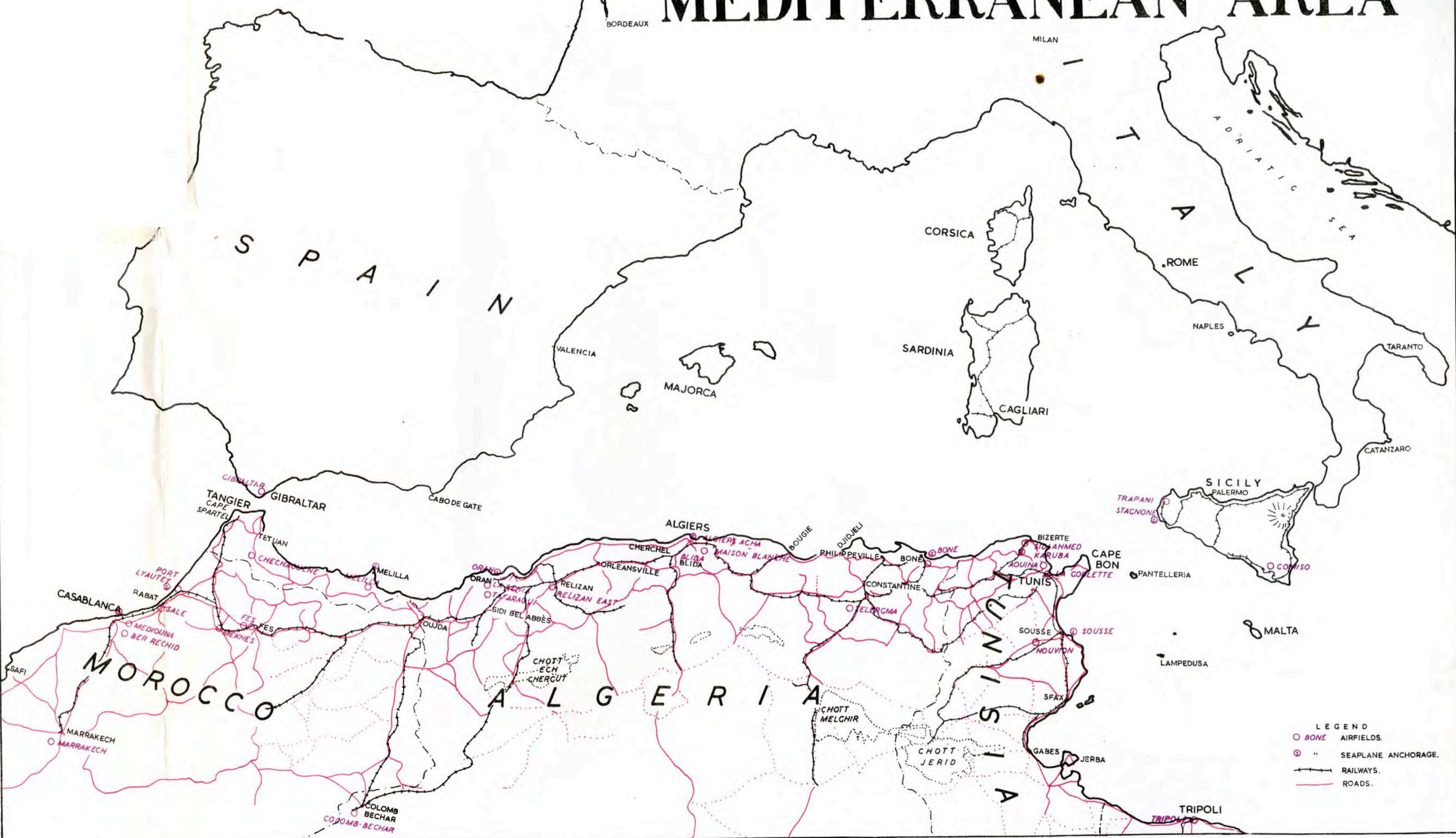
Several further Commando Units were formed early in 1943 for impending operations: No. 3204 was established in Fighter Command in February and in April Nos. 3205 and 3206 were formed in Army Co-operation Command and 3207, 3208, 3209 and 3210 in Fighter Command.

By April a revised establishment had been drawn up which incorporated the more important of the recommendations contained in the reports of the Officers Commanding Nos. 3201 and 3202 Commandos, though the addition of an Officer Adjutant was not allowed. The newly formed units, which were intended for use with No. 83 Group in Europe, were based on the new establishment.

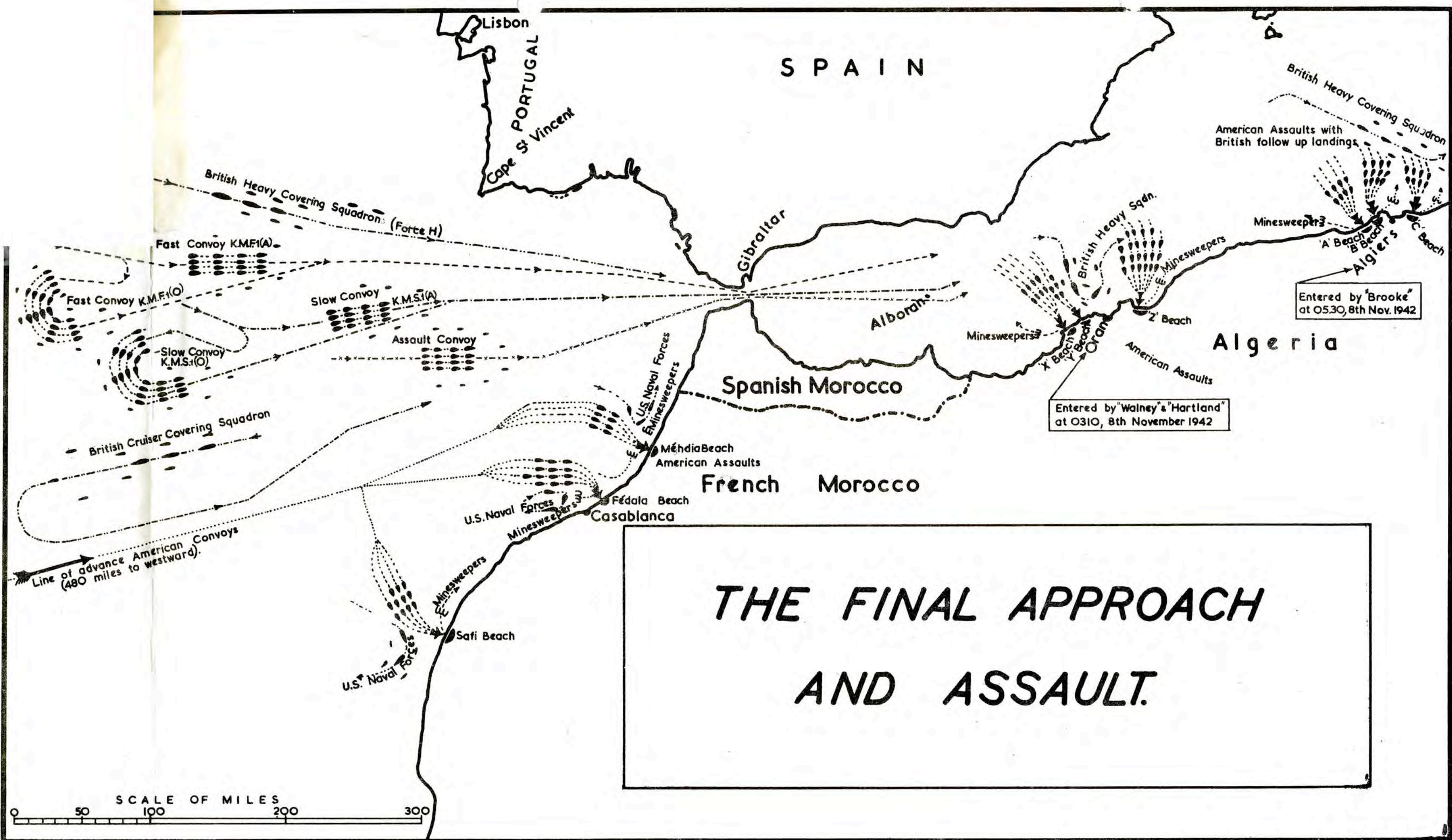
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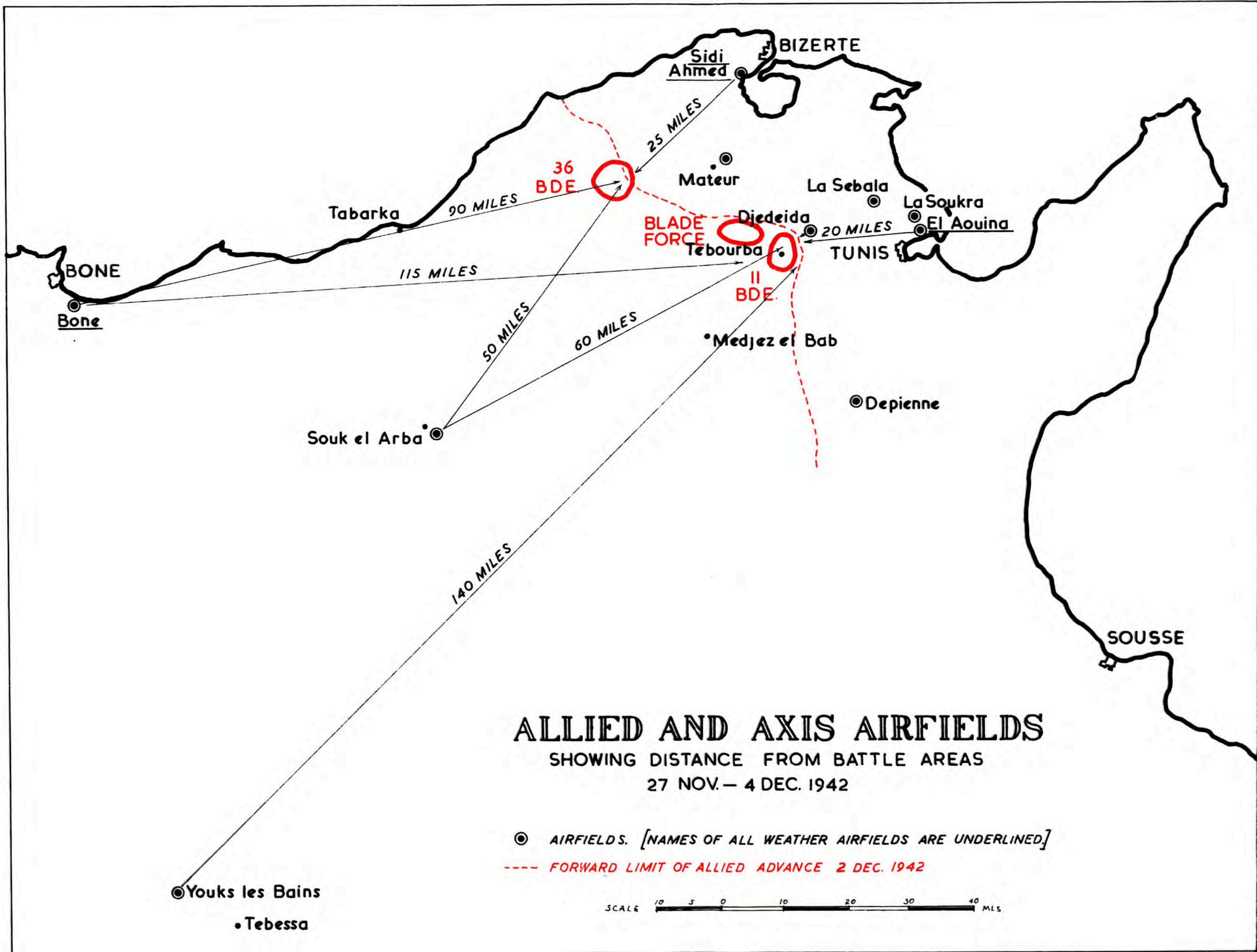
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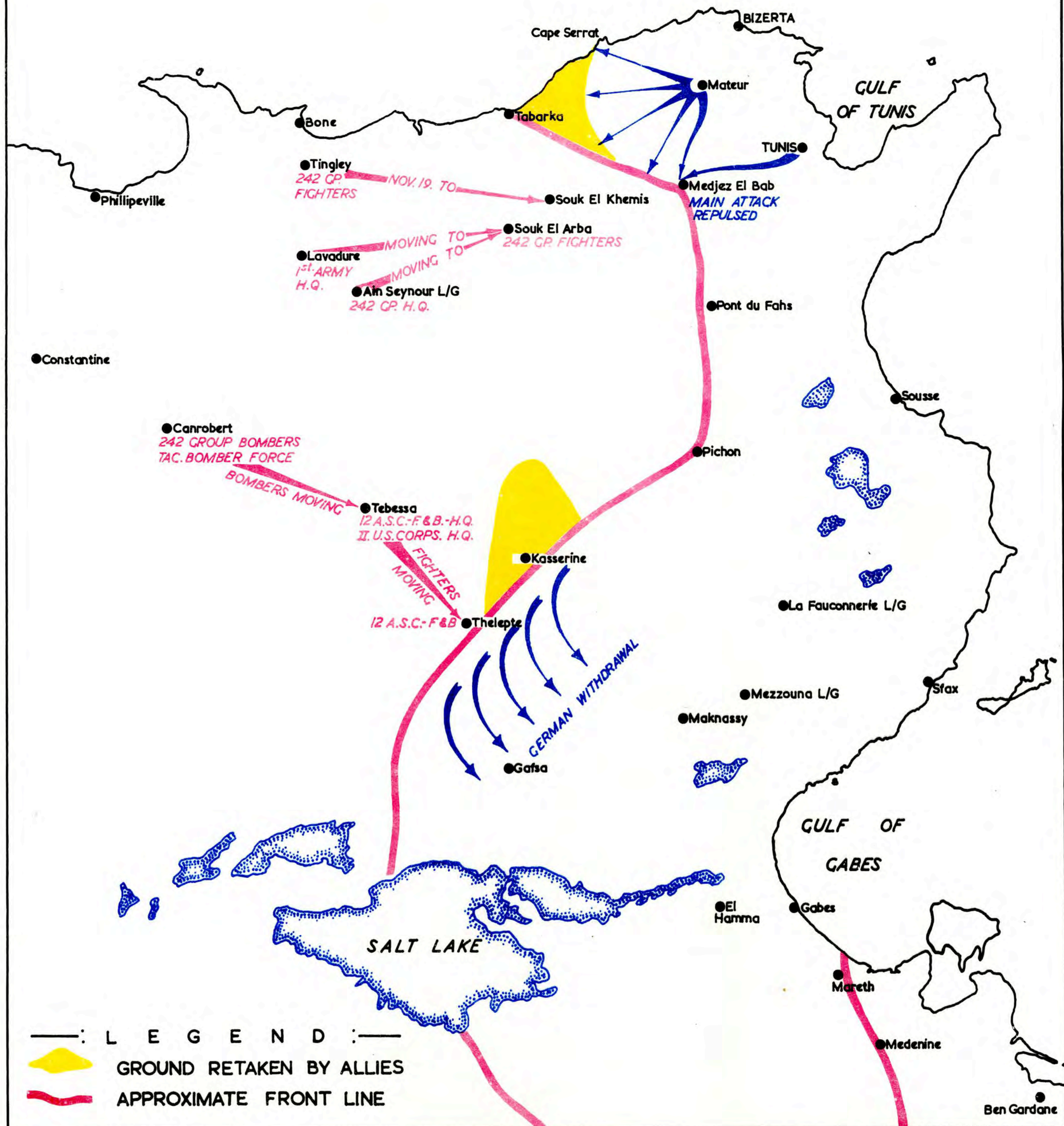






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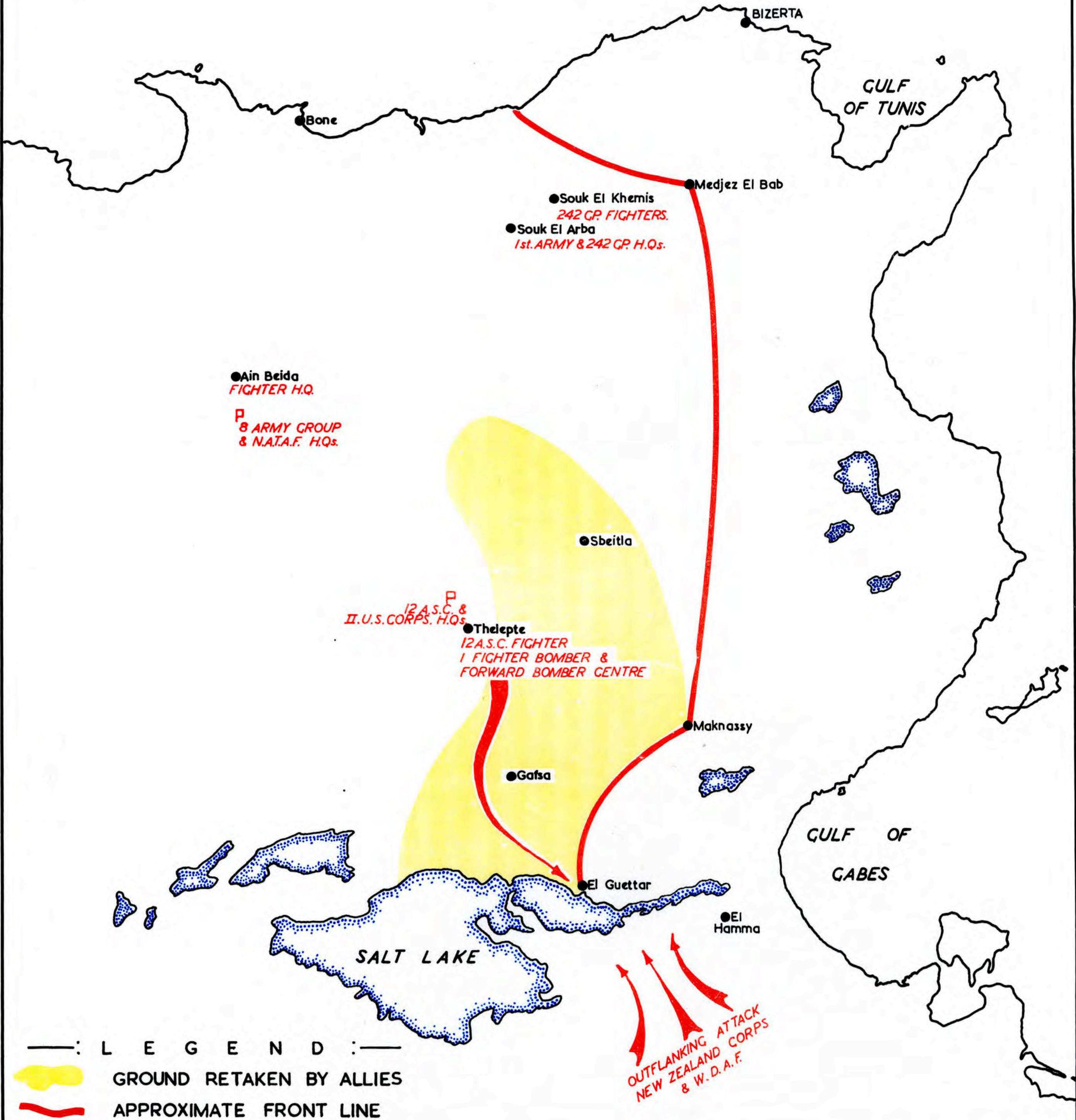
FEB. 18<sup>th</sup> to MARCH 15<sup>th</sup> 1943.





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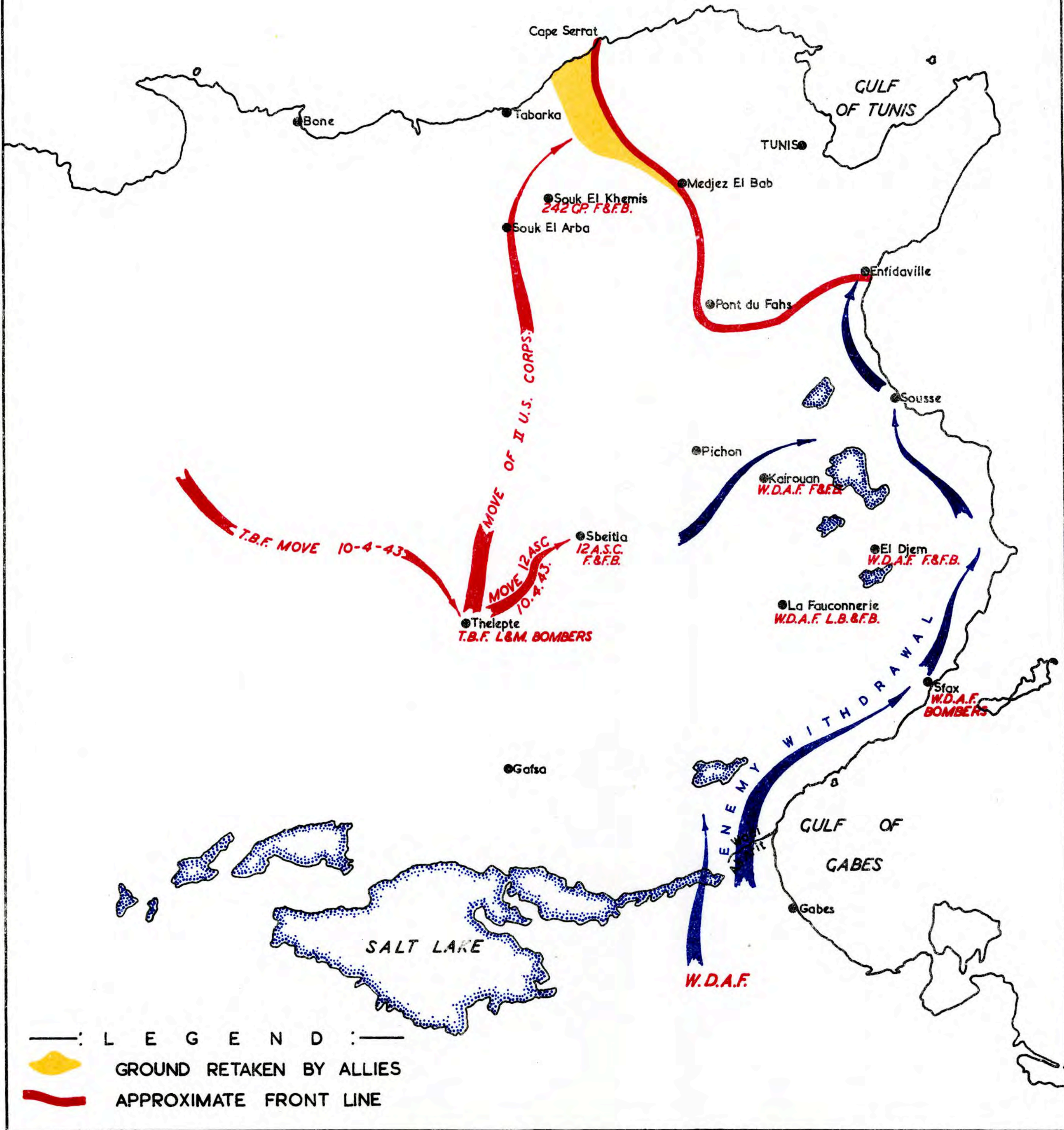
MARCH 15<sup>th</sup> to APRIL 7<sup>th</sup> 1943.





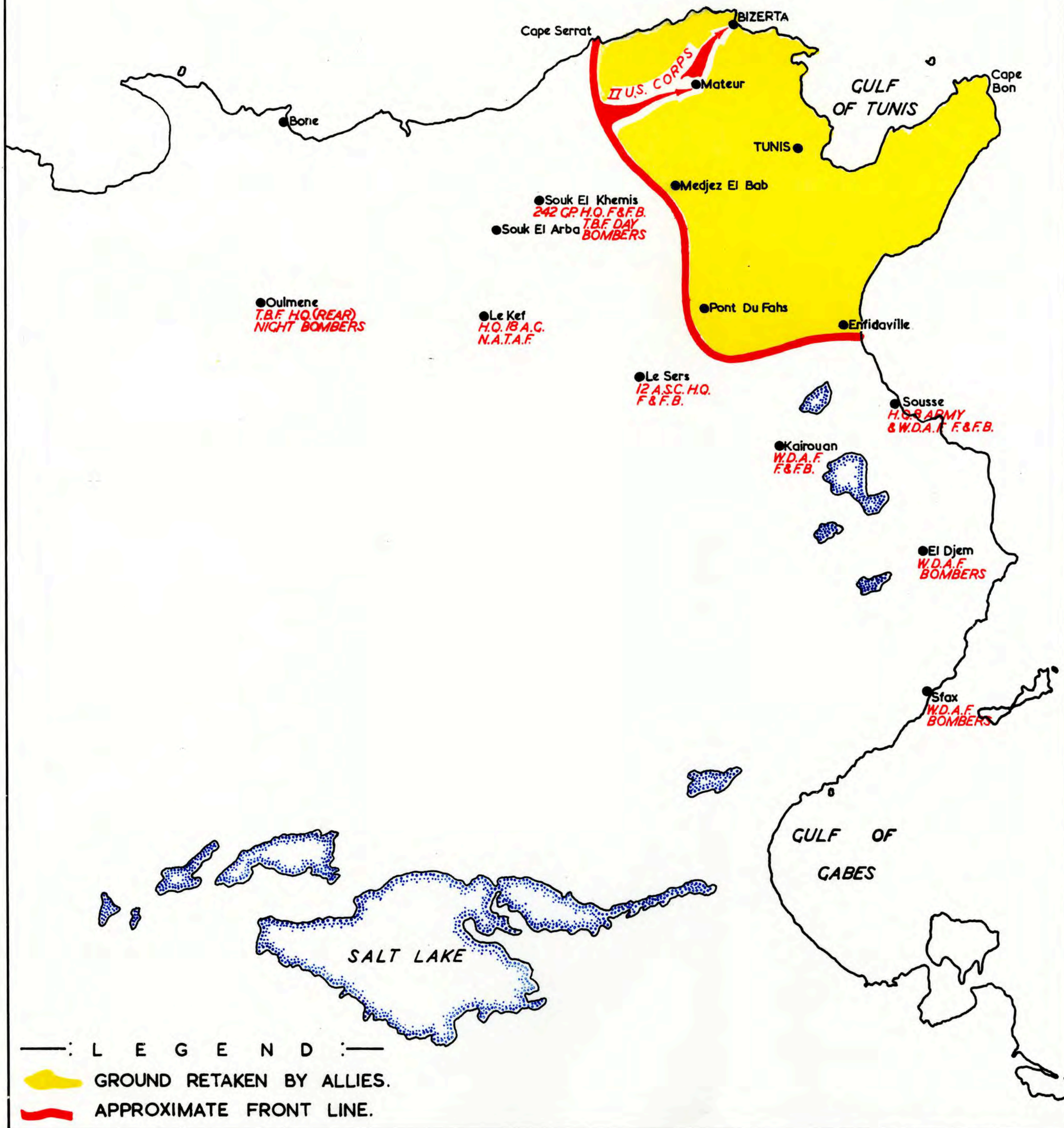
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APRIL 7<sup>th</sup>. to APRIL 16<sup>th</sup>. 1943.





## - TUNISIA -

APRIL 17<sup>th</sup>. to MAY 15<sup>th</sup>. 1943.



## THE AIRFIELD AT NORTH FRONT

