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Desperate Venture: The Story of Operation Torch, the Allied Invasion of North Africa,

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of the V-weapons, and materially aided the ground campaign by its destruction of the transportation and oil production sectors in 1944–45.

Though written primarily as a campaign history, this book is a worthwhile case study of the way an earlier “military-technical revolution” developed and how military leaders a half-century ago groped for ways to use new capabilities and ideas effectively. The tantalizing question for historians of the air campaign is—as is now said about socialism by its friends—whether the idea was wrong or whether it was merely executed badly. Could airpower by itself have been decisive if the “right” target sets had been chosen and the technology had been up to the task? The same question is particularly germane today as airpower proponents bask in the afterglow of undoubted successes in Desert Storm while defense planners engage in fundamental discussions about future service roles and missions. “Smart” ordnance has taken care of the bombing accuracy problem and the need for huge streams of bombers. But is there a “right” set of targets, and is their destruction decisive in war termination? The campaign of fifty years ago is a sobering reminder that there is a high cost in guessing wrong.

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Gelb, Norman. *Desperate Venture: The Story of Operation Torch, the Allied Invasion of North Africa*. New York: William Morrow, 1992. 366pp. \$25

The year 1942 was a worrisome one for the United States and its beleaguered allies. Still reeling from the Axis onslaught and short of resources on every front, the Allies had yet to agree on a coordinated, war-winning offensive strategy. Although the U.S. Navy (supported by public opinion) urged an all-out campaign against Japan, President Roosevelt (backed by General Marshall) eventually sided with Churchill and Stalin: Germany, the more dangerous enemy, had to be defeated first.

Agreement on “Germany first,” however, settled only half the strategic debate. With the Russians hard pressed all along the Eastern Front, Stalin was demanding that his allies quickly open a second front in Europe. Roosevelt favored a massive cross-Channel assault—but not until 1943, at the earliest. Churchill, fearful of another Dunkirk, much preferred to attack Hitler’s “soft underbelly” in the Mediterranean. It is against this background that historian Norman Gelb opens his account of Operation TORCH, the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942.

The book’s title comes from a statement of General George S. Patton as his task force prepared to embark for French Morocco: “The job I am going on is about as desperate a venture as has ever been undertaken by any force in the world’s history.” Patton had a talent for self-dramatization, but this time he was not exaggerating.

Patton’s anxieties began with the Anglo-American differences over how best to defeat Germany. Like most senior U.S. officers, he felt strongly that

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Churchill's peripheral strategy violated the first principle of war (the Objective), and he realized that Roosevelt's assent to the prime minister's plan for Operation TORCH—the only hope for a second front in 1942—meant both a year's postponement of the cross-Channel invasion and, very likely, of Hitler's downfall.

TORCH's senior commanders had much else to worry about as well. Could this huge armada, consisting of one task force sailing from the U.S. and two more from the U.K., evade the U-boat gauntlet and rendezvous undetected off Gibraltar? As the Algeria-bound U.K. contingent of warships and transports headed into the Mediterranean, what would the German spies in neutral Spain report to Berlin? Would they fall for the cover story that these were only reinforcements for Britain's Eighth Army, battling Rommel in Egypt? Would the troops have to fight their way ashore? Whether the Vichy French defenders of Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers would die for Hitler's cause or surrender quickly was a question the gung-ho, amateur OSS agents operating in those cities could not answer. If there was resistance, how would the green U.S. contingent acquit itself? Most American soldiers had never seen combat; some were just learning how to board a landing craft—en route, in mid-Atlantic.

There was one worry that British officers hid from their American counterparts: "Who is this Eisenhower chap?" they asked each other. "Amiable fellow,

perhaps, but dreadfully inexperienced to command TORCH, don't you know . . .?"

Despite all these concerns—and plenty of snafus during the landings—TORCH was a smashing success. At a cost of less than 1,500 American and British casualties, the Allies opened a second front, and though it was of little immediate help to Stalin, they now had Rommel's Afrika Korps in a strategic vise. When the Tunisia campaign ended in May 1943, the Axis had lost nearly 300,000 men. Additional Allied losses came to 70,000 killed, wounded, or missing.

Norman Gelb, whose previous books include *Dunkirk* and *The Berlin Wall*, covers all these varied aspects of the story (and more) in twenty crisply written chapters. Gelb is particularly good at describing how Churchill and his well prepared military advisors were able to take control of the direction of Allied strategy away from their less experienced American compatriots—a "highjacking," Gelb calls it. His chapters on the political intrigues and espionage capers that preceded the invasion are the most entertaining, and those describing the blundering confusion of the landings are the most vivid. The portrayal of Eisenhower is impressionistic, but leaves no doubt he was the right man for the job.

However, this is not the *definitive* history of Operation TORCH. Gelb tells us little about the actual joint and combined planning process for what was to be the largest amphibious invasion up to that time. The same goes

for the miracles of logistics it took to mount the landing and for the Navy's role in getting it all there. The generals in the story, with the exception of Eisenhower, come across as cardboard figures—which is hard to do with the likes of Patton and Rommel. Nor do we get much feel for what the campaign was like for the average GI or Tommy; the one map, good as it is for an overview, does not help tell their part of the story.

Make no mistake, *Desperate Venture* is an enjoyable read. The photographs add a lot, and the research is solid—as far as it goes. I just wish Norman Gelb had written a more ambitious book.

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D'Este, Carlo. *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943*. New York: Harper, 1991. 666pp. \$14.95

D'Este, Carlo. *Decision in Normandy*. New York: Harper, 1991. 557pp. \$14.95

Amphibious operations are conceded to be the most difficult to plan and execute. Their success requires the fullest coordination of land, sea, and air forces; each is at great risk unless that coordination is achieved. Successful coordination permits the strengths of each component to offset the weaknesses of the others.

Operations involving two or more sovereign states also represent a high level of risk and reward. They are difficult because the forces are dependent on one another to achieve results that neither can achieve alone.

Lieutenant Colonel Carlo D'Este, U.S. Army, Retired, discusses two of the largest amphibious operations in the European Theater in World War II: Operation HUSKY in Sicily, July 1943, and Operation OVERLORD in Normandy, June 1944. Both studies illuminate the problems encountered by the British and the Americans in their bilateral and joint operational planning efforts.

The author emphasizes the importance of operational planners being in close communication with each other and with those who execute their plans. It is therefore critical that all planners speak the same doctrinal "language," which can otherwise be a barrier between forces of the same nation or divide those of different nations, even if they speak the same actual language.

Mark Twain's observation that the Americans and the British are two people divided by the same language was, during World War II, true in more ways than one. The two allies often used different terms for the same concept, and their combat doctrines differed as well. Moreover, the Americans (except for Patton) were either unable or unwilling to participate in a seminar offered by the British about what they had learned fighting the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1942.

As the war progressed, the planning and execution of bilateral amphibious operations grew in quality and extent. Their beginnings—in Operation TORCH of November 1942, conducted along a dispersed front on the Atlantic and Mediterranean—had been