



# Mission: History

*Studiorum Historiam Praemium Est*



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★★★★★

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## 1943: Tarawa – Marines Get the Job Done, But Central Pacific Campaign Won't be Easy



LEATHERNECKS FOCUS on the job before them as they are carried to the forbidding beaches of Betio Island in Tarawa Atoll. The 2nd Marine Division, battle-hardened at Guadalcanal and fresh from training exercises in New Zealand must have found a magazine stand in Auckland or Christchurch, for mothers, sisters, wives and sweethearts did not send copies of Esquire Magazine to their men overseas. This Alberto Vargas illustration appeared in the August, 1943, issue of Esquire. Soon, it will be refolded and stuffed inside the Marine's shirt. Admiral William F. Halsey, noting a copy of a Vargas girl painted on the flying bridge of a Coast Guard vessel, pronounced it "the best-looking ship we have."



### *5,200 Japanese Defenders on Betio Island Fought For Three Days, Until Only 17 of Them Were Alive*

Tarawa Atoll is a soft right triangle, with the vertical side a reef running north and south and broken by an entrance to the lagoon. The east-west base and the hypotenuse are strings of islands with Betio at the lower left and the largest island, Buariki, the topmost save one,

18 nautical miles north of Betio. Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith's 2nd Marine Division would attack Betio on the morning of 20 November 1943. Subsequent landings would take the rest of the islands, skipping a few, in the five days after Betio was secured.

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### Gilbert Island Invasions Are Nimitz' First Step On Long Road to Tokyo

By 6 February 1943, Guadalcanal had been secured and full-scale fighting on land died down for a time. There were several small but ferocious naval engagements in the next few months, notably night actions around the Solomon Islands, in which the U.S. Navy got the worst of it, and an odd engagement halfway between westernmost Alaska and the Soviet Union — the Battle of the Komandorskis — in which an outnumbered American force in full retreat convinced the Japanese to break off the action and thereafter supply their troops on Attu and Kiska in the Aleutians by submarine.

During this lull, meetings were held in San Francisco and Washington, attended by Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area, and General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, or their representatives. Nimitz and King met in San Francisco and Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance represented him in Washington at a March meeting. At these, and additional conferences, the objective was to lay plans for taking the offensive against Japan.

Attu had been wrested from the Japanese in May by the U.S. Army 7th Division supported by a small detachment from the Navy's Task Force 50 (Vice Admiral Spruance now commanded TF-

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## Nauru? No Way, Howls Gen. Howlin' Mad Smith

(Continued from page 1)

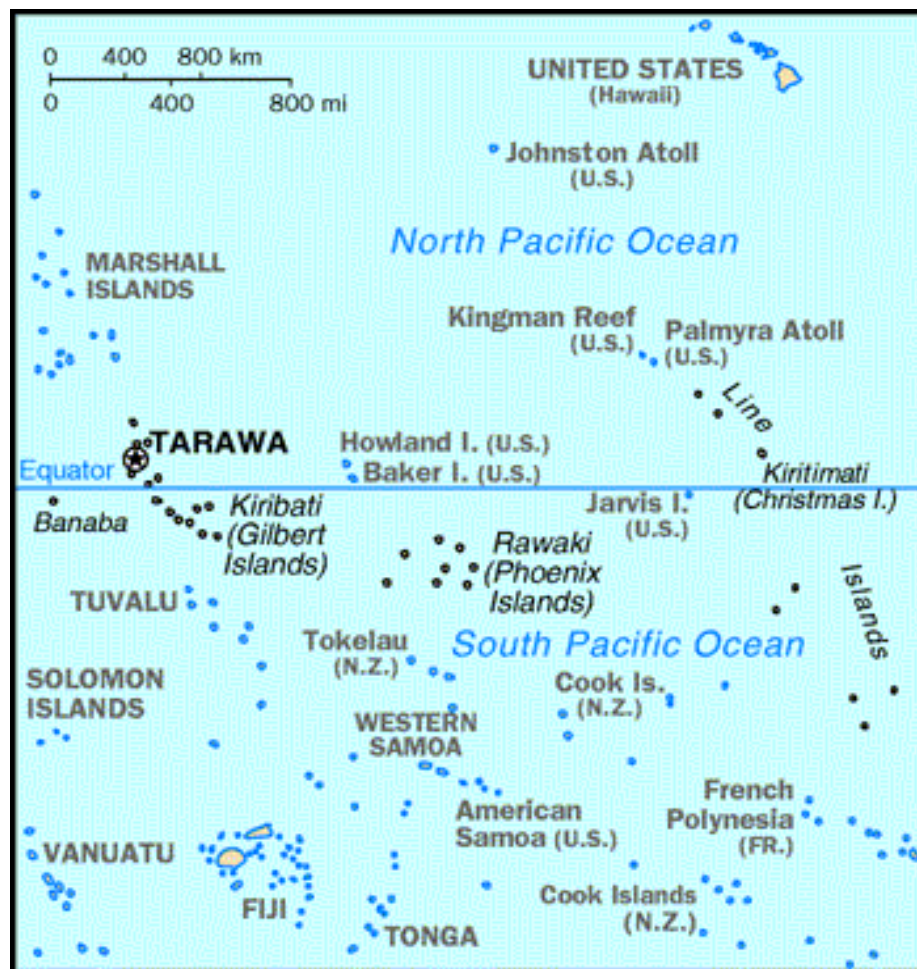
50) but King was itchy for action against Jap-held islands that blocked the road to Tokyo.

For the first year and one-half of the war, U.S. resources had been directed against Hitler, because of agreements between President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. But in the spring of 1943, a meeting of the combined British and American Chiefs of Staff, code-named *Trident*, had resulted in a "strategic plan" for the defeat of Japan. The Allies, meaning the U.S., would advance along two lines, up through the South Pacific and across the Central Pacific, toward Mindanao in the Philippines.

As originally planned, the first attack in the Central Pacific would be against the Marshall Islands, but that was changed and the Gilbert Islands, nearer to the Southwest Pacific Area, was selected. An invasion of the Gilberts would be supportive of MacArthur's planned attack on Bougainville. Moreover, the Gilberts would be within range of land-based aircraft. The island of Betio in Tarawa Atoll would be taken — that was the plan submitted by Nimitz to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

On 20 July, the Joint Chiefs approved the plan, but for some reason decided that the island of Nauru should be taken at the same time. Nauru would provide an airbase 400 miles closer to Japan than Betio, but it wouldn't be 400 miles closer to anywhere else. It is a pear-shaped coral outcropping almost on the equator, comprising about 8 square miles of plateau that is mostly phosphate, created by millennia of birds leaving their calling cards. The phosphate had been mined for generations, leaving the interior pockmarked with caves and excavations.

Nauru is fringed by a reef lying about 1000 feet offshore, with few navigable breaks. Cliffs up to 100 feet high rise almost from the water's edge, with only a "beach" of from 150 to 300 yards deep surrounding the island. On that narrow strand, Japanese gun emplacements and pillboxes ringed Nauru. On the plateau, the Japs could be expected to have put



THIS MAP WAS DRAWN to show how easy in 1999 the independent nation of Kiribati is for tourists to get to. In 1943 the Gilbert Islands weren't easy to find on a map of the Pacific ocean, and once they were found, they weren't easy to get to nor were they easy to wrest from the Japanese. They were, however, the first step in Admiral Chester W. Nimitz' drive across the Pacific to Japan.

caves left by mining to good defensive use.

When Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Holland M. Smith saw the photos and maps of Nauru, he had visions of landing craft stranded on the reef, troops cut down as they waded ashore, those that made it picked off as they scaled the cliffs. He doubted that the U.S. Army 27th Infantry Division, earmarked for the invasion, could pull it off. He had an ally in Spruance, who saw his fleet divided, and separated by 19 hours steaming time at 20 knots.

At a September meeting between Nimitz and King at Pearl Harbor, Spruance raised the objections to Nauru and King asked what he proposed as an alternative. Spruance proposed Makin Atoll and ticked off the advantages — Makin would provide a stepping stone to the Marshalls was the main one — and a few days later word came back from the Joint Chiefs that the change had been

approved. Holland M. Smith would be in overall command of the ground forces, Army Maj. Gen. Ralph C. Smith would send his 27th Division against the Makin Atoll island of Butaratiri and Maj. Gen. Julian C. Smith's 2nd Marine Division would take Betio.

H-Hour was to be 0830, 20 November 1943. Carrier planes and bombardment by ships was to soften up Tarawa and Makin. At Makin, there wasn't much to soften up. Pilots reported Tarawa devastated. It wasn't.

## 1812: Invasion of Canada Halted When Soldiers Won't Leave U.S.

A planned invasion of British Canada by U.S. forces was called off on 19 November 1812. An army of 5,000 men under Maj. Gen. Henry Dearborn moved up the Lake Champlain route, but the invasion faltered when soldiers refused to leave U.S. soil.





DEAD MARINES COVER THE BEACHES at Betio. Until the invasions of the Gilberts, American newspapers had avoided depicting the ugly side of war, but now that American forces were on the offensive, they took the wraps off. The public was horrified, and some people complained that such pictures shouldn't be shown. But most were glad, if not happy, to know the true cost of warfare. Complaints of home front privations dropped off markedly.

## *Photos from Betio's Beaches Horrified U.S.*

(Continued from page 1)

Betio is two and a half miles long and a half-mile across at its widest point. The highest point of land, depending on the tide, is ten feet. A 3,000-foot runway lay on the east-west long axis of the island, with paved arms that were either short runways or taxiways forming a triangle. The island was defended by its 2,600-man garrison and there were an equal number of support and aviation personnel. The commander, Rear Admiral Keichi Shibasaki, thought Betio could not be taken. He was very nearly right.

When, at 0900, the Marines began to land at three designated beaches on the north shore of Betio, inside the lagoon, they found that three days of "softening up" hadn't done the trick, and their LVT "Alligators" met withering 37mm and 76mm fire as they crossed a fringe reef well off shore. Scores of Marines didn't make it to the beach and, for the first time, there were news photographers on hand to record this dearest cost of waging war. Within a few days, their pictures were on the front pages of American newspapers, and the public was aghast. But only for a day or two. As people digested this grisly evidence of the barbarity of warfare, a new resolve took place. This was what Isoroku Yamamoto warned about when he told the Japanese cabinet that he feared he "would awaken a sleeping giant."

Despite the Jap defensive fire, elements of the 8th and 2nd Marines made it ashore in the assault waves and, according to Sergeant Jim Lucas, a Marine combat correspondent and later a Scripps-Howard reporter in its Washington Bureau, they won the battle for Betio. "The issue was settled by the assault waves," he wrote. "Had these troops faltered, we would not have taken the Gilberts. Most of the heroic efforts of the first three hours will never be written because most of the principals and witnesses are dead." But it would be

another 73 hours of bitter fighting before Betio was secured.

By nightfall, Marines under Col. David Shoup held a shallow beachhead about 600 yards wide and 300 yards deep and a tiny corner of the northwest tip of Betio where one battalion had got separated from its command group and waged war on its own, under its senior company commander, Mike Ryan. Two Sherman tanks had joined this orphan battalion, which then moved along the western end of Betio. During the night, some artillery from the 10th Marines made it ashore and a battalion of the 8th Marines came in at dawn, taking heavy casualties.

Julian Smith, using the words "Issue in doubt," asked Holland M. Smith, who was aboard *Pennsylvania* off Makin, for permission to bring in the 6th Marines, his Corps reserve. The fresh troops were released and landed mostly intact by late afternoon of D-Plus-One. By the end of the day, Shoup, who had been wounded but had not relinquished command, had driven across Betio to its south shore and Ryan, with his orphan unit, had secured the western end of the island. On the morning of D-Plus-Two, the 1st Battalion of the 6th Marines swung right from Shoup's position and drove west to join up with Ryan, and by late afternoon the Marines controlled the western two-thirds of Betio.

That night, the Japs shot their bolt with three suicidal *banzai* charges and in

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OVER THE TOP. One by one, Marines move over a protective wall and into the open, most of them carrying 40 pounds on their backs in addition to their 10-pound M-1 rifles and 5-pound steel hats. Infantrymen are the best-conditioned athletes in the world.

# 'Makin Taken,' Crows Dispatch from Army General, But Nimitz Fumes as Delays Endanger U.S. Fleet

Makin Atoll, 100 nautical miles north of Tarawa, could be a stepping stone to the Marshall Islands, the next objective of the U.S. offensive in the Central Pacific, or it could be a base from which the Japanese could harry U.S. efforts to remain in the Gilberts and to invade the Marshalls. The 27th Infantry Division, U.S. Army, under Maj. Gen. Ralph C. Smith, would attack the island of Butaritari at the same time Maj. Gen. Julian Smith's Marines were attacking Betio at Tarawa Atoll.

Butaritari is shaped like a misshapen T-square with an 11-mile shank and an off-center head. In August of 1942, Lt. Col. Evans F. Carlson's Marine Raiders had hit Butaritari, destroyed its 83-man

garrison and left. The raid was good for morale at home, but had caused the Japs to reinforce the island. But the Japs seemed to think that if the Americans came again, they would land on the shank of the T-square, as Carlson had done. The Americans didn't.

Butaritari was defended now by a garrison of not quite 800 men, about half of them trained to fight. They were led by a lieutenant. The defenses had very few gun emplacements and just a few tank traps, placed where Carlson had landed. Ralph Smith had the 165th Regimental Combat Team and a battalion-size landing team of the 105th Infantry, 6,472 assault troops in all.

The initial landings were on the head of the T-square, from the ocean, and were lightly opposed. Progress off the beach was slowed only by an occasional sniper. Two hours later, another assault attacked the shank of the T-square from inside the lagoon, and was met with small arms fire. Because of a miscalculation of tides, landing craft grounded on the fringe reef and the attackers were forced to wade in waist-deep water for the final 250 yards, a circumstance that

had proved murderous for the Marines at Betio. Three men were killed.

At the end of D-Day, Rear Admiral Kelly Turner reported to CINCPAC "Progress satisfactory." He said that the two invasion forces had linked up, half the island was in American hands and casualties were light. That was not satisfactory progress in the eyes of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, who, in the light of the disparity of forces, expected Butaritari to be taken in a single day, which would allow the naval forces to be moved to a safer area.

As it was, the 27th Division slogged on, taking another two days to reduce enemy resistance to the point where the issue was no longer in doubt. Finally, with casualties of 66 killed and 152 wounded, Ralph Smith reported to Holland Smith, Nimitz and the world, "Makin taken."

"Makin taken" had a nice ring to it and was echoed in headlines all across the U.S., but it may have had a hollow ring to some of the GIs, if they knew what had taken place at Tarawa.

## Betio Secured on 23 November; Banzai Charges End Resistance After Three Hard Days' Fighting



THE THIRTY-YARD DASH is the rifleman's best event. The leading Marine in this picture has his rifle in his right hand and his entrenching tool in his left. He's ready to dig a hole.

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the morning fresh troops of the 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines pushed to the eastern tip of the island. Julian Smith declared the island secure at 1321 on 23 November.

The Marines had lost 984 dead and 2,072 wounded. Of the 5,200 defenders, 17 wounded Japs who were taken prisoner and 129 Korean laborers were all that were still alive.



NO AUTOMATIC FIRE greeted the U.S. Army 165th Regimental Combat Team as it waded from the fringe reef to the beaches of Butaritari Island in Makin Atoll, and it was just as well, for this was the first combat of the war for these GIs. About 6,500 men under less than resolute leadership took three days to secure the island against fewer than 800 defenders.



# 1942: Allies Take Offensive Against Axis

## With U.S.-Led Invasion of Northwest Africa

In a complex operation beginning on 8 November 1942 and lasting for three days, American and British forces began, with the invasion of western North Africa, to retrieve from Germany lands taken by Adolph Hitler in his quest for world domination.

The invasion, code-named "Operation Torch," was under the command of U.S. Major General Dwight D. Eisen-

hower, Ike's first wartime command of troops at any level, from platoon up.

Under the overall naval command of Admiral Sir Andrew B. Cunningham, commanding officer of the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet, a combined fleet divided into separate components would put more than 100,000 troops ashore at three locations.

The Western Task Force under U.S.

Rear Admiral H. Kent Hewitt landed 35,000 American troops led by Major General George S. Patton Jr. on beaches at Safi, Fedala and Port Lyau-  
tey near Casablanca in French Morocco. It was hoped that resistance by Vichy French forces would be nonexistent or light, but this landing produced the only ship-against-ship naval action of Torch.

A Center Naval Task Force under Commodore Sir Thomas Troubridge, RN, landed a force of 39,000 Americans under Major General Lloyd R. Fredenall at Les Andalouses and La Senja, near Oran in Algeria. The Eastern Naval Task Force, under the command of Rear Admiral Sir H. M. Burroughs, RN, put ashore 10,000 American and 23,000 British troops under U.S. Major General Charles W. Ryder at Castiglione and Algiers, some of whom were bounced by sea 110 miles farther east down the Med to Bougie, still in Algeria.

### ACTION OFF CASABLANCA

The French battleship *Jean Bart* was at Casablanca, unfinished but capable of using her 15-inch guns. The light cruiser *Primauguet*, Contre-Amiral Gervais de Lafond, was also there, with two 2,500-ton destroyers and five 1,400-ton destroyers. Overall, but split into three attack groups and one covering group, Hewitt had the battleships *Massachusetts*, *Texas* and *New York*; heavy cruisers *Wichita*, *Tuscaloosa*, and *Augusta*; light cruisers *Savannah*, *Brooklyn*, *Cleveland* and *Philadelphia*; the fleet carrier *Ranger* and four "auxiliary" carriers (later called escort carriers); and no fewer than 38 destroyers. Lafond didn't have to face them all, but what he faced was enough.

At about 0700, *Jean Bart* and coast defense guns began firing on *Massachusetts*, straddling her with their fire. *Massachusetts* and *Tuscaloosa* immediately responded to *Jean Bart* and *Wichita* took on the coastal defense guns. Salvos from the battleship's 16-inch guns did superficial damage to the French ship until, after about fifteen

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THE WESTERN TASK FORCE approaches French Morocco in early November 1942. The United States had been at war on two fronts for only 11 months, and now was taking the fight to Axis forces. The inexperience would show; the landings would be successful.





## Vichy French Ships Sortie, Take on Hewitt's Heavies

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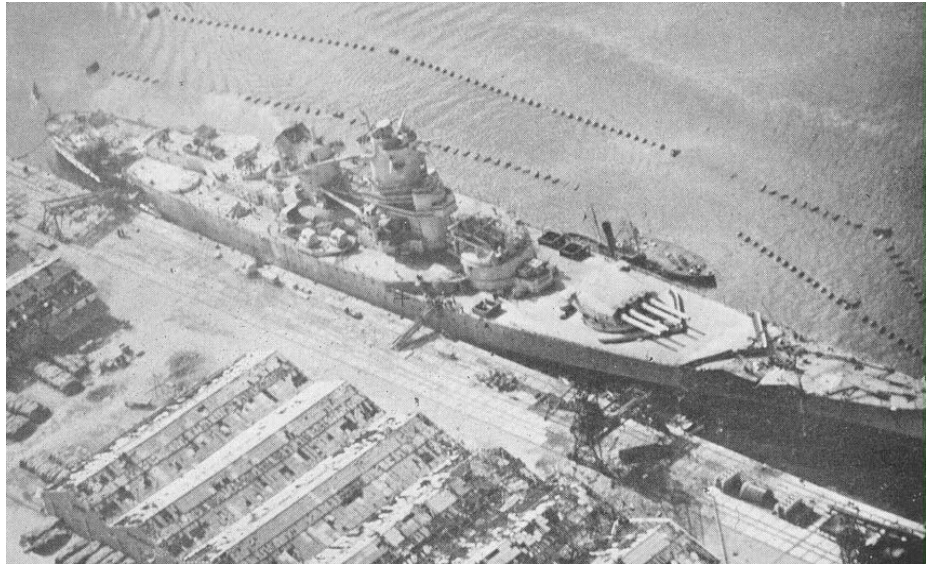
minutes, a single round jammed the forward turret in train, silencing *Jean Bart's* entire main battery. *Wichita*, during this time, had put the coastal guns temporarily out of action.

At 0815, the French destroyers put to sea with the objective of attacking U.S. transports landing troops and supplies at Fedala, and were followed by Lafond in *Primauguet* at 1000. Fedala was only 20 minutes from Casablanca for the 36-knot destroyers, and at 0828 they began firing on the transports, hitting one. They also engaged the U.S. destroyers *Wilkes* and *Ludlow*, damaging the latter and putting her out of the fight. Hewitt ordered *Augusta*, *Brooklyn* and the destroyer *Swanson* to assist *Wilkes* in dealing with the French destroyers.

As the French ships were driven back toward Casablanca, *Primauguet* sortied to assist them. By now, American units, assisted by planes from *Ranger*, had sunk two French destroyers, *Fougeueux* and *Boulonnais*, and a third, *Bresto*, had been so badly damaged she was just able to make port, where she capsized. A fourth, *Frondeur*, also made port but sank at her berth. *Primauguet*, *Albatros* and *Alcyon* reached the harbor and continued to fire from there. Continued bombardment from American ships and aircraft eventually finished them off before noon on D-Day.

Early in the afternoon, troops had secured Fedala and Patton went ashore. That evening, Patton sent a demand, under a flag of truce, that Vice Admiral F. C. Michelier, French naval commander at Casablanca, surrender. As a Michelier aide spoke through closed gates to the emissaries, *Jean Bart's* guns came back to life. "There is your answer," the aide said. He shrugged, as only Frenchmen can, saluted and walked off.

It would take two more days to convince the French that the Americans were their friends. When, on 11 November, Michelier met with Hewitt, it was not as the vanquished handing his sword to the victor. The surviving French ships would remain in French hands, fly the French Tricolor, be manned by French crews and would retain their guns and ammunition. The shore batteries would



THE FRENCH BATTLESHIP *Jean Bart* had not been completed, and only one turret of four 15-inch guns had been installed. But those guns were manned and supplied with ammunition. Except for one period when a single 16-inch shell from USS *Massachusetts* jammed her turret, *Jean Bart* kept up a steady, but not very effective, fire on the invasion forces.



AMERICAN SOLDIERS wait for the order to "Land the landing force." Except for four in the upper right, most seem alone with their thoughts, and a few ponder the heavy (to them) seas they will soon traverse in Higgins Boats. Some of these men will fight across Africa, invade Sicily and Italy, and land at Normandy three and one-half years from now.

also remain in French hands. Three hundred French prisoners were released in a ceremony on the 13th, and expressed appreciation that the Tricolor continued to fly over Safi.

The French capitulation did not end

naval hostilities off Morocco. German submarines sank seven ships in two days, including four transports off Fedala. Three other ships, including an oiler and the destroyer *Hambleton*, were hit by torpedoes, but not sunk.

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## Conflans Knew Local Seas; Hawke Knew He Could Sail Where Conflans Sailed

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with her, including her captain, Kersaint de Coetnempren, one of Conflans' best officers.

The first French ship to strike its colors was *Héros*, which surrendered to *Magnanime*. The weather was so bad, no boat could be sent with boarders to take her and she ran ashore. Shortly after 1600, *Royal George* poured repeated broadsides into *Superbe*, sinking her, and just before dark the French ship *Formidable*, "pierced like a cullender," struck to *Resolution* and was made a prize. "Night was now come," wrote Hawke in his report, "and blowing hard on a lee shore, I made the signal to anchor."

Conflans, even though he was in home waters, dared not move in the heavy weather and darkness, and he also anchored. At dawn, he found himself facing *Royal George* and made no attempt to fight it out. Instead, he beached his flagship, burnt her and escaped ashore with his crew.

Hawke's victory not only ended the threat of invasion, it cost the French navy whatever esteem it held in the court of Louis XV and among the soldiery. An English fleet of 23 ships of the line had chased a French fleet of 21 and defeated it practically within its own port, inflicting a loss of seven ships and 2,500 sailors at a cost of two ships, the crews of which were saved.



SINKING OF THE FRENCH SHIP *Thésée* occurred when she was knocked on her beam ends by a gust of wind in heavy weather. With her lee gun ports open, the ship quickly filled and went under, taking her captain and crew with her. *Torbay*, her opponent, nearly suffered the same fate.

## German Submarines Show Up at Casablanca and Sink Four Transports off Fedala, Damage Others

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On 17 November, the American transports and their escorts departed for the return to Hampton Roads in the U.S. and, on 19 November, Casablanca was incorporated into the new Moroccan Sea Frontier as a naval base.

Torch had been a success, and a classroom for future amphibious operations. U.S. ground forces had not yet met a determined enemy. They soon would.



LIGHTERING SUPPLIES ASHORE near Oran in Algeria on 8 November. Operation Torch would impress upon the U.S. Navy the need for new classes of seagoing ships that could be beached, unloaded quickly, and backed off with the tide.



# 1759: Wild Weather, Treacherous Waters Don't Deter Hawke in Battle with Conflans

## *Victory over French Ends Invasion Threat to England*

The French, in July 1759, had assembled a fleet of barges at Havre with which to ferry troops to England, but Sir George Rodney destroyed the flat-bottomed boats by bombardment, opening the naval warfare of the Seven Years' War. In August, an English fleet under Edward Boscawen encountered off the coast of Portugal a French fleet bound from Toulon to Brest to augment the force of Admiral Hubert de Conflans at Brest. Boscawen captured three ships and drove two more ashore.

Sir Edward Hawke had spent the summer of 1759 hugging the Isle of Ushant off Brest at the northwestern tip of France, keeping Comte de Conflans bottled up. An invasion army with transports had been assembled at Vannes, near St. Nazaire and facing on Quiberon Bay, waiting for Conflans to guide it safely to England where it might end the inconvenient alliance of George II with the Germans and restore Catholicism to the heretic island.

On 9 November, strong seasonal gales had forced Hawke to take shelter for a week in Torbay, a Channel port in southwest England. The same westerly storms which had driven Hawke to cover kept Conflans in Brest, but when they slackened sufficiently to allow the English to sail, Conflans escaped from Brest and headed south to Quiberon Bay with a force augmented by a squadron of frigates under Bompard. But Hawke was on his heels.

Off Quiberon Bay, Conflans' ships of the line gave flight to a small squadron of British frigates that was watching the transports, but his lookouts reported sails in the west. They were Hawke's. Conflans made for inshore and Hawke flew the signal "Form as you chase." The chase was on under darkening skies in a building northwesterly gale.

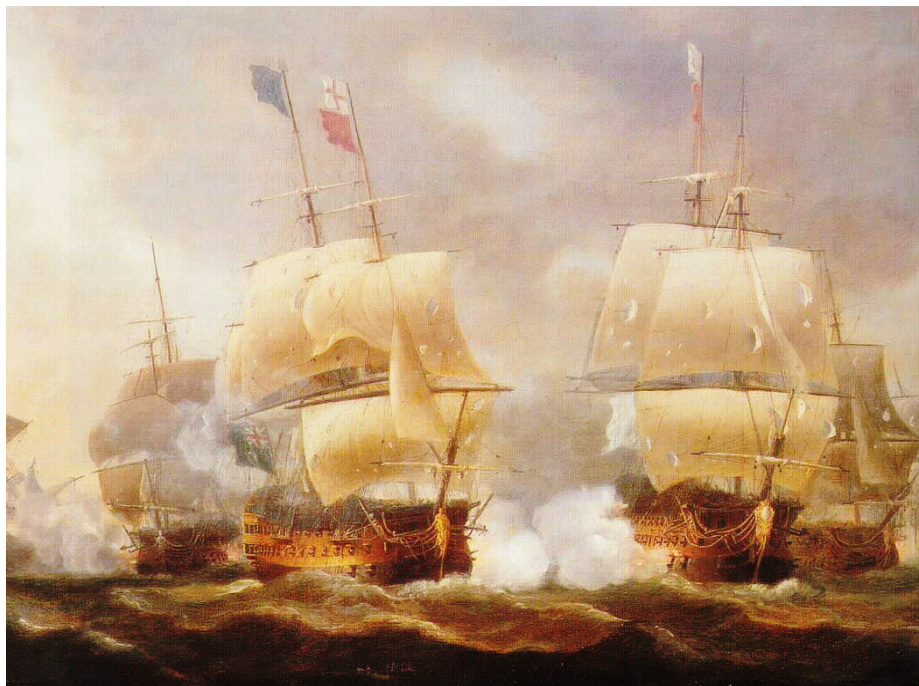
Hawke had no local knowledge of the sea around the rocky cluster called The Cardinals and the shoals called Le Four that guarded the bay, but he knew that

where Conflans sailed he could follow. Hawke would not be content to continue the blockade of the invasion fleet -- he saw the opportunity to destroy it once and for all.

The English line was led by *Magnanime*, a former French ship commanded by Lord Richard Howe. She was followed by *Torbay*, *Dorsetshire*, *Resolution*, *Warspite* and the flagship *Royal George*. Conflans, leading his ships in

the huge *Soleil Royal*, saw that Hawke meant to overtake and engage him at a disadvantage, so he turned to head to sea, which turned out to be a mistake, as he encountered *Royal George*. The new French 74, *Thésée*, which was in action with *Torbay*, caught a sudden gust in her sails which laid her on her beam ends. With her lee gun ports open, she instantly filled and sank, taking her crew

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HAWKE AND CONFLANS meet and exchange broadsides, but *Soleil Royal* was no match for *Royal George*, probably because of English leadership, seamanship and gunnery. Lord Howe, in *Magnanime*, a ship taken from the French 11 years earlier, forced the surrender of the first ship taken at Quiberon Bay. From a painting by Nicolas Pocock.



ILE de OUESSANT, lying off the tip of Brittany, opposite Brest, is what the English call Ushant. Hawke had spent the summer off Ushant, blockading Conflans in Brest. When seasonal gales drove Hawke to England, Conflans got ready to sail. When weather eased, he put to sea, but Hawke caught him off Quiberon.

### How to Get in Touch

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Submissions are not encouraged because of the time available for editing. If sent, they should be typewritten copy, double-spaced, accompanied by a 3½-inch diskette containing the submission in Word 6.0 for Windows.

Quite welcome, however, are suggestions of events for coverage. Please offer suggestions two months ahead of the anniversary of an event.