

been invited to attend the conference in the Moroccan city of Casablanca, but he declined due to ongoing military operations on the Eastern Front. Stalin did make it very clear to both Roosevelt and Churchill that he expected some movement on the issue of a cross-Channel invasion in 1943. While this viewpoint was one that was shared by several American leaders, like Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, it would be next to impossible to carry out such an operation in 1943, owing to the fact that both American and British forces still found themselves engaged in heated combat with German troops in Tunisia. The British expanded on the arguments that had been made during their July 1942 meeting in London. They continued to contend that a cross-Channel invasion was not feasible and that the best option would be to continue to focus on the Mediterranean theatre because of the potential for knocking Italy out of the war after final victory in North Africa was secured.

Over the course of the eleven-day meeting (January 14–24), American and British officials reached a number of crucial decisions. First, it was agreed that the German submarine presence in the Atlantic still posed the greatest threat to the Allied war effort and needed to be dealt with first and foremost. Second, the British were able to convince the Americans to follow up Operation Torch with **Operation Husky**, a joint invasion of Sicily, with any offensive against the Germans being limited to a coordinated plan of bombing while forces continued to be built up in Britain for the eventual invasion of France. The Americans were able to pry some concessions from the British by threatening to abandon the Europe First strategy. In order to avoid this, the British agreed to allow more forces to be funneled into the Asia/Pacific theatre of operations. The major question looming over the decision at Casablanca would be Stalin's reaction to having the invasion of France put off again for another year.

In order to soothe Stalin, Roosevelt announced the policy of **unconditional surrender** during a press conference on January 24. This policy meant that the Allied nations sought the complete destruction of the power of Germany and Japan through the destruction of their governments and that neither the U.S. nor Britain would attempt to make a separate peace agreement with either nation. The main impulse that led Roosevelt to issue this unconditional surrender policy was his desire to reassure Stalin of the American and British commitment to seeing the war through to the end, especially in light of the fact that no cross-Channel invasion would take place in 1943. The policy of unconditional surrender was also designed to reduce domestic political furor over the Americans and British working with Darlan, who was seen as a Nazi collaborator, by assuring both the public and Stalin that no deals would be struck with any Nazi or Japanese official.⁵²



U.S. troops taken prisoner during the Battle of Kasserine Pass are marched through a Tunisian village.

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Endgame in North Africa

The German rush of nearly 250,000 men into Tunisia in late 1942 meant that the Americans and British still had some work to do in North Africa in 1943. Rommel and his Afrika Korps continued to retreat across Libya toward Tunisia, pursued by Montgomery and the British Eighth Army from Egypt. Despite the seeming advantages the Allies had in manpower, resources, and momentum, by early February 1943 the Germans were able to establish a strong defensive position in Tunisia, with Rommel and his Afrika Korps protecting the eastern approach from the British, and German troops under the command of Jurgen von Arnim protecting the western approaches through the Atlas Mountains from the Americans. From this position, the Germans could also strike at weak points in the Allied lines. A series of localized attacks against French and American forces in the Atlas Mountains in January served to disorganize the Allied lines in the west and emboldened the Germans to continue the attack. In mid-February, German forces attacked the American II Corps at Faïd Pass with great success, driving the Americans from their positions. This opened the way for the Germans to launch another attack on American positions in the western Atlas Mountains, most notably at **Kasserine Pass**.

This was the first major engagement between German and American ground forces. The inexperienced American troops led by inexperienced officers proved themselves to be no match for the seasoned German troops. The Americans were forced back nearly fifty miles from their original position, and this gave the Germans the opportunity to roll up the American defensive line from the south to the north. Only the intervention of a British armored division, supported by the artillery component



Canadian troops in Sicily. One of the key outcomes of the Allies' conquest of Sicily was that it led to Mussolini's ouster.

Photo Credit: National Archives of Canada.

of the American 9th Division, prevented this from happening. Kasserine Pass was a loss for the American military, but it was a valuable one as it led to a shakeup in the command of the American forces. George Patton, who would become one of the great generals of World War II as well as one of the most controversial figures of the war, was placed in command of the American ground forces and tasked with rebuilding American combat effectiveness, a task at which he excelled. Kasserine was also the last gasp of the German army in North Africa, as after their brief success there, the British and Americans went back on the offensive.

In March, Montgomery, relying heavily on Ultra reports that gave an in-depth picture of how short of men and materials the Germans were in Tunisia, launched a major attack on the Libyan-Tunisian border, which broke through the German lines and made their holding of Tunisia untenable. Rommel himself was flown back to Germany for further medical treatment for ongoing health problems, and not having him present certainly hurt the German effort. The biggest obstacle they faced, though, was the lack of supplies. Allied air and naval forces, informed by Ultra intercepts, first ravaged German convoys trying to bring in materials and reinforcements and then, when the Germans switched to an air-lift model in late March, the Luftwaffe's transport fleet. By late April, pressure from both British and American forces had forced the Germans into a small pocket, and on May 8 the German Luftwaffe abandoned North Africa all together. By May 13 the last German resistance in North Africa had been eliminated. The Allies now turned their attention to Sicily and Italy.

Sicily and Italy

Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily by British and American forces, had been discussed during the

Casablanca Conference. The operation was formalized in May 1943 during the **Trident Conference** held in Washington at which American military planners were able to pin the British down on a specific date for the invasion of France, May 1, 1944, in return for agreeing to continue offensive operations in the Mediterranean beyond Sicily in 1943. On July 10, 1943, the British Eighth Army, under Montgomery's command, landed on the southeastern corner of the island of Sicily and was tasked with seizing Messina, the major city at the northeastern point of Sicily, in order to cut off Italian and German troops' point of retreat. The American Seventh Army, commanded by Patton, landed on the western side of the island and would provide cover for the British flank as it moved north.

The initial landings went smoothly, and Patton's Seventh Army made quick inroads against very light resistance. Montgomery, on the other hand, faced stiff resistance from German troops who had been moved from the west. As his drive slowed, Patton, not wanting to be in Montgomery's shadow, captured the city of Palermo on the northern coast and began to drive on Messina himself. Both the British and the Americans found their progress slowed by strong German resistance. Only by using a series of amphibious landings were they able to unhinge the German line. On August 11, German troops began retreating across the Straits of Messina into Italy, and on August 17, the Allied forces made a triumphal entry into Messina.

One of the key outcomes of the conquest of Sicily was that it led to Mussolini's ouster. On July 25, he was asked to resign as prime minister. After an interview with King Victor Emmanuel III, Mussolini was arrested and replaced as prime minister by **Marshal Pietro Badoglio**. At first the new government announced publicly that it would continue to fight beside Hitler, but secretly the Italians were in negotiations with the Allies to surrender. Hitler had grown worried about such a move and had begun to prepare for the necessity of German troops seizing control of the Italian peninsula. On September 5, Montgomery's Eighth Army landed on the toe of the Italian peninsula. On September 8, as the American Fifth Army commanded by **Mark Clark** came ashore near Salerno in southern Italy, launching **Operation Avalanche**, the Germans initiated their seizure of key positions in central and northern Italy while German forces formed a strong defensive line in the southern part of the peninsula to slow the Allied move north.

German resistance to the landings at Salerno almost succeeded in driving the Allies off of the beaches, and it was only the use of an immense artillery barrage that stopped the Germans from succeeding. The crisis period passed when an American airborne division landed in the beachhead along with British armored units. With numbers running against them, the German forces began a retreat to the north toward a prepared defensive line, blowing up bridges behind them in order to slow