

An analysis of operation torch essay



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The major goals of Operation Torch was outlined by Roosevelt and Churchill to the Commander-In-Chief of the Allied Expeditionary Force – Gen. Eisenhower as follows: a) Occupy and take control of the Oran-Algiers-Tunis area in the northeast coast and Casablanca in the northwest coast. b) Occupy and take control of the entire area including French Morocco and be prepared to take similar action in Spanish Morocco; this will lead to favorable conditions for an extended offensive to the east through the Western Desert (eastern Libya and western Egypt). c) Complete annihilation of air and sea operations against the Axis forces opposing the British forces in the Western Desert and intensification of operations against the Axis on the European continent.

The joint British-American planners stationed at Norfolk had to carefully consider what the general objectives and to determine what is possible based on the limited resources the Allied forces had at that time. In order to have a workable operational plan the end result was first established and working backwards, the planner attempted to show how to achieve the detailed specifications required of the mission. First of all, the planners delineated how to exactly carry out the task and they began by specifying that it must be a combined land, sea, and air assault against the Mediterranean Coast of Algeria. The planners were very specific that it is only after succeeding in Algeria then they could proceed to capture Tunisia.

The planners then made it clear that at the same time French Morocco must be in the control of the Allied forces which in turn allows them to have full control of the Straits of Gibraltar. The Straits of Gibraltar was a decisive point, a facet of operational planning that will be discussed in detail later.

There may be a need to occupy Spanish Morocco. Thus, strike force must be on standby and they will be stationed in the Straits of Gibraltar. The planners did not only subdivide the North African coast into three major areas, namely: a) Oran; b) Algiers; and c) Bone; but they also specified the allocation of tasks. The Americans were primarily responsible for the assault at Oran, the occupation of Oran and of French Morocco.

The British on the other hand were primarily responsible for the assaults at Algiers and Bone, including occupation of Algeria (except the Oran) and Tunisia. The planners were able to delineate Operation Torch by specifying how Aviation and Naval components of the Joint forces should be utilized. Finally, the objectives were drawn out with a practical consideration of the two major theaters of war: The European Theater of War and the Pacific Theater of War. Operation Torch was deemed necessary to pressure Hitler's army in Europe to subdivide, weakening the Fuhrer's capability to overwhelm the rest of Europe.

The said operation is also a major tool in opening up a backdoor into Europe which at a later date can be very beneficial for the carrying out of an intensified campaign on that side of the world. In the event of a successful operation, the leaders and planners would be rewarded with the bonus of the annihilation of General Rommel's forces, which were stationed in North Africa.

Center of Gravity Clausewitz remarked on his groundbreaking idea concerning the center of gravity in war and he wrote: Our position, then, is that a theater of war, be it large or small, and the forces stationed there, no

matter what their size represent the sort of unity in which a single center of gravity can be identified. That is the place where the decision should be reached; a victory at that point is in its fullest sense identical with the defense of the theater of operation (as cited in Handel, 1992, p. 55). Based on the quote from Clausewitz one can deduce that a center of gravity is where the strength of the enemy lies.

And by destroying that center or by focusing the assault on that center, a commander can significantly weaken the enemy's ability to fight back. The Axis' center of gravity with regards to Operation Torch is the enemy's forces stationed in North Africa. For all the activity in the Middle East, Africa, and Southern Europe, the hub of power and movement came from the Axis' armies that could be found in North Africa, specifically French forces that are loyal to Hitler and the army led by General Rommel. It is not difficult to ascertain the center of gravity judging by the emphatic order to attack Algeria and Tunisia with a preparation to also attack Spanish Morocco if they suddenly become pro-Nazi. It is important to note that Spanish Morocco is a neutral territory but the fact that the Allied forces would not hesitate in attacking them provide a clue as to how important North Africa was to the greater scheme of things.

They planned to destroy, and eliminate the enemy's center of gravity by hitting the core nerve of Hitler's troops in North Africa. A foothold on the Mediterranean coast must first be obtained because without it, it would be impossible to go further. An element of surprise is also needed to ensure that the Nazis would not have time to react and bolster their troops in the said area. In addition to capturing key beaches in the Mediterranean coast a

directive was also given to capture key strategic areas that are not part of the Algerian-Tunisia coast but still could greatly affect the outcome of war if ever the Allied forces did not take decisive actions to control them. Aside from a combined air, land, and sea assault on the beaches considered as gateway to North Africa, the neighboring areas of Spanish Morocco and the Straits of Gibraltar was included in the planned attack.

By taking control of the Straits of Gibraltar and ensuring that Spanish Morocco remains neutral; this would allow Allied forces a strategic advantage over the Axis forces in terms of preventing reinforcements and further harassment. This will enable the Allied armies to push inward into the heart of North Africa unopposed. The beach landings and subsequent conquest of the Mediterranean coast would provide a “tightening of the noose,” cutting off the forces of General Rommel.

The advancing Allied forces would then go eastward and challenge the African Korps in Eastern Libya and Western Egypt. The center of gravity for the Allied forces on the other hand is the Isle of Malta and the forces stationed there, which act as a military base that will enable the allies to mount a series of counteroffensive when needed. Without this center of gravity the Allied forces could not prevent enemy reinforcement. Another center of gravity for them is the excellent network of naval support that they were getting from the navy. Central command is aware of this and thus in the operational plan submitted they included the following directives, “...two or more cruisers with destroyers of the Assault Force may be sent to Malta to act as surface striking force”(Annex II, p. 9 Naval Outline Plan).

The British-American planners understood the importance of offense and just like what Clausewitz had prescribed they will hit on the enemy's center of gravity with unrelenting force until they succumbed to the power of combined air, land, and sea assault. But at the same time they also realized the strategic need to defend their own center. The plan then calls for a regrouping and refitting of the forces after they were able to successfully take the beachhead. The plan specifically ordered the commanders to protect the network of naval support that was critical in bringing in troops and supplies. Looking back, the plan to attack the enemy's center of gravity while at the same time protecting Allied forces' own center was an effective one because the enemy was not able to retaliate effectively.

The friendly forces were also able to achieve their objectives and proceeded to end the war (see Patton, 1975). With regards to protecting their own, the effectiveness of the plan can be gauged by their ability to provide necessary supplies to the fighting units and at the same time continued the build-up of forces. Both of these would not be possible if the enemy was able to destroy the navy supporting them. Decisive Points Now that the concept of a "center of gravity" existing within a geographical area was already established. It is now possible to identify the decisive points in the North African sub-theater of war.

Arthur Frame in his work on Operational Art and Campaign Planning enumerated the key characteristics of decisive points as: 1. Features of the ground. 2. Relation of the local features to the ultimate strategic aim. 3. Positions occupied by the respective forces. Examples of strategic points are listed as follows: a) constricted sea lane; b) a hill; c) town; d) airbase; e)

command posts; f) critical boundaries; g) airspace; h) communication nodes etc. Looking at the map of the Mediterranean coast one can easily pinpoint that the key to conquest of North Africa is through the Oran-Algiers-Tunis area.

These key areas must be occupied and put under the subjection of the Allied forces. There is also a need to control the northwest end of the coast and occupy Casablanca. Moreover, a political and diplomatic success is also needed to ensure that Spanish Morocco will not side with the Nazis or become suddenly hostile to the Allied forces. These areas contains decisive points such as military bases and command posts that could work together to monitor and harass the advancing Allied Forces. Another area containing major decisive point is Tunisia. The Allied forces must work doubly hard and work efficiently as to be able to move rapidly and assert their presence at Tunisia. The enemy must not be allowed to regroup and mount a counteroffensive in Tunisia.

The major problem here is the fact that Tripoli, which is very close to Tunisia, is an Axis power territory. Thus another emphatic directive was sent from central command saying, “ The Commander in Chief, will therefore be requested to use every endeavor to prevent seaborne traffic between Italy or Sicily and Tunisia” (Annex II, p. 9). In the operational plan some decisive points were identified and targeted early in the planning phase. Examples are the Port of Oran and nearby airdromes of La Senia and Tafaroui. Another example is the Port of Algies and airdromes at Maison Blanche and Hussein Dey.

The decisive points are very crucial in the war because it can turn the tide either way. Take for example an airbase. If the allied forces were not able to secure them then it could be used to strengthen the enemy's position, allowing them to mount a serious counteroffensive. By neutralizing decisive points such as these the friendly forces were able to paralyze the enemy's capability to put up a decent defense at the same time protecting their own from further harassment.

Culmination Again, Clausewitz provided another profound explanation on a third facet of war and he defined culmination as: The point at which a force no longer has the capability to continue its form of operations, offense or defense. For the offense, the point at which continuing the attack is no longer possible and the force must consider reverting to a defensive posture of attempting an operational pause. For the defense, the point at which counteroffensive action is no longer possible (as qtd. in Frame, p. 7). There is nothing wrong in the culmination of any activity. But concerning a campaign, premature culmination can lead to defeat. This realization lead Frame to conclude that, " Operational planning seeks to bring our opponent to culmination while avoiding our own" (p. 8).

The desire to have continuity in executing operational plans until goals are achieved is something that is easier said than done. It requires a high level of planning to ensure that forces are stopped dead in their tracks. The challenge lies in the fact that, "...the concept of culmination is related to more than logistics or resources alone" (Frame, p. 7). In the operational plan submitted for review there was a provision for alternative plans. A clear sign that the British-American planners were well aware of the threat of

premature culmination. The first possible cause of allied early culmination is the delayed arrival of the Toulon Fleet – being unable to reach a North African port or be at sea before the day of attack.

This will weaken their ability to defend their center of gravity and at the same time weaken their ability to execute unrelenting force towards the enemy's core capabilities. The second possible cause for premature culmination is the deteriorating weather after the third day of the attack. This will surely inhibit major operational maneuvers and landing on targeted beachheads. Third, in the event of a successful landing and equally successful takeover of the Mediterranean coast, another potential cause of culmination is the unexpected result of overwhelming success. The operational plan had already anticipated that even success can bring with it problems and therefore guidelines were given to be followed upon completion of the assaults.

Fourth, an error in estimating how fast the Allied forces can be upgraded into fighting form to complete the next level of Operation Torch can again result in a possible premature culmination. The Axis forces can be stopped short of achieving their operational objective without being defeated by suffering premature culmination. Thus, this facet of war could be used against the enemy as well. It can even be argued that the whole plan – Operation Torch – was an exercise to induce early culmination for the Axis forces stationed in Southern Europe. This is because they will be forced to spread themselves out to defend from an incoming invasion from the backdoor. Culmination occurs when they could no longer push harder into Europe and even Russia because supplies, troops, and morale are running low.

The planners executed a well-timed support system that enabled them to maintain a steady flow of reinforcements. They were also conscious of over-extending themselves that is why they reiterated to central command that annihilation of Axis forces must be done in a logical and step by step manner. This means they will proceed by taking out the decisive points first and prevent the enemy from strengthening their center of gravity. Only by this time when they will mount a serious offensive that will be based from Tunisia. Finally, the battle in North Africa was successful due to Axis forces' early culmination.

The Allied forces were able to achieved this by cutting them off from their main source of supply and at the same time prevented the reinforcements of troop. This was made possible by occupying Tunisia a place where they can mount a serious counter-offensive. At the same time they occupied key beachheads preventing the Axis forces from landing any kind of forces even if they have to circumnavigate the globe.