

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
GENERAL SECTION  
MILITARY HISTORY COMMITTEE  
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS COURSE  
1946-1947

THE ORAN OPERATION  
ALGERIA, NORTH AFRICA, 8-10 NOVEMBER 1942  
(THE INVASION OF NORTH AFRICA)

Type of operation described: AMPHIBIOUS LANDING

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THE ORAN OPERATION  
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of the Central Task Force, in the Allied Invasion of French North Africa, from the landings in the vicinity of ORAN 8 November to the cessation of hostilities 10 November, 1942.

In order to properly orient the reader it will be necessary to briefly cover the events, from a political as well as a military viewpoint, leading up to this first large scale Allied offensive of World War II.

Throughout the world the Allied Armies were on the defensive. The German Armies were making rapid progress in Russia and North Africa; while in the Pacific the Japanese offensive continued.

In June 1942 the Prime Minister of Great Britian met with the President of the United States in Washington. During this conference the decision was made by the Commanders-in-Chief of the two great Allied Armies to launch an offensive operation in Northwest Africa before the end of the year, if considered possible by the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff. (1)

On 24 July 1942 the decision was made by the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff to launch an expedition in French North Africa in conjunction with the advance westward of the British Eighth Army. The plans provided for three task forces to land simultaneously in the vicinity of ORAN, ALGIERS, AND CASABLANCA. (2) (Map A) A gigantic pincer movement was envisioned. In spite

(1) M-3, p. 2; (2) M-1, p. 18.

of the continued reverses in Egypt the British Eighth Army at this time was preparing for a large scale offensive. This force advancing from the East was to constitute the eastern jaw of the pincer designed to destroy the German Armies in North Africa. (3)

Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower (4), then Commanding General, American Forces, European Theater of Operation, was designated as Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces. (5)

Because of its strategic importance the successful occupation of North Africa would provide many military and political advantages. The Mediterranean Sea could be protected, thereby securing the shortest supply and communication route through the Suez Canal to the Far East. The constant threat of an Axis controlled French Morocco would be removed, further securing the Allied position. It could be a base for future operations against the Axis Armies. Furthermore, if landings could be effected without overantagonizing the French Military and Civil leaders, it also could be a base for the reorganization of the French Army. (6)

#### PREPARATION FOR THE INVASION OF NORTH AFRICA

During the early stages of preparation unsurmountable obstacles had to be overcome. Plans called for an invasion Army of 189,129 troops to be at sea on the morning of D-Day. (7) This required hundreds of troop and supply ships, along with the necessary air and sea escort protection. Involved were the combined arms of the American and British Forces; therefore, coordination between the services was of paramount importance and had to be insured. The supply and transportation

(3) M-4, p. 1; (4) The ranks given for all commanders are those held at the time. (5) M-5, p. 53; (6) M-1, p. 18; (7) M-3, p. 5.

requirements were on a scale unheard of in military history. Over 700,000 different items of supply had to be assembled -- these supplies coming from all parts of the globe and prepared for shipment at hundreds of ports. (8)

The entire invasion fleet required over 500 merchant ships and more than 350 warships. At this time many of the ships earmarked for the invasion were still in the shipyards under construction; others were in the Pacific Theater. To fully appreciate the magnitude of this task, it must be remembered that this assorted armada had to be provided for and assembled at the time when the Axis submarine offensive was at its peak. In many instances, ships assigned to the invasion force were sunk and had to be replaced. Warships were sunk, further reducing the potential naval escort protection.

So critical was the shortage of ships that throughout the month of August the ability of the Allied Nations to launch three simultaneous operations was threatened. (9)

The final plans as approved by the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff provided for three task forces to land simultaneously at ORAN, ALGIERS, AND CASABLANCA. One task force, entirely American, was to organize in the United States and sail directly to French Morocco. A second force composed of American ground troops escorted by British Naval Units was to organize and sail from the British Isles and land at ORAN. The third force composed of combined British and American ground forces, escorted by the British Navy, was to sail from the United Kingdom for ALGIERS. (10)

The composition of the three forces was as follows: (11)

(8) M-4, p. 2; (9) M-5; (10) M-4, p. 4; (11) M-4, p. 6.

Western Task Force, 35,000 Troops:

(Major General George S. Patton, Jr., Commanding)

3rd Infantry Division

9th Infantry Division (less 39th R.C.T.)

One Combat Command and One Armored Battalion,  
2nd Armored Division

Central Task Force, 39,000 Troops:

(Major General Lloyd Fredendall, Commanding)

1st Infantry Division

1st Ranger Battalion

Combat Command B, 1st Armored Division

2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Regiment

Corps Troops

Eastern Task Force, 33,000 Troops:

(Lieutenant General Kenneth A. N. Anderson, British Army,  
Commanding)

39th Regimental Combat Team, 9th Division

168th Regimental Combat Team, 34th Division

1st and 6th Battalion Commandos (British and American  
Troops)

11th and 36th Regimental Groups, British 78th Infantry  
Division

D-Day was tentatively set for 4 November, but was later changed to 8 November, 1942. This allowed approximately 3½ months to organize, equip, mass, transport, and coordinate what was to be the largest amphibious operation ever undertaken in the history of warfare. The ultimate success of this operation is indeed proof of the leadership and organizational ability of the American and British Officers who were responsible.

Secrecy was essential to success. This was recognized from the beginning by the Allied leaders.

During the days prior to D-Day General Eisenhower made

the following remark, "Each day that passes is a day of additional risk with regards to secrecy, and secrecy is vital to success." (12)

General Marshall in his report on the invasion states, "The success of the operation depended on the efficient handling of a mass of detail as well as on the training and fighting qualities of the troops, and, above all, upon the secrecy with which this vast undertaking had to be prepared." (13)

Activities in the British Isles were under daily observation by German reconnaissance planes. The German High Command was aware that an allied move was afoot, but was unable to determine the type of operation or its ultimate destination. As a result, strategic surprise was attained on the beaches of North Africa.

To cover this operation various ruses and deceptive measures were used, some interesting in their simplicity. In England General Officers were allowed to be seen in the Army Post Exchanges purchasing heavy woolen underclothes; rumors were encouraged in Allied nations that preparations for an invasion of Norway were underway; Norwegian experts were called in by the War Department; photographic flights were made over Norway; troops were led to believe that they were going to the Far East after landing at Dakar; a release in the Washington newspapers in the latter part of October announced that General Eisenhower was expected in Washington for a conference -- this ten days prior to D-Day; all deliberately planned to cover the forthcoming North African Operation. (14)

To cover the movements of the convoys from the United States and the British Isles additional counter measures were

(12) M-5; (13) M-1, p. 19; (14) M-5.

used. A convoy carrying lend lease equipment to Russia was dispatched in time to cover the departure of the invasion fleet. Even though strict radio silence was enforced throughout the move, destroyers were used to dispatch dummy radio messages to cover positions and routes. The task forces, after entering the Mediterranean, followed the routes usually used by British convoys running the block to Malta. The success of these deceptive measures was evidenced by the fact that the German High Command had submarine packs assembled off the coasts of Sardinia and Dakar ready to attack the convoys. German aircraft were concentrated on Sardinia, and, as a result, were relatively ineffective against the Allied landings for the first twenty-four hours. (15)

#### POLITICAL BACKGROUND

From the beginning international politics was destined to play an important role in the invasion of North Africa. "Not since the Middle Ages were Military and Political moves so closely tied together." (16)

The possibility that the Spanish government would declare war against the Allies, along with a possible Axis move through Spain, was a definite threat to the success of the operation. Aggressive action by the Spanish or in conjunction with the German Army would lead to the fall of Gibraltar, Axis control of Spanish Morocco and, most important, would sever the Mediterranean supply and communication route. Because of the secrecy involved diplomatic maneuvers were limited, and this threat had to be reckoned with throughout the planning. (17)

Of greater significance was the French political situation

(15) M-5; (16) M-3, p. 8; (17) M-5.

and the effect it was to have on the Military aspects of the operation. Following the German occupation of Northern France, and in spite of the singular relationship of the Vichy Government and Berlin, the United States Government maintained diplomatic relations with the French.

It was hoped that negotiations could secure French cooperation in North Africa. General George Marshall in his biennial report stated, "These military operations were staged against a background of diplomatic negotiations through which speedy cessations of French resistance was sought. --- The problem of how to avoid fighting with the French forces in Africa was difficult to approach. In the first place, and most important of all, the hazard to the secrecy with which the operation must be prepared and launched presented an extremely delicate balance in the choice of method to be followed....." (18)

The success of the operation was at stake. A break in security could prove disastrous. The risk was taken, however, and negotiations were started.

The State Department's Consul General in North Africa, Robert Murphy, who was later to be political advisor on General Eisenhower's Staff, was chiefly responsible for the arrangements and negotiations. Mr. Murphy later made a secret trip to London to coordinate and discuss with General Eisenhower the French situation. (19)

General Charles Mast was the chief French negotiation. The few military and civil leaders contacted were sympathetic and anxious to cooperate. (20)

Toward the latter stages of negotiations the French requested that five high ranking American officers come to North

(18) M-1, pp. 19, 21; (19) M-5, p. 103; (20) M-5, p. 107.

Africa to meet with them. General Eisenhower considered this mission so important that he designated his Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Major General Mark Clark, as the chief American representative. (21)

The American party landed by submarine at a specified point ~~east~~<sup>west</sup> of ALGIERS. General Clark was able to get a partial promise of non-resistance from troops in the ALGIERS area, but it was doubtful whether General Mast would be able to greatly influence the French forces in the ORAN and CASABLANCA areas. The French were informed of General Eisenhower's plan to restore French civil and military leadership in North Africa. General Henri Giraud, who had escaped from Germany and was to later escape from France with Allied assistance, would be responsible for civil and military affairs. The results of the conference were favorable and the French were told that they would be informed four days prior to the landings. (22)

The French Navy presented a different problem in itself. Based on prior political and military events, it was expected that the naval units and personnel would resist an Allied invasion. The resentment caused by the British attack on the naval bases of Dakar and Mers-el-Kebir in 1940 was expected to flare up again. This anticipated resistance had to be reckoned with, because it was known that sizeable naval units were in the vicinity of ORAN, ALGIERS and CASABLANCA, and, further, the harbors of these cities were studded with coastal guns manned by naval personnel. (23)

The importance of the political negotiations which were constantly going on prior to D-Day can best be stressed by

(21) M-5; (22) M-5; (23) M-2, p. 5.

quoting General Eisenhower's Naval Aide -- "Capacity of ports and consequent slowness of build-up made clear that if French forces in North Africa oppose the landings as a unit and with their full strength, there will be little hope of achieving the great purpose of sweeping to the eastward quickly to gain control of the whole of North Africa. Consequently, the whole campaign had to be considered as depending entirely on political factors." (24)

In spite of negotiations which had been carried on, the amount of resistance to be expected remained problematical until D-Day. Therefore, preparations continued under the assumption that resistance would be encountered. However, the landing forces were ordered not to fire until fired upon.

#### THE CENTRAL TASK FORCE

##### PREPARATION FOR THE OPERATION

The Central Task Force, under the command of Major General Fredendall, was assembled in the British Isles. The 1st Infantry Division arrived in July, followed by the other units which were to constitute the task force.

Prior to its departure from the United States the 1st Division had undergone extensive amphibious training. Maneuvers were held off the coast of Virginia and North Carolina, followed by battalion amphibious landings off Cape Cod. (25)

In the early part of September commanders down through the regimental level were informed of the forthcoming operation. Detailed planning and unit training followed. Combat units were trained in amphibious warfare, followed by landing maneuvers in Scotland. Throughout the training and maneuvers the American units worked in conjunction with the British Navy. This was necessary in order to provide understanding and team-

(24) M-5, p. 83; (25) M-11.

work between the two, since the British Navy was responsible for landing the American units on the beaches.

The maneuvers were conducted so as to assimilate as detailed as possible the mission and objectives the units would have upon landing. This proved to be very helpful.

During most of the training period Regimental Commanders and staff members were busy in London planning. Unit training was, in most cases, supervised by Executive Officers.

Special equipment was issued and all units were brought to T/O and E strength. However, some items of equipment were not received in time to train with. For example, Cannon Company of the 18th Regimental Combat Team was issued its self-propelled guns without sights three days prior to sailing. The guns were fired once and loaded aboard ship. (26)

The Central Task Force, under the naval command of Commodore Thomas Trowbridge, R.N., sailed from Scotland on 23 October.

#### ENEMY SITUATION (27)

Any discussion of the enemy situation in this operation prior to D-Day was unique in that we were preparing to engage in combat a people who had so recently been a bulwark of the Allied manpower, one of the major powers of the Allied Three. The unanswered question throughout the planning was how would we be received by the French, as aggressors or liberators. Whatever the answer might have been, any and all eventualities had to be countered in the planning.

Prior to the war the French maintained a sizeable force in the North African Empire. Many of these units participated

(26) M-9; (27) M-6, pp. 41, 42.

against the Germans during the invasion of France in 1940. Part of this force had returned to North Africa; however, the German armistice terms had greatly reduced its strength to approximately 120,000.

In the vicinity of ORAN, between Port Aux Poules to the east and Mersat Bou Zedjar to the west, was located one French Division with an estimated strength of 10,200 troops. The Division headquarters was in ORAN, with the smaller units occupying the outlying towns and villages. This force could be increased to 17,000 on the first day and to 21,000 on the second day by calling in units from adjacent military districts.

The French forces were known to be low in fighting efficiency. Their armored cars and tanks were light, slow and outdated; replacements and parts for all wheeled vehicles were almost extinct, thereby reducing mobility to the minimum. Aside from the infantry, the most important strength of the French forces was their artillery batteries, consisting of the famous French 75's that had played such an important role in World War I.

At Mers-el-Kebir was located a French Naval Base. The exact strength of the Naval Units located there was not known; however, the base and nearby harbor of ORAN was known to be fortified by coastal batteries manned by Naval personnel.

#### TOPOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS (28)

A terrain analysis of the ORAN area reveals a variety of topographic features. Mountains and high bluffs parallel the coast and generally extend to the water's edge. The coast is

(28) self.

rocky and irregular in outline. Suitable landing beaches are rare, and the few worth utilizing are small and located in the bays usually protected by high cliffs on three sides. The only natural landing beach in the entire area is in the Gulf of Arzew, 28 miles east of ORAN.

Djebel (29) Murdjadjo, overlooking the city of ORAN and extending west, dominates the ORAN area. This mountain range is characterized by steep rocky crags which look down on the city then taper westward to form a long flat plateau flanked by steep gullies.

South of the coastal mountains is an extraordinary chain of salt flats, varying in size from 3 to 28 miles in length. The edges are generally dry and can be used by wheeled vehicles; however, the centers are marshy and impassable.

West of ORAN the coastal mountains extend inland to the Grande Sebkra, the largest salt flat in the area. To the east the mountains and salt flats are separated by flat cultivated vineyards.

#### PLANS FOR THE OPERATION

While at sea on D-15 all troop leaders and troops were given their destination, along with the mission, objectives and plans. Unit commanders had ample time to make detailed studies of their missions. Five paragraph Field Orders were issued in detail. However, the question of French resistance remained unanswered. Would the French fight?

The quantity of equipment, maps, large scale relief table reproductions of landing beaches, aerial photographs and orientational literature, available aboard ship, was in itself an indication of the thoroughness of planning. This equipment

(29) Arab word for mountain.

provided invaluable assistance for detailed planning to the smaller units, battalions, companies, and platoons. Maps, 1/25,000 scale, were issued down through platoon leaders.

The mission of the Central Task Force was as follows: (30)

1. Sieze and secure the port of ORAN, adjacent airfield and coastal network of roads in its zone of action.
2. In conjunction with the Western Task Force, to maintain communication between ORAN and CASABLANCA.
3. To establish and maintain contact with the Eastern Task Force between ORAN and ALGIERS.

To accomplish this mission landings were to be effected east and west of ORAN, supported by an airborne landing on La Senia Airfield and a naval assault on the harbor.

Landing beaches were designated as X, Y and Z. X and Y beaches were located west of ORAN at Les Andalouses and Mersat Bou Zedjar, respectively, while Z beach stretched around the gulf south of Arzew. (Map C) After the establishment of initial beachheads Regimental Combat Teams of the 1st Division were to converge on the city and attack from the east and west. Armored Units of Combat Command B, landing on the right and left flanks, were to sieze the airfields south of ORAN and then attack the city from the south.

H-Hour for beach landings was 0100 on D-Day, which was 8 November, 1942.

The mission assigned subordinate units was as follows: (31)

- a. Combat Command B (less detachment) to land on Z Red Beach (Map B), move rapidly to the southeast and sieze the airfield at Tafaroui, the most important initial

(30) M-2, p. 64; (31) Landings on X and Y beaches, Map C; Z beach, Map B.

objective of the task force. The field was to be immediately occupied by the 12th Airforce flown in from England in order to provide for local land based air support. (32)

- b. The 16th Regimental Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, to land on Z White Beach, push inland and advance on the city of ORAN from the southeast.
- c. The 18th Regimental Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, to land on Z Green Beach, overcome enemy resistance north to the sea and advance on the city of ORAN from the east.
- d. The 1st Ranger Battalion to land in the harbor and north of Arzew, sieze the coastal batteries at Fort de la Pointe and Fort du Nord, and secure the harbor installations. (33)
- e. The 26th Regimental Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, to land on Y Beach, sieze Djebel Murdjadjo overlooking the city of ORAN, and attack the city from the west.
- f. Special Armored Detachment of Combat Command B to land at Mersat Bou Zedjar, strike inland and sieze the airfield at La Senia. This was admittedly a difficult task due to the rugged terrain over which this force would have to move.
- g. The 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Regiment, on a 1500 mile flight from England, to descend upon La Senia Airfield and facilitate in the capture of this objective. (34)
- h. The 3rd Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, aboard two British Cutters, the H.M.S. Walney and the H.M.S. Hartland, along with British and American naval

(32) M-6, p. 47; (33) M-6, p. 11; (34) M-1, p. 20.

personnel, to assault the harbor of ORAN. This force had the mission of siezing harbor installations, French naval units in the harbor, and preventing large scale sabotage or an attempt by the French to block the harbor. (35)

For the convenience of the reader, the landing and subsequent move inland will be divided into three phases -- D-Day, D plus 1, and D plus 2. The first two phases will be further subdivided so as to present the uninterrupted action of Regimental Combat Teams, Combat Command B, and Special Units. (Map C)

The material presented in the remainder of this monograph on the action and movement of the 18th, 16th and 26th Regimental Combat Teams is based exclusively on conversation by the writer with former officers of the 1st Division who participated in this operation.

## D-DAY

### 1st RANGER BATTALION

The landing of the Rangers was started at 0100. The detachment assigned to sieze Fort du Nord moved into the Fort and found it deserted, except for one guard. Strangely enough, the breach blocks had been removed from the guns. (36)

The other units of the battalion came under machine-gun fire from the seaplane base as they moved into the harbor. At 0230 the coastal battery at Fort de la Pointe was taken, and by 0730 the harbor was secure. Its initial mission accomplished, the battalion remained on guard in the city of Arzew until the surrender of ORAN. (37)

(35) M-6, p. 57; (36) M-8; (37) M-6.

### 18th REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (38)

The 18th Regimental Combat Team landed at 0115 with the 3rd Battalion on the right, 1st Battalion on the left, and the 2nd Battalion in reserve.

The landing was unopposed and progressed according to plan. The 3rd Battalion turned north and advanced on Arzew, with the objective of siezing the town and establishing contact with the 1st Ranger Battalion. At daylight the leading elements came under anti-aircraft and machine gun fire from the naval seaplane base in the harbor. These guns were manned by French naval personnel. Mortar fire was placed on the positions and the guns were silenced. The advance into Arzew was resumed and only scattered sniper fire was encountered.

The 2nd Battalion landed and pushed inland to Highway 4 without resistance. The battalion continued its advance in a column of companies to St. Cloud, its initial objective. St. Leone and Renan fell without opposition. Two miles west of Renan, two French light armored cars were destroyed by anti-tank rifle grenade fire.

At 1145 the leading elements reached a point about one mile east of St. Cloud and came under enemy small arms fire. The men hit the ground, and officers had difficulty in getting them to move forward, which, undoubtedly, was due to the reaction of troops under enemy fire for the first time. The battalion deployed and launched an attack on the town with two companies abreast. This attack was unsuccessful and resulted in some casualties. Two company commanders were killed and one seriously wounded.

The 2nd Battalion landed about dawn, and at noon of D-Day

(38) M-9, M-10, M-14.

was approaching St. Cloud along Highway 4.

At about 1600 another attack was ordered on the town. The 1st Battalion was to attack west and the 2nd Battalion was to circle the town and attack to the northeast. In this attack the 2nd Battalion did not make the wide envelopment that was called for and came up on the left flank of the 1st Battalion. This resulted in a frontal attack with two battalions abreast, and with the 2nd Battalion exposed to the same enemy fires which had stopped the 1st Battalion. The attack was again unsuccessful, and additional casualties were sustained. The remainder of the day and night was spent in reorganization and preparation for another attack the following morning.

The estimated enemy strength in the town was two companies of mixed Colonial French Infantry, eight 75mm artillery pieces entrenched astride Highway 4 west of the town, and a few light armored cars. The enemy infantry were defending from dug in positions around the town and from buildings within the town.

#### 16th REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (39)

The 16th Regimental Combat Team landed unopposed at 0055 with the 1st Battalion on the left, the 2nd on the right, and the 3rd in reserve.

The 1st Battalion moved into Damesme and St. Leu and captured the French garrison asleep in barracks. At daylight the battalion moved east along the coastal highway. It had the mission of protecting the left flank of the division. Resistance was encountered at Port Aux Poules. The lead company passed through the town unmolested, but the second company was fired upon as it entered the outskirts of the town.

The enemy garrison consisted of one rifle company and one (39) M-8, M-14, M-15, M-16.

battery of 75mm artillery. The artillery withdrew to the northeast along with a small number of protecting riflemen; the remainder surrendered.

One company of the battalion moved on to take the bridge east of the town, while another company took the town of En Nekale to the southwest. Thus at the close of D-Day this battalion was in position to protect the left flank of the sector and remained there until the surrender of ORAN.

The 2nd Battalion landed as scheduled, pushed inland to Highway 13, and continued its advance along the road to the southwest.

The 3rd Battalion landed before daylight and moved inland to join the 2nd Battalion. By nightfall the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were in the towns of St. Louis, Legrand and Fleurus, with the 3rd Battalion on the right.

#### COMBAT COMMAND B (40)

Combat Command B (less detachment) landed unopposed and assembled in the vicinity of St. Leu. After daylight, with reconnaissance elements in front, the column moved southwest on its mission. No resistance was encountered until the column approached St. Barbe du Thelat. Here a small enemy detachment consisting of armored cars and light tanks, advancing northeast along the road, was engaged and easily destroyed. The column overran the town of St. Barbe du Thelat, turned west and continued its advance on Tafaroui Airfield. The garrison at the field was taken by surprise and surrendered after firing a few scattered shots. Thus at 1300 Combat Command B had siezed its objective, and shortly thereafter aircraft of the

12th Airforce began to land on the field.

A force was left to protect the airfield, and the remainder of the column proceeded south toward Tafaroui. Only a scattered, unorganized enemy resistance was encountered in the move, and the town of Tafaroui was quickly overcome.

Company B, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion, was ordered in position astride the road to Sidi-Bel-Abbes, and mechanized patrols were sent out to protect the south and east flanks, while the remainder of the Combat Command prepared to advance north on La Senia Airfield.

#### 26th REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (41)

The 26th Regimental Combat Team landed unopposed, with the 2nd Battalion on the left, the 3rd Battalion on the right, and the 1st Battalion in reserve.

The 2nd Battalion was to advance along the coastal road to the initial regimental objective, Djebel Murdjadjo, while the 3rd advanced inland and parallel to the coast to its part of the objective.

At daylight both battalions came under enemy fire, mostly artillery, with some scattered small arms fire.

The 2nd Battalion, after some difficulty, siezed Ain-el-Turk. Rear security was not provided for and the French were able to launch a surprise counterattack, which caused a certain amount of confusion before it was repelled.

At daylight the 3rd Battalion had reached the high plateau on the west end of Djebel Murdjadjo. One company had become separated. As the troops moved over the top and across the plateau, they came under enemy artillery fire. Men scat-

(41) M-11, M-13.

tered and confusion resulted, which caused further disorganization.

The movement of the 1st Battalion on D-Day is not known to the writer.

#### SPECIAL ARMORED DETACHMENT (42)

A Special Armored Detachment of Combat Command B, commanded by Colonel P. M. Rob<sup>i</sup>nnet, landed at Mersat Bou Zedjar. The landing was unopposed; however, considerable difficulty was encountered in the mechanics of landing the troops and vehicles. The landing crafts had difficulty locating the beaches, which, when located, were found to be very soft and overshadowed by rocky bluffs. In spite of these difficulties, the first wave landed 45 minutes after H-Hour and the first tanks were ashore at H plus 5.

As the first units landed a reconnaissance force was organized with available vehicles and proceeded toward Lourmel. At 0900 all tanks were ashore and the main body started movement to the northeast. At this time the reconnaissance unit reported the town of Lourmel taken.

At Bou Thelis a defended road block was encountered. The main body caught up with the reconnaissance elements at this point and assisted in the reduction of the road block. At 1445 the town of Bou Thelis was captured.

At Misserghin the column was stopped by a well defended road block. An attempt to reduce the road block by fire failed. Here was the first determined, coordinated defense encountered, and indications were that the town was well defended.

The French defensive force consisted of two companies of

(42) M-6, pp. 43-46.

infantry, with light armor and artillery. The defensive position was further enhanced by the surrounding terrain. Located north of the town were the high hills of Djebel Murdjadjo, and the marshy salt flats of the Grande Sebkra lay to the south, which placed an attacking force at a great disadvantage.

French 75mm artillery fire was heavy and accurate throughout the afternoon, and when darkness fell the detachment had been unable to penetrate the defense.

The decision was made to bypass the town under cover of darkness by skirting the edge of the salt flat, taking the risk of losing some of the armored vehicles in the marsh.

#### 2nd BATTALION, 503rd PARACHUTE REGIMENT (43)

The 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Regiment, left England aboard transport planes on the longest airborne mission ever attempted prior to this time. The planes took off from three fields and were to rendezvous over the English Channel. This was never accomplished and, as a result, the bulk of the planes started out on their long flight in groups of twos and threes, and in some cases singly.

At daylight on D-Day not one had reached the objective area, La Senia Airfield. The planes were scattered from Spain to points 30 miles west of ORAN. One crash landed in Spain, and two in Spanish Morocco. Others, as their fuel supply became exhausted, crash landed in and around the ORAN area. The majority of the planes were able to land on the salt flat 30 miles west of La Senia. Of these, three had sufficient fuel supply to allow them to reach the objective and return to the salt flat. These three were reloaded in a desperate attempt

(43) M-3, pp. 61,62; M-6, p. 38.

to drop paratroopers on the objective. As soon as the planes were airborne they were attacked by French fighter planes and forced to land again; a number of men were wounded in this attempt.

The decision was then made to assemble all available troops on the salt flat and move by marching to the objective. When the small detachment finally reached La Senia, the airfield was in the hands of American troops.

The airborne operation was a complete failure. Although the 1st Battalion had rehearsed its mission many times in England, the pilots and navigators were not sufficiently trained to undertake such a long flight.

#### THE ASSAULT ON THE HARBOR OF ORAN (44)

The 3rd Battalion, 6th Armored Infantry Regiment, aboard the British cutters, H.M.S. Walney and H.M.S. Hartland, started moving toward the harbor of ORAN at 0300. The first approach was inaccurate and a second attempt had to be made. By this time the French in the harbor had been alerted.

The Walney broke the boom and proceeded up the harbor, followed by the Hartland. The two cutters were picked up by enemy searchlights and were immediately taken under fire by the shore batteries and naval units in the harbor.

In an attempt to avoid the fire the Hartland struck a jetty and damaged her controls; this left her helpless. Enemy guns finally set the Hartland on fire and the order to abandon ship was given at 0410.

In the meantime, the Walney had steamed up the harbor. Badly hit and still under devastating enemy fire, she managed

(44) M-6, pp. 54-60.

to come alongside the French ship Epervier. An attempt was made to board the French ship by means of grapnels, but there were no men to man the ropes. The Walney exploded and sunk at 0445.

This operation was a disastrous failure due to the overwhelming enemy fire. The infantrymen crammed in the mess decks never had a chance. Total casualties were approximately 375 killed and 200 captured and wounded.

Among the captured was an American officer on whose person the French found the plans, orders and overlays for the ORAN operation.

#### D PLUS 1

#### 18th REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (45)

On the morning of D plus 1 another attack was launched against St. Cloud by the 1st and 2nd Battalions. The east half of the town was captured and the attack then bogged down. At this time the Regimental Commander decided to launch a coordinated attack at 1400. His plan was to withdraw the troops to the edge of the town, bombard the town proper with artillery fires, which up to this time had not been utilized in the attack, and follow the artillery fires into the town. This plan was never placed into effect, since the attack was called off by Task Force Headquarters, and the 18th Regimental Combat Team was ordered to bypass the town.

The regimental plan was to bypass the town under the cover of darkness. The 3rd Battalion, which had moved up from Arzew during the day, was to circle north of St. Cloud, sieze Djebel Khar, the coastal battery at Canistel to the northwest,

(45) M-9, M-10, M-14.

and advance along the coastal road to ORAN. The 2nd Battalion was to circle south of St. Cloud, advance along Highway 4, sieze Arcole and proceed to ORAN. The 1st Battalion was to take up a defensive position astride Highway 4 east of St. Cloud, with the mission of containing the enemy forces in the town.

#### 16th REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (46)

During the late afternoon the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, after having advanced some 20 miles from the beach without opposition, were stopped by artillery and small arms fire from Fme St. Jean du Baptiste, two miles east of ORAN. Supported by fire from the Cannon Company's 105mm self propelled guns, the battalions had little difficulty in overcoming the resistance.

#### COMBAT COMMAND B (47)

At 0900 air reconnaissance reported an armored column, identified as the French Foreign Legion, advancing north from Sidi-Bel-Abbes. The air force was called on to attack the column, and the subsequent strafing and bombing by fighter planes of the 12th Airforce completely destroyed the enemy force.

During the day Combat Command B established contact with the detachment at La Senia, and the major part of the Command was assembled in the vicinity of La Senia in preparation for the advance on the city of ORAN.

#### 26th REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM (48)

The writer does not have sufficient factual information

(46) M-8, M-12, M-15, M-16; (47) M-6; (48) M-11, M-13.

on the action of the Combat Team to permit detailed discussion. It is known, however, that the 2nd Battalion assumed a defensive position at Ain-el-Turk and did not move on to its objective, while the 3rd Battalion remained engaged by the enemy at Fme Combien.

Regimental Headquarters had difficulty maintaining contact with the battalions. Radio communication was limited due to the mountainous terrain, and wire was not employed because of the great distances involved. Therefore, foot messengers had to be used.

#### SPECIAL ARMORED DETACHMENT (49)

The difficult task of bypassing the salt flat south of Misserghin during hours of darkness was successfully accomplished with negligible losses, and by daylight the detachment was in position around the airfield at La Senia. An attack developed during which the French made a determined effort to defend the field. The weight of the armor was too great for the French to overcome, and at 0840 the airfield was surrendered.

Its mission completed, the detachment reverted back to Combat Command B control.

#### D PLUS 2

At daylight leading elements of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 16th Regimental Combat Team, entered the southeastern edge of the city of ORAN.

The bypassing of the city of St. Cloud was effected during the night. The coastal battery at Canistel and the town of Arcole were taken without difficulty, and by 1030 the 2nd and

(49) M-6.

3rd Battalions, 18th Regimental Combat Team, had reached the eastern outskirts of ORAN.

From the vicinity of La Senia elements of Combat Command B were advancing on the city, and by 1045 a tank column had entered ORAN from the south.

West of ORAN the 3rd and 1st Battalions, 26th Regimental Combat Team, supported by one battery of 75mm pack howitzers, were preparing to launch an attack on Fme Combien. The artillery preparation was sufficient, however, and the French surrendered before the attack developed.

Shortly thereafter the city of ORAN surrendered. With the 18th Regimental Combat Team marching into the city from the east, the 16th from the southeast, and the tanks of Combat Command B from the south, the French Commander asked for an armistice. Brigadier General Oliver, Commanding General of Combat Command B, arranged for the surrender, and by 0100 hostilities in the area had ceased. (50)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

An analysis of the Allied Invasion of North Africa will reveal the campaign as the most ambitious amphibious operation in the annals of warfare. The success of the invasion, which was the foundation for future allied combined operations, can be attributed to detailed planning, efficient execution of orders, an extraordinary cover plan to maintain secrecy, and, above all, superior coordination between the combined arms of both nations.

From a study of the tactical operation of the Central Task Force it will be seen that units could have advanced more

(50) M-6.

rapidly on the city of ORAN. Failure to do so undoubtedly prolonged the operation. The possible reasons for this delay were: (1) inexperienced officers were overcautious while advancing, and (2) troops carried too much equipment and were unable to make rapid progress.

Additional reasons, therefor, which admit to criticism are:

1. The failure of the 18th Regimental Combat Team to bypass the resistance at St. Cloud. This regiment was allowed to remain engaged for 36 hours against an apparent localized enemy strong point before the decision was made to bypass the town.
2. The failure of the 2nd Battalion, 26th Regimental Combat Team, to continue on its mission. This battalion, for no apparent reason, went into a defensive position around Ain-el-Turk when its mission was to seize the high ground west of ORAN.

#### LESSONS

Some of the lessons learned from this operation are:

1. A unit commander must not allow his unit to become engaged in a fire fight with the enemy if it will jeopardize the successful accomplishment of his mission. Islands of resistance should be bypassed.
2. All-around security is essential, and the responsibility of all unit commanders.
3. The individual soldier should not be overloaded for an amphibious landing, particularly if a long march is contemplated after the landing.
4. Armored units can be employed to strike quickly and secure important objectives deep in enemy territory.

5. In a combined operation coordination and teamwork is essential to success.
6. There is no substitute for combat experience. Officers and enlisted men alike participated in their first operation under fire. Mistakes were made; poor judgment was exercised; but with the cessation of hostilities 60 hours of valuable combat experience had been gained by the participating troops.