

# American involvement in n. africa during world war ii (revised)

[Parts of the World](#), [Africa](#)



The second world II was a world wide conflict which started in 1939 and ended in 1945. The war was fought in different places in the world. One was fought in Asia at around 1937, the other in Europe in 1939 with the invasion of Poland by Germany. Another one was also fought in African continent. It led the world nations to split into two that is. Allies (Britain and America) and the axis (Germany and Italy) The Second World War started when Hitler invaded Poland on September first in 1939.

About million Australians fought in the Second World War in campaigns against Germany and Italy in Europe, North Africa, Mediterranean and against Japan in South East Asia as well as in other parts of the Pacific. The main focus in this paper will be to discuss on the US military involvement in North Africa during the Second World War. In 1942, November, United Kingdom military forces in conjunction with US military forces staged war against the French North Africa. It was the result of the long contentious argument between American planners of war and those of Britain.

The turbulence of this argument was calmed by the American president's Franklin D Roosevelt intervention. American dreamabout the Second World War in 1942 was to attack and defeat Germany before proceeding to Asia to see the harm the Japanese were causing to Pacific territories. In the same year, the Soviet Army was far much pressed by the Germany-panzers division who were leveling attacks on Russia. Some American planners thought it was not necessary to attack North Western Europe.

They planned that come 1943, the American army would be well prepared, trained and equipped to meet the Germany's aggressive troops. The

American planners believed that its army's knowledge and resources could help them to accomplish their mission of bringing Germany troops down. The British military leaders under the field marshal Alan Brooke (Dennis P. 2002; 78) adopted a different approach. They never thought it wise to start launching their attacks in 1942. The main reason why they were opposed to this idea was because taking such a move would force United Kingdom to bear much of the military burden.

At this time, they could not have afforded to have a division in the army because they were experiencing a fierce fight against Germany which had already inflicted a lot of harm to their army. Most of their military had met stiff resistance of the Wehrmacht in France during the disastrous 1940 campaign. At this time their forces under field marshal Erwin Rommel, they had done practically nothing to end or reduce the German military process in North Africa and in Libya. After the war, Brooke found the strategy of the Marshal very incompatible and that he did not appreciate what the operations in France would mean.

He could not figure out how the Germans could reinforce their attacks about three to four times faster than theirs and he could not understand how they could suffer from the shortage of sea transport if the Mediterranean was not opened. The British opposed this idea though America promised to provide the invading forces. They wanted the Americans to clear the axis force in the Mediterranean shores of North America and open up that great inland sea for the allied convoys to move in.

This culminated into a deadlock that made Brooke to consider switching the America army's emphasis from European theatre of operations to the pacific, but Roosevelt the then president of America could not accept such an idea that was central to their war strategy. This emphasis from Britain never worked to the Americans instead it led Roosevelt to do something that Winston Churchill would never dream of doing. In fact he intervened and overruled his advisers who used to advise him on war matters. This was in the summer of 1942.

He ordered his generals to direct their forces to the French North Africa to support the British proposal for landing along the coast of North Africa. He did this so that he could divide the attention Germans were giving to European war. He wanted to divide the concentration of German because he thought that if he did not do that, then he would come to face German somewhere in Europe. He knew that his move would be embraced by Britain though it was only done due to political necessity and national interests. At this time the British soldiers had no choice but to gang with USA in attacking Morocco and Algeria.

From this time the attention that German had on war in Europe, half of it shifted to the battle in the Mediterranean. The plan was well strategized. About 65, 000 men under lieutenant General Durlight D. Eisenhower were to be transported by the allies to invade Casablanca, Roan and Algiers. These were the possessions of the French North Africa. Everything went according the plan and they had a lot of quick success that was attributed to the fact

that the Axis attention was focused elsewhere. This time the Germans were trying to subjugate Stalingrad and the Caucasus.

In Egypt at the same period, the Rummel's African Korps renewed their offensive attacks on the British area of interests. The British forces under Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery organized his army to liaise the move of the Rummel's the Montgomery's force entered into a fierce battle with the axis forces. The axis powers had no hope of winning this war and by early November Rummel's armies yielded back to Libya. The move they took was against the wishes of Hitler who had ordered them to keep soldering on. Hitler never at any time contemplated of defeat. He would rather die that witness such humiliations (Ambrose S.

2001; 58) At the onset of November 1942, the allied forces had started to build up their ships at Gibraltar. The German spies were aware but they down played the idea as simply as another large supply convoy for reinforcing Malta. The Germany's companion had a different view; Italy was not so sure of this though Germany never thought about this seriously but had been ignoring Italy's decision. In November eighth 1942 the foreign German foreign minister Ulrich Joachim who was also known as Von Ribbentrop was so sure about the American troops who had landed in Algerian as well as in Moroccan ports.

These allied forces leveled attacks that had positive results as it was expected, the allied forces thought that the dissident French military officers who had supported them would turn against them however, this did not happen but to their surprise the Vichy French government just as it

happened in Dakar and in Syria in the following year, they fought against the Allied forces though they did not manage to keep off the invading Germans in France and in Tunisia in the same year, that is 1942. The Vichy French military men couldn't have resisted the German who were very adamant and determined to crash the French's down.

The Vichy's weapons were not up to the standard when compared with those of the Germans. They used tanks while the German possessed combat aircrafts though they were not enough. The Germans never trusted the French Vichy government and that was why they could never let them to modify their war technology. They thought that French's would rise up against them if let to acquire modern weapons. Due to lack of proper weapons the Vichy French's were unable to keep sustained resistance against the Allied forces who comprised of British soldiers and American soldiers (Atkinson R 2003; 152)

In the initial stage of the war, America thought the French North Africa would not attack the Americans though this is not what happened. Though they tried to resist they could not resist the American's advancements. They had no effective troops that would manage to keep Americans at bay. Though the American's landings defeated the Frenchs, not all of them were successful. In fact a landing at Fedela costed the transport Leonard wood its 21 landing crafts and many lives perished. Also in another landing, the transport Thomas Jefferson 16 crafts was destroyed completely beyond revival.

The most affected landing was of the transport canal which lost 18 out of its 25 crafts and in the second wave; five of them were ruined leaving only two

boats that could carry troops and other supplies. There was serious landing opposition at Mehdia by the French forces. The landing was not safe and was very dangerous. By November 10th, the Americans under major general Lucian Truscott were able to capture the airfield from the hands of French military men. This was as a result of a very heavy naval gun fire between French's and Americans but later after the negotiations between French leader and the allies in Algeria, fighting stopped.

On 8th November 1992, the infantry division had already actualized its dreams in almost all areas apart from St. Cloud where they met a very strong French force. During this time the combat was spearheaded by Roosevelt who was by then who was brigadier general. However, the landings begun to be interfered with by the rising surfs on 8th of November, the landing activities were to be suspended. In the following day the Vichy government tried to counter attack but they met a lot of resistance from Allied force who had support from air bases and naval base

Oran was secured from the hands by the American though the French looked like they would never go but an armistice was signed when the confronting parties came together. The most operation assignment that the allied forces faced was at the port of Algiers. The French had enough ground force plus 52 fighter aircrafts. They also had 39 bombers. The port was heavily guarded so there was no way the British's and Americans could have an easy access to the port. The American troops of the 168th regimental combat landed on the West while the 39th combat team went to the East of the port and they raided the port.

They used two British destroyers which carried the royal navy personnel and the American troops. Before they could succeed, one of the destroyers was destroyed and it had to go back immediately while the other one succeeded and crossed the barriers. These forces that succeeded captured the power station and petroleum tank farm and the Frenchs responded to this attack immediately. After some time when the 168th combat group failed to turn up, the American commander was forced to surrender his troops. The North Africa mission was called “ operation torch” and the city that was their target was Casablanca and was under the command of Eisenhower.

These nations (Sam M. 2006; 102) were fighting for the control of the Suez Canal that linked Africa with the Middle East. Suez Canal was the inlet of oil from the Middle East and other raw materials from Asia. Due to the mechanization of their armies, oil was a very crucial commodity and because Britain which had already a mechanized army it totally relied on oil from the Middle East. Britain used Suez Canal as a link to her overseas dominions. This was all made possible by the Mediterranean Sea hence, the struggle. This struggle started at around 1935 when Ethiopia was invaded by Italy which by then had made Somali land its colony.

The move frightened Egypt which was not yet a British colony. They started getting worried of its imperialistic aspirations thus in order to protect its interest and country, it allowed Britain to station its army in its territory so as to keep off any advances from Italy. Thereafter, Britain and France took upon themselves theresponsibilityof maintaining naval control over the Mediterranean with the main British’s base at Alexandria, Egypt. The British



and American troops met little resistance at Algiers, Oran and Casablanca on 8th of November 1942. The war took place in the North African desert.

By the time the war took place the Italian dictator Mussolini had a better equipped army than that of the Britain and America. He had about a million soldiers who were based in Libya while Britain had only 3600 soldiers who were based in Egypt. They were supposed to protect the Suez Canal and the oil fields in Arabia. At this time the Italians were a threat to Britain. They had already started showing interest in the red sea and Suez Canal supply routes. The North Africa campaign in the beginning was hampered by lack of enough supplies on both sides but later they got equipped.

Tough battles took place which either rendered one group to advance against each other along the supply routes. Many of these fights took place in the Far East region out of the Mediterranean where they enjoyed free transport (Breuer W. 1985; 26) In April 1941, the allied forces were under the leadership of General Bernard Montgomery. While the British troops worked to keep German forces at bay to the West, the US forces were supposed to confront the French in North Africa under "Operation Torch". The main reason for this operation was to take over Morocco which was already a French colony, to take Algeria and Tunisia.

They wanted to offer support to their colleague in the Libyan Desert. They also wanted to make Mediterranean shipping route free to their ships and for other major operations in North Africa. They hoped that they would force the axis out of the region. They also wanted the axis to reduce their concentration on the Russian forces or in other words, they wanted the Axis

forces to divide their war attention between North Africa and Russia. The attack took Germans by surprise because they did not expect it to happen. Later, the French stopped being hostile to the allied forces and allowed them to have access to Tunisia.

Rommel led his armies to various defensive operations. One of the most key operations was of the Kasserine pass where American defenses were crashed by Germans modern tanks. This operation saw 1000 allied troops dead and hundred of them were held prisoners by Germans. They also lost most of their fighting equipments. Though the axis powers thought they were winners, to the allied forces was an awakening call. They went back to their drawing board, assessed their weaknesses and came up with the way forward (Funk A. L. 1974; 86)

Americans never gave up; they sent Rommel back to conquer the Kasserine pass so that they could get the Merith line. This time, the axis forces gained advanced and suppressed the resistance that until they let 275000 prisoners free. The axis forces in Africa surrendered on may 2nd 1943 after about 350,000 soldiers were captured by the allied forces and 70,000 were casualties. After they quit from the war, the stage was left open for Italian campaign. The axis surrendered because of ruthlessness of 'the operation retribution' which was designed to evacuate German and Italian forces from Tunisia.

About 897 were held captives, 653 escaped and were assumed to have might drowned. In conclusion, we have seen how the North African war costed many lives. Many people perished and others were injured. Though the war was took place in Africa, it was not as fierce that one in Europe.

These wars were fought by these nations to protect their national interests. No country wanted their competitors to have an access or even go near its spheres of influence. Another reason for the fight was to gain supremacy.

The Allied Forces were determined to silence Germany and its colleagues which were proving to be a big threat in Europe. Their plan worked as it was expected that is, they engaged Germany to another front so as to divide its concentration on war in Europe. So, it was not war for the sake of war but war for different reasons. In this war America in conjunction with Britain were the main aggressors. They left North African countries highly damaged. A lot of people perished while others were injured. The harm this American led war did was more than what one could have expected.

Reference: Dennis P. The oxford Companion to Australian Military History. Melbourne. Oxford University press. 2002; 78 Breuer W. Operation Torch: The Allied Gamble to Invade North. St. Martins Press. 1985; 26 Funk A. L. The Politics of Torch, University press. 1974; 86 Sam M. At all costs: How crippled and two American Merchant mariners Turned the Tide of world WarII. Random House. 2006; 102 Ambrose S. The good Fight: How World War II Was Won. Atheneum. New York. 2001; 58 Atkinson R. An army at Dawn The war in North Africa 1942-1943. Newyork: Henry Holt. 2003; 152