

The Battle for Africa

The first joint British and American operation of World War II was in Africa, code named Operation Torch. More than 107,000 troops, mostly American, were to secure a hold at nine coastal points spreading 900 miles, including Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers, then speed into Tunisia and seize Tunis and Bizerte.

Algiers was the first objective to be taken. Within 20 hours after landing, American troops moved in to occupy the city. Oran proved to be a harder fight, but the city surrendered within 48 hours. General George Patton had planned to bomb Casablanca before attacking with ground troops on November 11 but the French surrendered just before the planes took off. The first German/American clash happened a few miles from Djedida. The U.S. learned that their M3 light tanks were no match for German Panzers. U.S. forces steadily moved forward until they hit the Longstop Mountain, where they were forced to fall back on Christmas Day. The Germans renamed the double peaks Christmas Hill.

On February 13, U.S. troops lost at Sidi Bow Zid. On February 15, Lieut. Colonel James D. Alger led a counter attack to rescue 2,500 U.S. troops trapped on two hills. The Germans set a trap and Alger was captured and his battalion lost 15 officers, 298 enlisted men, and 50 tanks. Colonel Drake tried to lead his men off their hill but was captured. The same night, Maj. Robert Moore led his men off their hill. He and 300 of his men managed to escape; the other 600 were killed or captured. The Allies were forced to withdraw to Western Dorsal. After bitter fighting at Western Dorsal, Rommel did not press his advantage and pulled back. Rommel returned to Germany to try to convince Hitler to pullout of Africa, Hitler responded by replacing Rommel.

The allies were able to force the Germans to retreat from the Mareth Line on April 7. Once the Germans withdrew, Patton pushed his forces eastward to the Mediterranean coast. At this point the Germans were running dangerously low on supplies. The U.S. II Corps engaged the Germans at Hill 609, forcing the enemy to fall back 25 miles. On May 6, the 9th Infantry overcame the last German stronghold before Bizerte. The rest of U.S. II Corps broke through the German Coastal Entrenchment. The last German Commander surrendered on May 13. Total U.S. losses in Tunisia were 13,984.