The decision to take the initiative in the West with an Allied invasion of North Africa was made by Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. It was one of the few strategic decisions of the war in which the President overrode the counsel of his military advisers.

The reasons for it were as much political as military. At first TORCH, as the operation was called, had no specific military objective other than to effect a lodgment in French North Africa and to open the Mediterranean to Allied shipping. It stemmed mainly from a demand for early action against the European members of the Axis, and ostensibly was designed to ease the pressure on the hard-pressed Soviet armies and check the threatened advance of German power into the Middle East.

A combined Anglo-American attack on North Africa might have come earlier had it not been for the pressing need to use the extremely limited resources of the Allies to defend the eastern Mediterranean and stem the Japanese tidal wave that ultimately engulfed Burma, Malaya, the East Indies, the Philippines, and large areas of the southwest Pacific. In fact the invasion of North Africa had been a main topic of discussion between President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and their chief military advisers, known collectively as the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), at the first of the Allied wartime conferences held in Washington (ARCADIA) during the week before Christmas 1941. [2] The thought of a North African undertaking at that time was inspired by hope of winning the initiative at relatively small cost and "closing and tightening the ring" around Germany, preparatory to a direct attack upon the core of its military power. [3]

American military leaders had long appreciated the fact that the occupation of North Africa held the promise of producing valuable results for the Allied cause. (See Map II, inside back cover) It would prevent Axis penetration of the French dependencies in that region, help secure the British line of communication through the Mediterranean, and provide a potential base for future land operations in the Mediterranean and southern Europe. Nevertheless, they were opposed on strategic grounds to the dissipation of Allied strength in secondary ventures. [5] Confident that America's great resources eventually would prove the decisive factor in the war, they favored a concentration of force in the United Kingdom for a massive attack against western Europe at the earliest possible time. [6]

The British accepted the American view that the main blow would eventually have to be delivered in western Europe, but they hesitated to commit themselves on when and where it should fall. Even at this early stage they showed a preference for peripheral campaigns to be followed by a direct attack on the enemy only after he had been seriously weakened by attrition. Such a "peripheral strategy" came naturally to British leaders. They had followed it so often in earlier wars against continental powers that it had become deeply imbedded in England's military tradition. But another factor that led them to shy away from an immediate encounter with the enemy on his home grounds was the vivid memory of earlier disasters on the Continent. About these the British said little at this time but that the fear of another debacle influenced their arguments can be taken for granted. Later it was to come more openly to the surface.

Churchill and Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, from the outset stressed the advantages of a North
While the majority of American military leaders had their doubts about the value of a North African invasion and its chances of success, President Roosevelt was attracted to the idea largely because it afforded an early opportunity to carry the war to the Germans. In his opinion it was very important to give the people of the United States a feeling that they were at war and to impress upon the Germans that they would have to face American power on their side of the Atlantic. [7] Because of the interest of the two political heads, who in many matters saw eye to eye, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, without committing themselves definitely to any operation, agreed at the ARCADIA Conference to go ahead with a plan to invade North Africa.

The task of working out such a plan was given to General Headquarters (GHQ) in Washington. By combining the main features of GYMNAST and a British scheme to attack Tunisia, GHQ produced a plan in record time called SUPER-GYMNAST. [8] This plan was first submitted for review to Maj. Gen. Joseph W. Stilwell, who had been working on plans to seize Dakar, and then to Maj. Gen. Lloyd R. Fredendall. On the basis of their comments a revised plan was drawn up and approved on 19 February 1942. [9]

Plans for Cross-Channel Operations Get the Green Light

Soon thereafter, unforeseen developments arose that prevented immediate implementation of the revised plan. Among these were the heavy losses the British Navy suffered in the Mediterranean and the Japanese advances in southeastern Asia, the Philippines, and the Netherlands Indies which made it imperative to give the Pacific area first call on American resources, particularly in ships. The shipment of men and supplies to the threatened areas put so great a strain on the Allied shipping pool, already seriously depleted by the spectacular success of German U-boats, [10] that little was available for an early venture into North Africa or anywhere else. Before the situation eased, preparations for meeting the German Army head on in Europe, known as BOLERO, had received the green light in priorities over SUPER-GYMNAST.

As in the case of SUPER-GYMNAST BOLERO had its roots in strategic thinking that antedated Pearl Harbor. Months before 7 December, basic Anglo-American strategy, in the event of America’s entry into the war, called for the defeat of Germany, the strongest Axis Power, first. This grand strategic concept was discussed as a hypothetical matter in pre-Pearl Harbor British-American staff conversations held in Washington between 29 January and 27 March 1941 and later set forth in the Allied agreement (ABC-1) and in the joint Army-Navy plan, RAINBOW 5, which were submitted to the President in June 1941. [11] While sympathetic toward the strategy in both ABC-1 and RAINBOW 5, Roosevelt refrained from approving either at the time, probably for political reasons. At the ARCADIA Conference in December 1941, the basic strategic concept was confirmed and a de-

[6] The date for such an assault as estimated in early 1942 was to be sometime in the spring of 1943.

Page 176

The principal argument for selecting this area for the main British-American offensive was that it offered the shortest route to the heart of Germany and so was the most favorable place in the west where a vital blow could be struck. It was also the one area where the Allies could hope to gain the necessary air superiority, where the United States could "concentrate and maintain" the largest force, where the bulk of the British forces could be brought into action, and where the maximum support to the Soviet Union, whose continued participation in the war was considered essential to the defeat of Germany, could be given. [12] By 1 April an outline draft, which came to be known first as the Marshall Memorandum and later as BOLERO, was far enough advanced to be submitted to the President who accepted it without reservation and immediately dispatched Mr. Harry Hopkins and General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, to
London to obtain British approval. [13]

As originally conceived, BOLERO contemplated a build-up of military power in the United Kingdom simultaneously with continuous raids against the Continent, to be followed by a full-scale attack on Hitler's "Festung Europa" in the spring of 1943. Later the code name ROUNSUP was applied to the operational part of the plan. Under this plan forty-eight divisions, 60 percent of which would be American, were to be placed on the continent of Europe by Septem-

ber of that year. Included in BOLERO was a contingent alternate plan known as SLEDGEHAMMER, which provided for the establishment of a limited beachhead on the Continent in the fall of 1942 should Germany collapse or the situation on the Eastern Front become so desperate that quick action in the west would be needed to relieve German pressure on the Soviet Union.

In London Hopkins and Marshall outlined the American plan to the British. While stressing BOLERO as a means of maintaining the Soviet Army as a fighting force, they also emphasized the need of arriving at an early decision "in principle" on the location and timing of the main British-American effort so that production, allocation of resources, training, and troop movements could proceed without delay.

Churchill seemed to be warmly sympathetic to the American proposal to strike the main blow in northwestern Europe, and described it as a "momentous proposal" in accord with "the classic principle of war-namely concentration against the main enemy." [15] But though the Prime Minister and his advisers agreed "in principle," Marshall was aware that most of them had "reservations regarding this and that" and stated that it would require "great firmness" to avoid further dispersions. [16] That he was right is borne out by the fact that Churchill later wrote that he regarded SLEDGEHAMMER as impractical and accepted it merely as an additional project to be considered along with invasion of North Africa and perhaps Norway as a possible operation for 1942. [17] At all events, BOLERO was approved by the British on 14 April with only one strongly implied reservation: it was not to interfere with Britain’s determination to hold its vital positions in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean area. [18]

**British Opposition to an Early Cross-Channel Attack Grows**

While BOLERO-SLEDGEHAMMER was acceptable to the British in mid-April, it remained so for less than two months. [19] By early May


[18] Paper, COS, 13 Apr 42, title: Comments on Gen Marshall’s Memo, COS (42)97(0) Tab F, ABC 381 BOLERO (3-16-42), 5; Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, pp. 181-85; Bryant, *Turn of the Tide*, pp. 286-87.


Page 179

they were expressing strong doubts that the resources to launch an early cross-Channel operation could be found. [20] In part the uncertainty was due to the state of the American landing craft production program which was not only lagging far behind schedule but was indefinite as to type and number. What the full requirements in craft would be no one actually knew, for all estimates in regard to both number and type were impressionistic. In the original outline plan, the number needed had been placed at 7,000. This was soon raised to 8,100 by the Operations Division (OPD), still too conservative an estimate in the opinion of many. Lt. Gen. Joseph T. McNarney, Deputy Chief of Staff, for example, considered 20,000 a more realistic figure. [21] As to type, the Army had placed orders with the Navy for some 2,300 craft, mostly small 36-foot vehicle and personnel carriers, for delivery in time for a limited operation in the fall. These, along with 50-foot WM boats (small tank lighters), were considered sufficiently seaworthy by the Navy to negotiate the waters of the English Channel. The rest of the 8,100 were expected to be ready for delivery in mid-April 1943, in time for ROUNSUP. [22]

This construction program, seemingly firm in early April, soon ran into difficulties. Toward the end of April the Navy, after re-examining its own requirements for amphibious operations in the Pacific and elsewhere, concluded it needed about 4,000 craft. If its estimates were allowed to stand, only about half of the Army’s needs for SLEDGEHAMMER could be met in the construction program. Some of the resulting deficit might possibly be made up by the British, but this seemed unlikely at the time for their production was also behind schedule.

The second obstacle arose when the British questioned the ability of the landing craft on which construction had begun to weather the severe storms that prevailed in the Channel during the fall and winter months. They convinced the President that their objections to the type of craft under construction in the United States were sound, as indeed they were. The result was that a new program, which shifted the emphasis to the production of larger craft, was drawn up and placed under British guidance. Like the earlier program this one also underwent a series of upward changes. [23]
HAMMER had dwindled. If the latter operation was to be undertaken at all, it would have to be executed with what craft and shipping could be scraped together. This, of course, would increase the danger that SLEDGEHAMMER would become a sacrificial offering launched not in the hope of establishing a permanent lodgment but solely to ease the pressure on the Soviet armies. For this the British, who would be required to make the largest contribution in victims and equipment, naturally had no stomach.

In late May when Vyacheslav M. Molotov, the Soviet Foreign Commissar, visited London to urge the early establishment of a second front in western Europe, he found Churchill noncommittal. The Prime Minister informed him that the British would not hesitate to execute a cross-Channel attack before the year was up provided it was "sound and sensible," but, he emphasized, "wars are not won by unsuccessful operations." [24]

In Washington a few days later, Molotov found that a different view on SLEDGEHAMMER from the one he had encountered in London still prevailed. Roosevelt, much more optimistic than Churchill, told him that he "hoped" and "expected" the Allies to open a second front in 1942 and suggested that the Soviet Union might help its establishment by accepting a reduction in the shipment of lend-lease general supplies. [25] The conversations ended with a declaration drafted by Molotov and accepted by the President which stated that a "full understanding was reached with regard to the urgent tasks of creating a Second Front in Europe in 1942." [26] This statement, although not a definite assurance that a cross-Channel invasion would soon be launched, differed considerably from the noncommittal declarations of the Prime Minister. It clearly indicated that Washington and London were not in full accord on the strategy for 1942 and that further discussions between U.S. and British leaders were necessary to establish a firm agreement.

By the time of the second Washington conference in June 1942 the Prime Minister and his close military advisers, if they ever truly accepted the U.S. strategy proposed by Marshall, had definitely undergone a change of mind. They now contended that an emergency invasion in 1942 to aid Russia would preclude a second attempt for years to come and therefore no direct attack should be undertaken unless the German Army was "demoralized by failure against Russia." [27]

Aware of the fact that the British had grown cool to SLEDGEHAMMER, if not to ROUNDUP, as the strategy for 1942 and 1943 and anxious to get American troops into action against the main enemy as quickly as possible, President Roosevelt in mid-June sounded out his military advisers on the resurrection of GYMNAST. The suggestion met with strong dissent from Secretary of War Stimson and General Marshall, both of whom now were convinced that the British were just as much opposed to ROUNDUP for 1943 as they were to SLEDGEHAMMER in 1942. [28]

In deference to their views, Roosevelt refrained from openly supporting the British position during the June conference in Washington, with the result that the meetings ended with BOLERO and ROUNDUP-SLEDGEHAMMER ostensibly still intact as the basic Anglo-American strategy in the North Atlantic area. But Churchill's vigorous arguments against a 1942 cross-Channel invasion of the Continent and Roosevelt's lively and unconcealed interest in the Mediterranean basin as a possible alternative area of operations indicated that the opponents of diversionary projects were losing ground. The defeat of the British Eighth Army in a spectacular tank battle at Knightsbridge in Libya on 13 June, the subsequent fall of Tobruk on 21 June, followed by the rapid advance of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's army toward Alexandria and the Suez Canal, further weakened the position of the U.S. military leaders, for as long as Commonwealth forces were fighting with their backs to the wall in Egypt no British Government could be expected to agree to a cross-Channel venture.

Churchill, who had hurriedly returned to England in the crisis created by Rommel's victories, soon made it unmistakably clear that he was adamant in his opposition to any plan to establish a bridgehead on the Continent in 1942. [29] A premature invasion, he reiterated in a cable to Roosevelt, would be disastrous. Instead he recommended that the American military chiefs proceed with planning for GYMNAST while the British investigated the possibility of an attack on Norway (JUPITER) a pet project of his. To his representative in Washington, Field Marshal Sir John Dill, he sent a message making it clear that he wanted a North African operation. "GYMNAST," he stated,


Page 181

although the German Army was "demoralized by failure against Russia." [27]

Page 180

As the requirements rose, the prospects of meeting them declined. In late May it was still possible to expect delivery in time for ROUNDUP in the spring of 1943 but the hope of obtaining enough craft for SLEDGE-

[20] Bryant, Turn of the Tide, pp. 300-301.
[22] Ibid.
"affords the sole means by which the U.S. can strike at Hitler in 1942 .... However if the President decided against GYMNASST the matter is settled" and both countries would have to remain "motionless in 1942." [30] But for the time being the impetuous Prime Minister was in no position to press strongly for the early implementation of the project, eager though he was to assume the offensive. For weeks to come the military situation would demand that every ton of available shipping in the depleted Allied shipping pool be used to move men, tanks, and other materials around southern Africa to hold Egypt and bolster the Middle East against Rommel's army and the even more potentially dangerous German forces in Russia that had conquered Crimea and were massing for an offensive that might carry them across the Caucasus into the vital oil-rich regions of Iraq and the Persian Gulf. [31]

Strong support for the Prime Minister's objections to a premature invasion of the Continent had come from the British Chiefs of Staff. After considering the advantages and disadvantages of SLEDGEHAMMER, they stated in their report to the War Cabinet on 2 July: "If we were free agents we could not recommend that the operation should be mounted." [32] In reaching this conclusion they were ostensibly persuaded by two reports, one from Lord Leathers, British Minister of War Transport, who had estimated that the operation would tie up about 250,000 tons of shipping at a time when shipping could ill be spared, and the other from Lord Louis Mountbatten, which pointed out that, in the absence of sufficient landing craft in the United Kingdom, all amphibious training for other operations, including cross-Channel in 1943, would have to be suspended if SLEDGEHAMMER were undertaken. The War Cabinet immediately accepted the views of the British Chiefs of Staff and on 8 July notified the Joint Staff Mission in Washington of its decision against an operation on the Continent even if confined to a "tip and run" attack. [33]

In submitting its views on the strategy to be followed, the War Cabinet carefully refrained from openly opposing ROUNDUP as an operation for 1943. But the effect was the same since it was not possible to conduct both the African invasion and the cross-Channel attack with the means then at the disposal of the Allies.

[30] See JCS 24th Mtg, 10 July 42; Msg, Churchill to Field Marshal Dill, 12 Jul 42, ABC 381 (7-25-42) Sec. 4-B; Bryant, _Turn of the Tide_, pp. 301-02, 318.

[31] How serious the British considered this latter threat to their vital oil resources is clearly indicated in the many references to it in Field Marshal Brooke's diary. See Bryant, _Turn of the Tide_, Chs. 8, 9.

[32] Memo, COS for War Cabinet, 2 Jul 42, sub: Future Opns WP (42) 278 (COS 42), ABC 381 (7-25-42) Sec. 4-B, 19.


Page 183

Because of the lag in landing craft construction, the Joint Chiefs of Staff realized that SLEDGEHAMMER was rapidly becoming a forlorn hope. By the end of June, out of a total of 2,698 LCP's, LCV's, and LCM's estimated as likely to be available, only 238 were in the United Kingdom or on the way. [34] By mid-July General Hull informed Eisenhower, who had gone to London, "that all the craft available and en route could land less than 16,000 troops and 1,100 tanks and vehicles." [35] This was 5,000 troops and 2,200 tanks less than the estimates made in mid-May. Despite these discouraging figures, Marshall and King stubbornly continued to object to dropping SLEDGEHAMMER from the books, not because they wanted it but because they clearly recognized that the fate of ROUNDUP was also at stake in the British Government's attitude toward the emergency operation. Whether in earnest or not they now went so far as to advocate that the United States should turn its back on Europe and strike decisively against Japan unless the British adhered "unservingly" to the "full BOLERO plan." [36] This attitude so impressed Field Marshal Dill that he seriously considered cabling his government that further pressure for GYMNASST at the expense of a cross-Channel operation would drive the Americans into saying, "We are finished off with the West and will go out in the Pacific." [37] What Dill did not know was that Roosevelt was opposed to any action that amounted to an "abandonment of the British." Nor did the President openly agree with his Joint Chiefs of Staff that the British would be as unwilling to accept a large-scale cross-Channel attack in 1943 as in 1942, whatever their present views. [35] He was still determined to commit the Western Allies to action against the Germans before the end of the year, somehow and somewhere. If an agreement with the British on a cross-Channel attack could not be reached he was quite willing to settle for some other operation. Unlike his chief military advisers, he was far from hostile to a campaign in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, or elsewhere in the Atlantic area, if circumstances ruled out SLEDGEHAMMER or ROUNDUP. In fact, Secretary Stimson believed he was weakening on BOLERO and considered him somewhat enamored of the idea of operations in the Mediterranean. [39] The President's willingness to accept a substitute for an early invasion of Europe appears in the instructions he gave Harry Hopkins, General Marshall, and Admiral King.

[34] Leighton and Coakley, _Global Logistics, 1940-1943_, p. 382.
[35] _Ibid_.
when he sent them to England on 18 July with large powers to make a final effort to secure agreement on a cross-Channel attack. Should they become convinced after exploring all its angles with the British that such an operation would not prevent “the annihilation of Russia” by drawing off enemy air power, they were to consider other military possibilities. [40]

As might have been expected, the American delegates failed to convince Churchill or the British military chiefs that an early assault on the Continent was practical. The Prime Minister, after questioning both the urgency and feasibility of SLEDGEHAMMER, again emphasized the value of a North African operation and suggested that if the approaching battle for Egypt went well, it might be possible to carry the war to Sicily or Italy. [41]

A realistic estimate of the military situation at the time indicated that launching a successful operation against the mainland of Europe in 1942 was far from bright. Allied war production potential was still comparatively undeveloped and battle-tested divisions were unavailable. Landing craft, despite a high production priority ordered by the Navy in May, were still scarce, shipping was woefully short, and modern tanks, capable of meeting those of the enemy on equal terms, were just beginning to roll off the assembly lines. Even if the production of materiel could be speeded up time was required to raise and organize a large force and train units in the difficult techniques of amphibious warfare. By according additional overriding priorities to BOLERO, the flow of men, equipment, and supplies to the United Kingdom could be increased, but this meant running the grave danger of crippling forces already engaged with the enemy. Should this risk be accepted, there still remained the problem of erecting a logistical organization that could feed men, equipment, and supplies into the battle area without interruption. Considerable progress had been made in building such an organization in the United Kingdom but it was still far from perfect. Taking all these matters into consideration, along with the likelihood that the Germans would have enough strength in France and the Lowlands to contain an invasion without weakening their eastern front, the Combined Chiefs of Staff concluded that, at best, the only landing that could be made on the Continent in 1942 would be a minor one, aimed at securing a foothold with a port and holding and consolidating it during the winter. But the hard facts mutually argued against pitting any force against a veteran army on the chance that it would be sustained during the stormy winter weather.

The Americans saw this as clearly as the British. As realists, they knew that an operation in execution would take priority over one in contemplation, and that it would generate pressures that could upset the basic strategy agreed upon for Europe. The weakness of their stand was that nearly a year would probably elapse during which few Americans other than those in the air force would be in action against the Germans. Such a situation the impatient President whose full support they needed could not bring himself to accept. Knowing this, Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff reiterated time and again the advantages of a North African operation in conjunction with a counteroffensive in Libya. They stressed all the old arguments: it could lead to the liberation of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, bring the French there back into the war against the Axis, open the Mediterranean to through traffic thus saving millions of tons of shipping, cause the withdrawal of German air power from Russia, and force the Germans and Italians to extend themselves beyond their capacity in reinforcing their trans-Mediterranean and southern front. They would not admit that a North African operation in 1942 would rule out ROUNDUP and contended instead that early action in the Mediterranean would lead to a quick victory which would still permit it to be launched in 1943.

The Americans, on the other hand, continued to hold out for SLEDGEHAMMER. They resisted the idea of dropping SLEDGEHAMMER, primarily in order to forestall a diversionary and indecisive operation which would syphon off resources and prevent a true second front from being established in 1943. Marshall and King, if not Hopkins, were certain that the fate of ROUNDUP was at stake and held as firmly as ever the belief that a direct attack against the Continent was the only way to assist the hard-pressed Soviet armies and seriously threaten the military power of Germany. But because of the President’s instructions to agree to some military operations somewhere in 1942, it was impossible for them to hold their ground indefinitely. Their position was not strengthened by the course of events in Russia, in the Middle East, and in the Atlantic, or by the opinion expressed by General Eisenhower—recently appointed Commanding General, European Theater of Operations, United States Army (ETOUSA)—that SLEDGEHAMMER had less than a fair chance of success. [42] Nor were they helped by the secret message from Roosevelt to...
July, at a meeting at the White House with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the President stated that "TORCH would be undertaken at the earliest possible date" but made no comment on its possible effect on ROUNDPUP. [52] The next day his decision on TORCH was
forwarded to the British Chiefs of Staff and to General Eisenhower. [53]

However loath the President's military advisers were to sidetrack plans for the direct invasion of the Continent and accept a secondary project in its place, an attack on French North Africa, alone among the operations considered, met strategic conditions for joint Anglo-American operations in 1942 on which both Churchill and Roosevelt could agree. Without the wholehearted support of the two top political leaders in the United States and Great Britain, no combined operation could be mounted. In short, TORCH from the beginning had support on the highest political level in both countries, an advantage never enjoyed by either ROUNDUP or SLEDGEHAMMER.

The decision to invade North Africa restored Anglo-American cooperative planning, which had been showing signs of serious strain. It was now on a sound working basis that permitted the establishment of rights and priorities with relentless determination. What was still needed was a final agreement between Washington and London on the size, direction, and timing of the contemplated operation. Such an agreement was not easy to reach. The big question to be decided was where the main effort of the Allies should be made and when. On this issue Washington and London were at first far apart.

**The Issue of Inside Versus Outside Landings [54]**

The strategic planners in Washington, mindful of the dangers in French opposition, hostile Spanish reaction, and a German counterstroke against Gibraltar with or without the support of Spain, proposed making the main landings outside the Mediterranean on the Atlantic coast of French Morocco. Troops would take Casablanca and adjacent minor ports, seize and hold the railroad and highways to the east as an auxiliary line of communications, secure all the approaches to Gibraltar, and consolidate Allied positions in French Morocco before moving into the Mediterranean. This, the planners estimated, would take about three months. The plan was a cautious one,

[52] Memo, Maj Gen Walter B. Smith for JCS, 1 Aug 42, sub: Notes of Conf Held at the White House at 8:30 PM, 30 Jul 42, OPD Exec 5, Item 1, Tab 14.
[53] Before leaving London, Marshall informed Eisenhower that he would be in command of the TORCH operation, if and when undertaken, in addition to being Commanding General ETOUSA. This appointment was later confirmed by the CCS.

Page 189
dictated primarily by the fear that the Strait of Gibraltar might be closed by the Germans or the Spanish, acting singly or together.

The bold course, advocated by the strategic planners in London, including many Americans working with the British, was to strike deep into the Mediterranean with the main force at the outset and then, in co-ordination with the British Eighth Army moving west from Egypt, seize Tunisia before the Germans could reinforce the threatened area. They viewed with feelings approaching consternation the cautious American strategy that would waste precious months in taking ports and consolidating positions over a thousand miles distant from Tunisia, whose early occupation they believed to be vital to the success of TORCH. Should the Germans be permitted to establish themselves firmly in that province it was feared that they might, because of shorter lines of communications and land-based air power, be able to hold out indefinitely, thus preventing the extension of Allied control to the strategic central Mediterranean.

The proponents of the inside approach also stressed the relative softness of the Algerian coastal area as compared with that around Casablanca. In their view Algeria with its favorable weather and tide conditions, more numerous and better ports, and proximity to Tunisia seemed to have every advantage over western Morocco as the main initial objective. They believed that even in the matter of securing communications it would be safer to move swiftly and boldly through the Strait of Gibraltar and seize ports along the Algerian coast as far east as Philippeville and Bone. Strong determined action there would cow the Spanish and make them hesitate to permit German entry into Spain for a joint attack on Gibraltar. On the other hand they contended that an unsuccessful attack in the Casablanca area, where operations were extremely hazardous because of unfavorable surf conditions four days out of five, would almost certainly invite Spanish intervention. [55]

**The Transatlantic Essay Contest [56]**

For weeks arguments for and against both strategic concepts were tossed back and forth across the Atlantic in what has aptly been called “a transatlantic essay contest.” Meanwhile preparations for the attack languished. A logical solution to the problem was to reconcile the conflicting views by combining both into a single plan. This, General Eisenhower, who had been designated to command the operation

[55] Ltr, Prime Minister to Harry Hopkins, 4 Sep 42, as quoted in Churchill, *Hinge of Fate*, p. 539; Bryant, *Turn of the Tide*, pp. 401-02.

Page 190

before Marshall left London, attempted to do in his first outline plan of 9 August when he proposed approximately simultaneous landings inside and outside the Mediterranean, the first strong and the latter relatively weak. [57]

Almost immediately the plan struck snags in the form of insufficient naval air support and assault shipping. Shortly after it was submitted,
both the American and the British Navies suffered severe losses in naval units, particularly in aircraft carriers. [58] Since close land-based air support would be negligible, confined to a single airfield at Gibraltar under the domination of Spanish guns, carriers were necessary to protect assault and follow-up convoys for the operation. In view of the recent naval losses and needs elsewhere in the world, finding them would take time. The U.S. Navy quickly let it be known that it had no carriers immediately available to fill the void and was unwilling to commit itself on when they would be. This meant that the burden of supplying seaborne air protection would probably fall on the British.

Equally if not more important in determining the size and timing of the landings was the availability of assault shipping. Most of the American APA's (assault troop transports) were tied up in the Pacific where they were vitally needed. To transport the twelve regimental combat teams, envisioned as the force needed to make the three landings, would require 36 APA's and 9 to 12 AKA's (attack cargo transports); and as yet the program for converting conventional transports to assault transports had hardly begun. [59] On 2 August the Navy estimated that sufficient assault shipping, trained crews, and rehearsed troops for an operation of the size originally contemplated would not be ready for landings before 7 November. The British were against postponing the operation and, to gain time, were willing to skimp on the training and rehearsals of assault units and boat crews. [60] The President sided with them on an early attack and on 12 August directed Marshall to try for a 7 October landing date even if it meant the reduction of the assault forces by two thirds. It now fell to Eisenhower and his planning staff to rearrange their plan in the light of available resources and under the pressure for quick action.

In his second outline plan of 21 August Eisenhower set 15 Oc-

tober as a tentative date for the invasion and proposed dropping the Casablanca operation entirely and concentrating on the capture of Oran in Algeria. [61] That having been accomplished, he would move in two directions, eastward into Tunisia and southwest across the mountains into French Morocco. This plan seemed to ignore the danger to the Allies' line of communications from the direction of both Gibraltar and Spanish Morocco should Spain join the Axis Powers. It also failed to take sufficiently into account the shortage in naval escorts and the logistical problems involved in funneling all the men, equipment, and supplies needed to seize Algiers, French Morocco, and Tunisia into the port of Oran, whose facilities might not be found intact. The complicated convoy arrangements for the assault, follow-up, and build-up phases of the operation that would have to be made were enough by themselves to doom the plan in the eyes of the military chiefs in Washington as too risky.

In response to continuous pressure from the President and the Prime Minister for an early assault, Eisenhower advanced D Day from 15 October to 7 October, when the moon would be in a phase that would facilitate surprise. This date he viewed as the earliest practical time for the beginning of the invasion. But few informed leaders believed that this date could be met. Admiral King considered 24 October more likely, and even the British planners, who were consistently more optimistic about an early D Day than their American colleagues, admitted that meeting the proposed date would require a “superhuman effort.” [62]

The most serious problem confronting planners on both sides of the Atlantic continued to be the scarcity of assault shipping. The Navy's original estimate of fourteen weeks as the time required to convert conventional ships to assault vessels, train crews, rehearse troops in embarkation and debarkation, load troops and cargo, and sail from ports of embarkation in the United States and the United Kingdom to destination remained unchanged. This meant that 7 November, the date given in the original estimate, would be the earliest possible day for the assault to begin. The Navy might also have pointed to the shortage of landing craft for transporting tanks and other assault vehicles as an argument against an early D Day. LST's were under construction at the time but none were expected to be available before October or November. [63]

Nevertheless Roosevelt and Churchill, impatient of delay, continued to insist on an early invasion date. It was such pressure in the face of shipping, equipment, and training deficiencies that was responsible for Eisenhower's 21 August proposal to limit drastically the size of the assault and confine it entirely to the Mediterranean.

The plan found few supporters even among those who made it. Eisenhower himself regarded it as tentative and the date of execution probably too early because as yet little progress had been made in planning the force to be organized in the United States and not enough was known about scheduling convoys, the availability of air and naval support, or the amount of resistance that could be expected. [64]

So widely varying were the reactions to the plan in Washington and London that a reconciliation of views appeared impossible.
steadily began to emerge. On 3 September, Roosevelt, who had promised to restudy the feasibility of more than two landings, came up
follow-up help for some considerable time should the landings be stubbornly opposed or even held up. [74]
British forces would have to be carried in conventional vessels that could enter and discharge at ports. This necessarily would delay
shipping arrangements and possibly subsequent operations. Since all the assault ships would be required to lift purely American units,
assault forces. At the same time he appropriately pointed out that the American view on the composition of the assault would affect
should come in after the political situation was favorable, provided the restriction did not compromise the size or employment of the
attributed the initial landings to American troops.
This sentiment was such that the inclusion of British troops in the assault was extremely dangerous. [72] Roosevelt therefore insisted on
confining the initial landings to American troops.
In a series of messages to Roosevelt, he urged the establishment of a definite date for D Day, [67] and argued eloquently for an invasion
along the broadest possible front in order to get to Tunisia before the Germans. "The whole pith of the operation will be lost," he cabled,"if we do not take Algiers as well as Oran on the first day." [68] At the same time he urged Eisenhower to consider additional landings at Bone and Philippeville. [69] He was confident that a foothold in both places could be attained with comparative ease and expressed the opinion that a strong blow deep inside the Mediterranean would bring far more favorable political results vis-a-vis Spain and the French in North Africa than would an assault on Casablanca. He was not opposed to a feint on that port but he feared making it the main objective of the initial landings. Because of the dangerous surf conditions, he argued, "Casablanca might easily become an isolated failure and let loose upon us ... all the perils which have anyway to be faced." [70] As to the time of the attack, he would launch it by mid-October at the latest. To meet that target date, he believed naval vessels and combat loaders could be found somewhere and outloading speeded up.
Roosevelt, equally unwilling to accept a delay, proposed in his reply two simultaneous landings of American troops, one near
Casablanca, the other at Oran, to be followed by the seizure of the road and rail communications between the two ports and the
consolidation of a supply base in French Morocco that would be free from dependence on the route through the Strait of Gibraltar. He
appreciated the value of three landings but pointed out that there was not currently on hand or in sight enough combat shipping and
naval and air cover for more than the two landings. He agreed however that both the Americans and the British should re-examine
shipping resources "and strip everything to the bone to make the third landing possible." [71] In his reply Roosevelt also conveyed his
views on the national composition of the forces to be used in the initial landings within the Mediterranean. Recent intelligence reports
from Vichy and North Africa had convinced him that this was a matter of such great political import that the success or failure of TORCH
might well depend on the decision made. These reports indicated that in the breasts of most Frenchmen in North Africa an anti-British
sentiment still rankled in consequence of the evacuation at Dunkerque, the de-
[64] Mallof and Snell, Strategic Planning, 1941-1942, p. 289.
[65] Bryant, Turn of the Tide, p. 403.
[66] Churchill, Hinge of Fate, pp. 484-86; Bryant, Turn of the Tide, pp. 373-74.
Page 193
structure visited on the French fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, British intervention in the French dependencies of Syria and Madagascar, and the
abortive attack by British-sponsored de Gaulle forces on Dakar. Both the President and his advisers were convinced that the strength of
this sentiment was such that the inclusion of British troops in the assault was extremely dangerous. [72] Roosevelt therefore insisted on
confining the initial landings to American troops.
Churchill did not share the view that Americans "were so beloved by Vichy" or the British "so hated" that it would "make the difference
between fighting and submission." [73] Nevertheless he was quite willing to go along with the President's contention that the British
should come in after the political situation was favorable, provided the restriction did not compromise the size or employment of the
assault forces. At the same time he appropriately pointed out that the American view on the composition of the assault would affect
shipping arrangements and possibly subsequent operations. Since all the assault ships would be required to lift purely American units,
British forces would have to be carried in conventional vessels that could enter and discharge at ports. This necessarily would delay
follow-up help for some considerable time should the landings be stubbornly opposed or even held up. [74]
As a result of the transatlantic messages between the two political leaders, a solution to the impasse of late August gradually but
steadily began to emerge. On 3 September, Roosevelt, who had promised to restudy the feasibility of more than two landings, came up

with a new plan in which he proposed three simultaneous landings at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers. For Casablanca he proposed a force of 34,000 in the assault and 24,000 in the immediate follow-up (all United States); for Oran, 25,000 in the assault and 20,000 in the immediate follow-up (all United States); for Algiers, 10,000 in the initial beach landing (all United States) to be followed within an hour by British forces. All British forces in the follow-up, the size of which would be left to Eisenhower, would debark at the port of Algiers from non-combat loaded vessels. All the American troops for the Casablanca landing were to come directly from the United States; all those for Oran and Algiers, from the American forces in the United Kingdom. As for shipping, the United States could furnish enough combat load-

ers, ready to sail on 20 October, to lift 34,000 men and sufficient transports and cargo vessels to lift and support 52,000 additional troops. Total available shipping under U.S. control, he estimated, was enough to move the first three convoys of the proposed Casablanca force. This did not include either the American transports, sufficient to lift 15,000 men, or the nine cargo vessels in the United Kingdom that had previously been earmarked for the TORCH operation. Under the President's proposal, the British would have to furnish (1) all the shipping (including combat loaders) for the American units assigned to take Oran and Algiers except the aforementioned American vessels in the United Kingdom, (2) the additional British troops required for the Algiers assault and follow-up, and (3) the naval forces for the entire operation, less those that the United States could furnish for the Casablanca expedition.

Churchill replied to the American proposal at once, suggesting only one modification of importance, a shift of ten or twelve thousand troops from the Casablanca force to that at Oran in order to give more strength to the inside landings. Unless this was done, he pointed out, the shortage in combat loaders and landing craft would rule out an assault on Algiers. [75]

Roosevelt consented to a reduction of approximately 5,000 men in the Casablanca force and expressed the belief that this cut, along with a previous one made in the Oran force, would release enough combat loaders for use at Algiers. Whatever additional troops were needed for that landing the President believed could be found in the United Kingdom. To these proposals the Prime Minister agreed on 5 September.

The scope and direction of the landings were now decided; the "transatlantic essay contest" was over. Only the date of the invasion remained to be settled. The planning staffs in both Washington and London, after six weeks of frustrating uncertainty, could now breathe a sigh of relief and proceed with definite operational and logistical preparation without the harassing fear that the work of one day would be upset by a new development in strategy the next.

The final decision represented a compromise on the conflicting strategic concepts of Washington and London. It sought to minimize the risks to the line of communications involved in putting the full strength of the Allied effort inside the Mediterranean without giving up hope of gaining Tunisia quickly. The plan to make initial landings east of Algiers at Philippeville and Bone, advocated by the Brit-

ish, was abandoned but the assault on Algiers was retained at the expense of the forces operating against Casablanca and Oran. The political desirability of an all-American assault, though probably still valid, was compromised to the extent that British forces were to be used at Algiers in the immediate follow-up and for the eastward push into Tunisia after a lodgment had been attained.

No date was set for the attack. The decision the Combined Chiefs left to Eisenhower who had a number of matters to consider in making it. [76] Because of broad political and strategic reasons and the normal deterioration in weather conditions in the area of impending operations during the late fall, the earlier the landings, the better. The vital need for tactical surprise pointed to the desirability of a new-moon period. But in the final analysis D Day would be determined by the time needed to assemble and prepare necessary shipping, acquire naval escorts, equip American units in the United Kingdom, and train assault troops and landing craft crews in amphibious operations. By mid-September Eisenhower was sufficiently convinced that his logistical and training problems could be solved by late October and so he set 8 November for the attack. [77]

His optimism that this date could be met was not shared by all his staff, particularly those acquainted with the tremendous logistical tasks that remained to be completed. More than the political leaders and strategic planners they realized that no task forces of the size contemplated could be fully equipped and shipped in the short time remaining, no matter how strongly imbued with a sense of urgency everyone concerned might be. [78] If there was to be an invasion at all in November, they realized that the Allies would have to cut deeply into normal requirements and resort to considerable improvisation. Events were to prove that those who doubted the complete readiness to move on 8 November were correct.

Even in retrospect, it is debatable whether the decision to invade North Africa was the soundest strategic decision that could have been made at the time and under the existing circumstances. If there had to be an operation in the Atlantic area in 1942 that had a chance of

[73] These views of Churchill are not in accord with the reports from British intelligence agents that Churchill showed Harry Hopkins in July when he was urging the United States to accept a North African offensive. Nor are they the same as those expressed in his message of 12 July to Dill. Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins, pp. 610-11; Msg, Churchill to Field Marshal Dill, 12 Jul 42, ABC 381 (7-25-42) Sec. 4.
[74] Churchill, Hinge of Fate, p. 534.

Page 195

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Even in retrospect, it is debatable whether the decision to invade North Africa was the soundest strategic decision that could have been made at the time and under the existing circumstances. If there had to be an operation in the Atlantic area in 1942 that had a chance of

[75] Msg 144, Prime Minister to Roosevelt, 5 Sep 42, Exec 5, Item 1; Churchill, Hinge of Fate, Ch. VII; Bryant, Turn of the Tide, p. 403.

Page 196
success, few students of World War II will argue today that TORCH was to be preferred over SLEDGEHAMMER. The shortage of landing craft and other resources necessary to attain a lodgment in northwest Europe and to sustain it afterward was sufficient reason for the rejec-

[76] CCS 103/3, 26 Sep 42, Sub: Outline Plan Opn TORCH.
[77] Leighton and Coakley, Global Logistics, 1940-1943, p. 424.

Page 197

tion of SLEDGEHAMMER. There was little real doubt but that TORCH would siphon off the necessary men and equipment required for ROUNDUP in 1943. This the American military leaders saw clearly as did the British, although the latter never admitted it openly in conference. The real question therefore remains: Was it wise to embark on an operation in the northwest African area in 1942 at the expense of a possible direct attack against the Continent in 1943? The British as a group and some Americans, notably the President, believed it was; most of the American military leaders and strategic planners thought otherwise.

The preference of the British for TORCH undoubtedly stemmed fundamentally from their opposition to an early frontal assault on Festung Europa. Their inclination for a peripheral strategy was based in part on tradition, in part on previous experience in the war, in part on the desirability of opening up the Mediterranean, and in part on the need of bolstering their bastions in the Middle East. More than the Americans they knew what it meant to try to maintain a force in western Europe in the face of an enemy who could move swiftly and powerfully along inner overland lines of communications. Having encountered the force of German arms on the Continent earlier in the war, they naturally shied away from the prospect of meeting it head on again until it had been thoroughly weakened by attrition.

The American military leaders, on the other hand, less bound by tradition and confident that productive capacity and organization would give the Allies overwhelming odds within a short time, believed the war could be brought to an end more quickly if a main thrust was directed toward the heart of the enemy. In their opinion the enemy, softened by heavy and sustained preliminary bombardment from the air, would become a ready subject for such a thrust by the summer of 1943. They also believed that an early cross-Channel attack was the best way to help the Russians whose continued participation in the war was a matter of paramount importance. They did not want SLEDGEHAMMER any more than the British, but fought against scrapping it before Russia's ability to hold out was certain. They opposed entry into North Africa because they did not consider it an area where a vital blow could be struck and because they wanted to save ROUNDUP. Churchill, Brooke, and others may assert, as they do, that no cross-Channel attack would have been feasible in 1942 or in 1943 because the Allies lacked the means and the experience in conducting amphibious warfare, and because the enemy was too strong in western Europe. Marshall and his support can contend with equal vigor that had not TORCH and the preparations for subsequent operations in the Mediterranean drained off men and resources, depleted the

Page 198

reserves laboriously built up in the United Kingdom under the BOLERO program, wrecked the logistical organization in process of being established there, had given the enemy an added year to prepare his defenses, a cross-Channel operation could have been carried out successfully in 1943 and the costly war brought to an end earlier. Whose strategy was the sounder will never be known. The decision that was made was a momentous one in which political and military considerations were so intermingled that it is difficult to determine which carried the greater weight. For that reason if for no other, it will be the subject of controversy as long as men debate the strategy of World War II.


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