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Operation Torch: The Gamble to Invade North Africa

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had to be won. But for completeness, *The Atlantic Campaign* is the single best English language reference and a book which should become a standard text.

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Breuer, William B. *Operation Torch: The Gamble to Invade North Africa*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986. 272 pp. \$18.95

This is a popular account of the Allied invasion of French Northwest Africa in November 1942. William Breuer is a combat veteran who has produced several World War II histories for the general reader. Operation Torch, the first blooding of American ground troops in the Mediterranean theater, has been often bypassed by authors with more spectacular tales to tell. However, many of the military and naval leaders who were prominent in landings on the beaches of Sicily, Italy, and France made their appearance first in North Africa. Through Breuer's lively prose the reader will sense the trepidation, confusion, and courage of American troops and their leaders as they staged their first major amphibious assault.

Allied leaders contemplated various ways to enter the war. One early option was an invasion of western France in 1942 or 1943. That this was seriously considered provides a sense

of how troubled those times were. The Allies were concerned that without a show of force in the West, the Soviet Union might be forced into a separate peace. Stalin was urging the establishment of a second front to divert German pressure on his beleaguered troops. Breuer boldly states that the British staged the suicidal Dieppe raid (Operation Jubilee) in August 1942 in order to convince Washington (Roosevelt, Stimson, and Marshall) what a mistake a larger invasion would be at that early date. In other words, they intentionally staged an attack they knew would fail in order to win an argument at the conference table.

Breuer emphasizes the tortuous nature of military politics in Vichy France and how difficult it was to determine whether the French in North Africa would oppose an Allied landing. The Allies went to great lengths to prevent French opposition. The book contains extensive coverage of General Mark Clark's ill-advised (by Robert Murphy), clandestine voyage in a British submarine to have a meeting with a sympathetic French general on the North African coast. The very real possibility of Clark's capture, with its propaganda and intelligence value, overrode the practical result. The romantic, daring quality of the mission was undeniable, but it did not prevent hostilities with the French.

Finally, Breuer vividly portrays what went wrong in the various landing zones when local French commanders opposed the Allies with

force: the naval debacle in Oran harbor, the French strafing of American paratroops at Tafaroui airport, the chaotic situation at Port Lyautey, and the disorganized landing at Cape Fedala near Casablanca, to mention but a few examples. After four days of sporadic warfare and urgent diplomacy, French resistance collapsed. The cost was 1,434 American casualties (556 killed, 837 wounded, 41 missing); for the British, 330 casualties; for the French, 2,500 casualties (700 killed, 1,400 wounded, 400 missing). The French air force lost many pilots and planes, and their navy scuttled the fleet at Toulon and other ports in southern France. In the last analysis, as Breuer points out, it was fortunate the French chose to fight. As a result, Operation Torch became a "gigantic combat laboratory" where untried troops learned bitter lessons before having to face the seasoned Wehrmacht. The landing was a success, but as General George Patton later admitted, "only through the intervention of Divine Providence."

Breuer does not use footnote or endnote citations. His sources include 54 books, mostly biographies and memoirs written between 1945 and 1980. The bulk of these accounts were published in the 1950s and 1960s. He also lists four titles under "unit and campaign histories." One of them, George F. Howe's *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1957), of the famous "Green Series," was probably indispensable to the writing of *Operation*

Torch. Breuer may have also consulted Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare, 1941-1942* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1953), but does not list this valuable work. For those who need a quick, readable summary of Operation Torch, this book is ideal; but for deeper treatment and guidance to primary sources, one should go elsewhere.

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Stafford, Edward P. *Subchaser to Sicily*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 320 pp. \$17.95

Stead, Gordon W. *A Leaf Upon the Sea: A Small Ship in the Mediterranean 1941-1943*. Vancouver, Canada: Univ. of British Columbia, 1988. 185 pp. \$27.95

These are two great books! Those who go down to the sea in small ships will find them particularly interesting. Both books are warmly and personably written with an easy flowing style. They are hard to put down once started.

It is remarkable that two so similar works would be published in the same year—one by an American reservist, the other by a Canadian recounting his service with the Royal Navy. Both were young men thrust into command of a small warship as their nations geared up for the full fight of World War II. In the