



North African Theater

Bermuda Command



Fifth Air Force
Sw Pacific



Panama Canal Dept
Controls
units
in Canal Zone



U.S. 34th Inf Div
North Africa



Victory has its cost. Port-city under attack by dive-bombers

Enemy objective: to cut our lifeline of supply. Some four thousand miles from the shores of America. The forward movement of the British-American expeditionary forces was at first good, until wretched heavy rains fell in December. Whenever weather cleared, German aircraft flew in from great distances, such as Sardinia, nearly 500 miles from Algeria or 1100 miles from Casablanca--to bomb the Allies in N. Africa. Allied front movement was stopped about 25 miles from the port-city, Tunis.

The strength of the United States was still not at full zenith. One must remember the WW II generation did not begin to see that zenith until two years hence. At this stage of war, UK forces had more in uniform than the United States.



Afrika Korps and a downed American P-38.

had to be flashed to America and then back again before we could hear it.



It was some time before the Allies would be able to swing their full might. Straight from a controversial, political context, Vichy French North

Africa was quite a hotbed of political pressurements constraining allied operation, and even though there was some kind of cease fire, not all French units complied, especially those nearest German and Italian divisions. Although France fell to Hitler in 1940, Axis troops generally stayed out of French No. Africa. How neutral would the over 60,000 French troops in Morocco and Algeria under Vichy authority be? Added to them were the 200,000 reservists. If German troops pulled into the land, whose orders will they follow? Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria composed French North Africa in WW II. There was a strip of land some 200 miles up near the tip of the straits of Gibraltar on the African continent called Spanish Morocco, which like Spain was neutral—but all sides were fanatic on keeping Spain neutral, and it so remained. There used to be an Italian Morocco, but by 1942 it ceased to exist. By the end of November, over 12,500 tons of supplies and 17,000 German troops had



U.S. 45th Inf Div
North Africa



The main preoccupation of Doolittle (above) was to destroy enemy airdromes, be they French or German.



been sent into Tunisia.

With the Torch buildup, the main military objective was naturally to keep heading east toward Tunisia, to link up with the British 8th Army, and even more so to initially secure various airfields in Algeria and along the borders of Tunisia, plus key ports leading up to the link-up. Proceeding toward Tunisia was agonizing slow. It surprisingly rained often.

The distance was longest for most American units because they were furthest away from Tunisia.

In the early stretch, which really extends to the end of 1942, the front drive belonged to the British "tommie"—the British 1st Army, and they were the ones who cleared most of the coastline. But, as to the securing of airfields, it was the two of us together, both British and American troops. On November 15, we believe the first unit paratrooper drop in WW II by American soldiers took place. It was a successful attempt in securing the Gafsa airfield in Tunisia—the 503rd Parachute Regiment, led by Lt-Col. Edson D. Raff. It became operational for twin-engined U.S. P-38 Lightnings shortly afterward.

The vast majority of French nearest the allied ports by December were neutralized, nevertheless the Allied drive into Tunisia was slowed by troops loyal to the collaborationist government of the Vichy, so much that the Germans were able to reinforce Tunisia and eastern Algeria.

Regarding air support, the U.S. Army Air Force was strengthened with two B-17 groups, two P-38 units, one P-40 group and two groups flying tough English Spitfires with U.S. markings. They joined the A-20 and B-24 units already stationed in Africa, but as was noted earlier, the air force had its operational troubles in the beginning.

The U.S. Commander of the African-based air force was General James H. Doolittle. Commander of U.S. land forces was General Dwight D. Eisenhower, then relatively unknown.

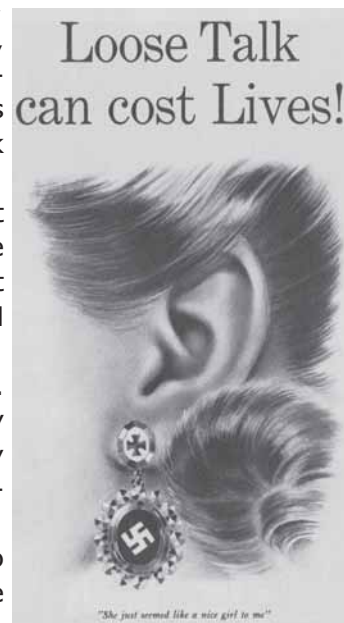
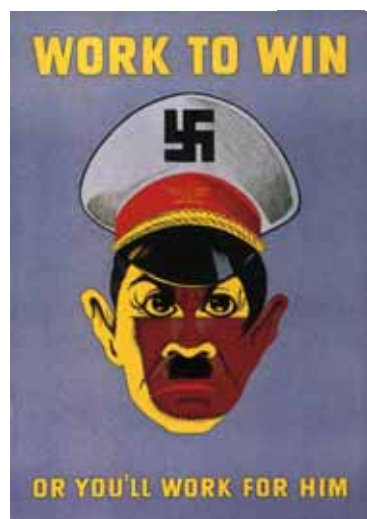
Eisenhower found out in December that supplies and armor could not be maintained overall and that the mental and moral strain of British forces were, according to Gen. Alexander, hurt badly by constant Luftwaffe dive-bombing. In mid-December, the Allied Front in western Tunisia had 20,000 British, 30,000 French, 11,000 U.S. troops; the Axis had 38,500.

The War Department got its vital long-distance radio communications opened on the fifteenth of November; receivers between Oran and Kano, Africa, were opened, followed by a major connection on the 28th from Casablanca, and on the 25th of the next month from Algiers to the outside world. USAACS units made the direct link from Algiers to London.

Opening a direct radio circuit was important; without it, one relied on carrier pigeon or underwater sea cable connecting Algiers-Gibraltar-London-Washington, that established a secret direct line between the principal Allied headquarters in London and Algiers.

There was, however, Radio Algiers and Radio Maroc. CBS and NBC, for example, utilized them, but had to buy time and via voicecast sent news to the world. The only problem: Radio Berlin friends could also pick up the transmissions.

Obtaining information from Radio Algiers and Radio Maroc was not always reliable. This was the world before satellites. By the end of the year, the North African campaign stalled and remained in low gear until January, 1943—the enemy and the terrain creating the chief resistance. From then on, it was a time of supply, and waiting.





Control of the mideast meant control of the Suez Canal, pictured. A fraction of U.S. troops traversed the Suez. It was in the British zone.

World War Two was in convulsive, international, myriad war zones. China, our Ally, was in its 5th year of war.



Persian Theater



Fourth Air Force
U.S. Far West

