

WW2 North Africa

The Tunisia Campaign



*With drawings of Carol Johnson
WW2 Combat Artist*

By Richard Clarke

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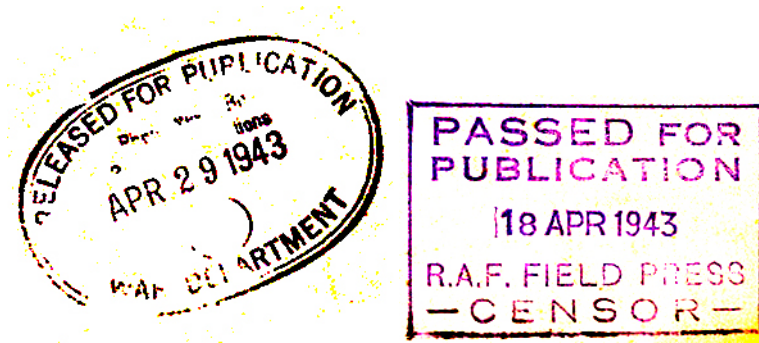
Published by Infinite Pie Publications
Ajijic, Jalisco, Mexico

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Drawings of Carol Johnson



Censor stamps, required for publication of these drawings

In 1943, at the age of 26, Carol Johnson went to the News Enterprise Association office in New York City where he was told to get a uniform and report to the docks in two days. He was being sent overseas as a war correspondent, as an artist sketching what he saw for publication in newspapers in the USA. His destination was Algeria, where the North African Campaign was ramping up.

For the next eight months, the young Mr. Johnson worked diligently to report on the North African flank of the War, and to record the daily life of the American GIs through his sketches. The drawings, in pencil and/or ink and wash, were published in daily newspapers across the United States as *Carol Johnson's North African Sketch Book*. But first they had to be approved by US and English censors.

Johnson's sketches captured everyday scenes of Army life as well as the grimmer realities of the War. His subjects included life in the barracks and tents, and he made fine, sensitive portraits of some of the men who served around him. In addition, several of the sketches show glimpses of the local Arab culture as well as the French Algerian Zouave infantry who were encamped in the area. And when the fighting occurred, Johnson was on the spot to record the action.

Mr. Johnson traveled for some months with the writer Ernie Pyle, who was also known for reporting stories that emphasized the personal experiences of the young men engaged in the conflict. Pyle's book *Here Is Your War* contains illustrations by Mr. Johnson. With the relative difficulty of reporting on a War which was occurring all the way across the world, these intimate stories and sketches served as a lifeline of information for a news-starved American public.




NEA
Daily News-Magazine
New York, May 3, 1943

Bright ... Fresh ... Exclusive

HERE ARE THE FIRST OF CAROL JOHNSON'S SKETCHES FROM THE AFRICAN WAR FRONT

This is a different kind of war reporting ... These drawings—recording humor, detail and atmosphere that cameras cannot catch nor words convey—are exclusive to NEA Service client newspapers ... Watch for other picture-stories from this North African Sketch Book.





Carol Johnson, right, is shown with Lt. Gen. Carl S. Spaatz, commander of U. S. Air Forces in North Africa.


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—LINES ON LIFE AT AN ADVANCED AIR BASE—


Carol Johnson's North African Sketch Book



AN EGG IS A PRIZE for a betweenside match at one of the advanced U. S. air bases in North Africa. The team which can best egg from the Arabs, who sell them along the roads near the business stations, or they can try to keep chickens of their own. The bet is the center which watched into camp one day and has been a faithful predator ever since. (She has flown on bombing missions, too.) Before, in a living chicken. Staff Sgt. Carol Thomas, of Desert Oak, Calif., from a double county-wide-up while a hungry (all) waits with more to.



BACK SAFELY from a bombing mission over enemy territory, a B-26 taxis up for refueling and more repairs while a ground crewman directs the plane with arm signals. Unconcerned with all the chatter and commotion are the grunting and the big Arabs on the tarmac. They are to deliver all the advanced bomber's and fighter's line, because it is close to an Arab village.



BOMBER PILOT and squadron commander is Maj. F. L. Brown, from Tallahassee, Ala. He wears the world's most famous mustache.



"WHO'S NEXT?" Tony Novelli has moved his barber shop from Chicago to a beach in North Africa. And Tony's customers are grateful, even if it isn't very funny. The barber, who's also a pilot, actually a cat on a stick—climb for the one-eyed shop, and a piece of canvas provides a patch of welcome shade.

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First coverage of Carol Johnson drawings, from NEA Daily News Service
New York, May 3, 1943.

"This is a different kind of war reporting ... These drawings--recording humor, detail and atmosphere that cameras cannot catch nor words convey ..."

WW2 Situation at this time

From the time that WW2 started in 1939, the Allied forces had received a long series of losses and setbacks through 1941. Much of Europe fell to the Germans, and Italy entered WW2 expanding the war to the entire Mediterranean. Then with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and America's formal entry into the war, the conflict became truly worldwide, in both major oceans, and involving people throughout the world. By mid 1942 the US had some successes, especially the Battle for Midway Island in the Pacific. There was no progress in Europe, though Britain had withstood the Germans' air power in The Battle of Britain, and the Axis push into Greece had failed.

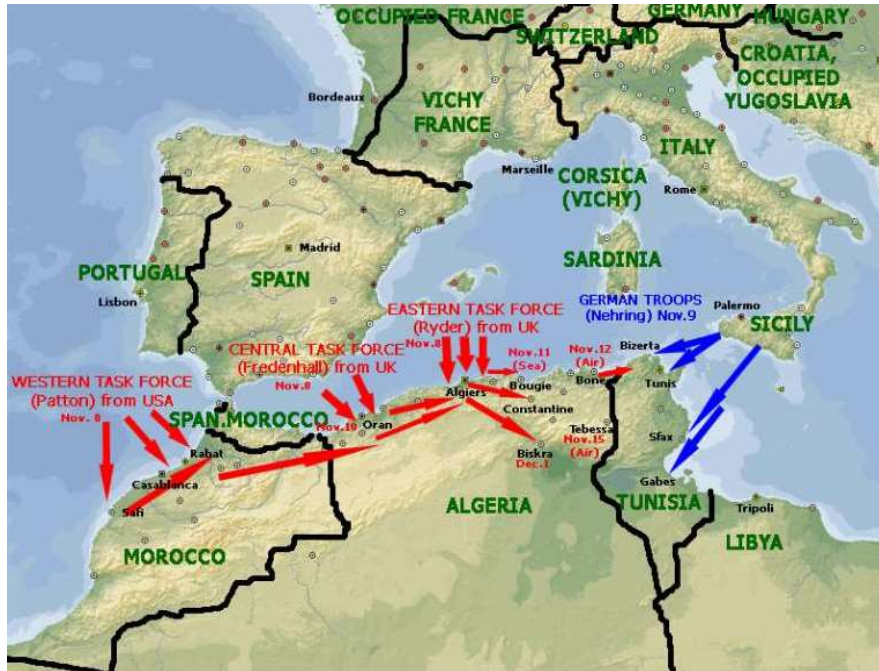
The North African Campaign took place from June 10, 1940 to May 13, 1943. It included campaigns fought in the Libyan and Egyptian deserts (Western Desert Campaign, also known as the Desert War) and in Morocco and Algeria (Operation Torch) and Tunisia (Tunisia Campaign).

The early days of the North African Campaign pitted the Italians against 100,000 British forces. In December 1940, a Commonwealth counter offensive, Operation Compass, destroyed the 250,000 troop Italian 10th Army. Then the German Afrika Korps—commanded by Erwin Rommel, "The Desert Fox," was dispatched to North Africa. A see-saw series of battles for control of Libya and parts of Egypt followed, reaching a climax in the Second Battle of El Alamein, when British Commonwealth forces under the command of Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery delivered a decisive defeat to the Axis forces and pushed them back to Tunisia. This set the stage for Operation Torch, the massed Allied Invasion of west North Africa.

Operation Torch was the British-American invasion of French North Africa. On November 8, 1942, Operation Torch landed troops in North Africa under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. It would be General Eisenhower's first major operation, and the first massed sea and air assault of the war in Europe. The initial Axis opponent was the forces of Vichy France in Morocco and Algeria.

Allied forces of Operation Torch landed in Morocco and Algeria with 65,130 US troops. Altogether three amphibious task forces land—one American, two British—are to seize the key ports and airports of Morocco and Algeria simultaneously. These would support subsequent coastal military operations in order to capture Casablanca as a base.

From the moment the Allies landed, the campaign in Northwest Africa and the race for Tunisia would be a logistical battle. The side that could mass and supply forces the fastest would win. To illustrate the logistic challenges: a German motorized division needed 360 tons of supplies per day. With seven Axis divisions, air and naval units, 71,000 tons of supplies per month were needed.



Operation Torch (from ww2-weapons.com)

For the Germans, control of Tunisia was also critical to prevent Rommel from being trapped between Montgomery in the east and the newly formed British First Army in the west.

The Western Task Force was created, made up of American units, with Major General George S. Patton in command and Rear Admiral Henry K. Hewitt heading the naval operations. It was aimed at Casablanca. The Western Task Force consisted of the U.S. 2nd Armored Division and the U.S. 3rd and 9th Infantry Divisions—35,000 troops in a convoy of over 100 ships.

Overall, for Operation Torch, the entire invasion force consisted of over 400 warships, 1,000 planes, and some 107,000 US & British troops, including a battalion of paratroopers jumping in the U.S. Army's first airborne attack.

Operation Torch was a major success. Landings were made with little resistance at Casablanca, Oran, Algeria, and Algiers, Algeria. By Nov. 16, 1942, Operation Torch was considered to be finished. The Allies had invaded North Africa. They had overcome the Vichy French. Next were the German forces and Rommel.

In January 1943, the winter rains and resulting mud brought mechanized operations to a halt in northern Tunisia. Waiting for better weather in the spring, the Allies continued to build up their forces. This is the period in which these soldiers and Carol Johnson are to ship out.

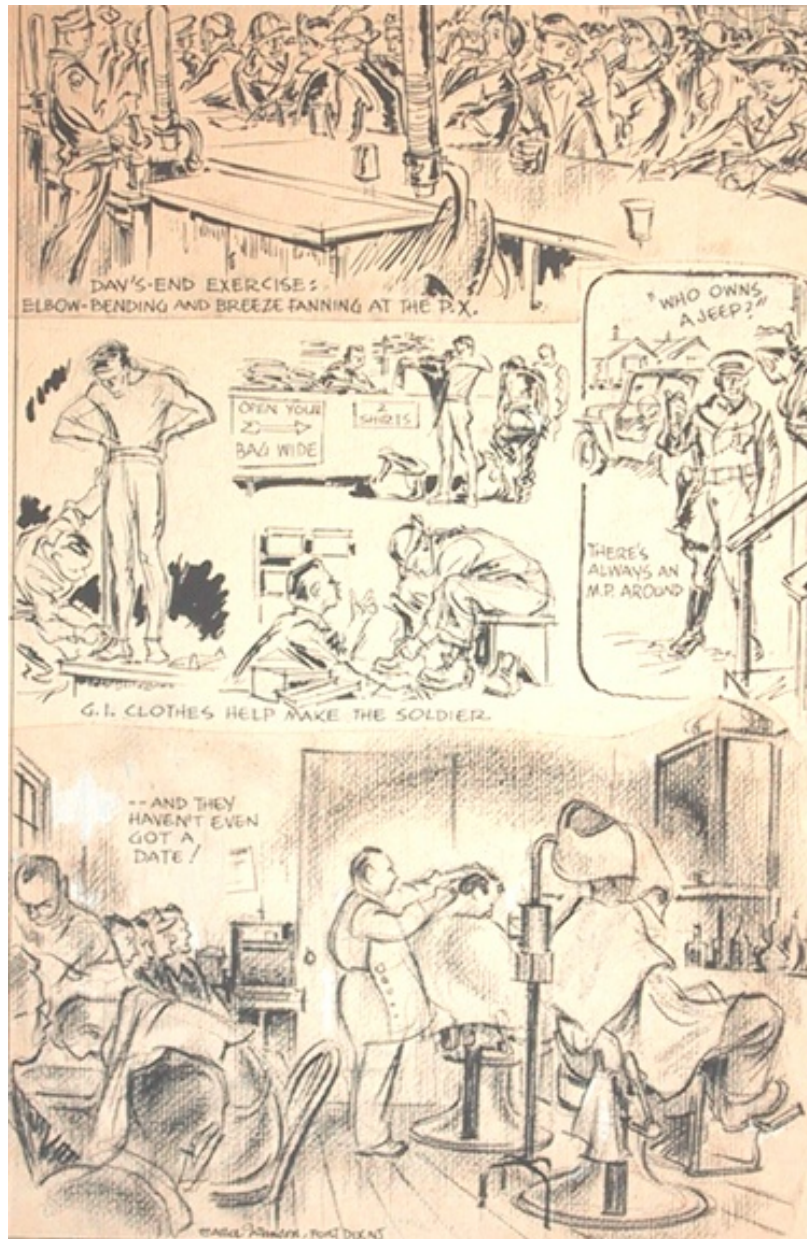
Camp Life in USA

Between 1943 and 1944 about 3 million troops moved from the USA to Europe and North

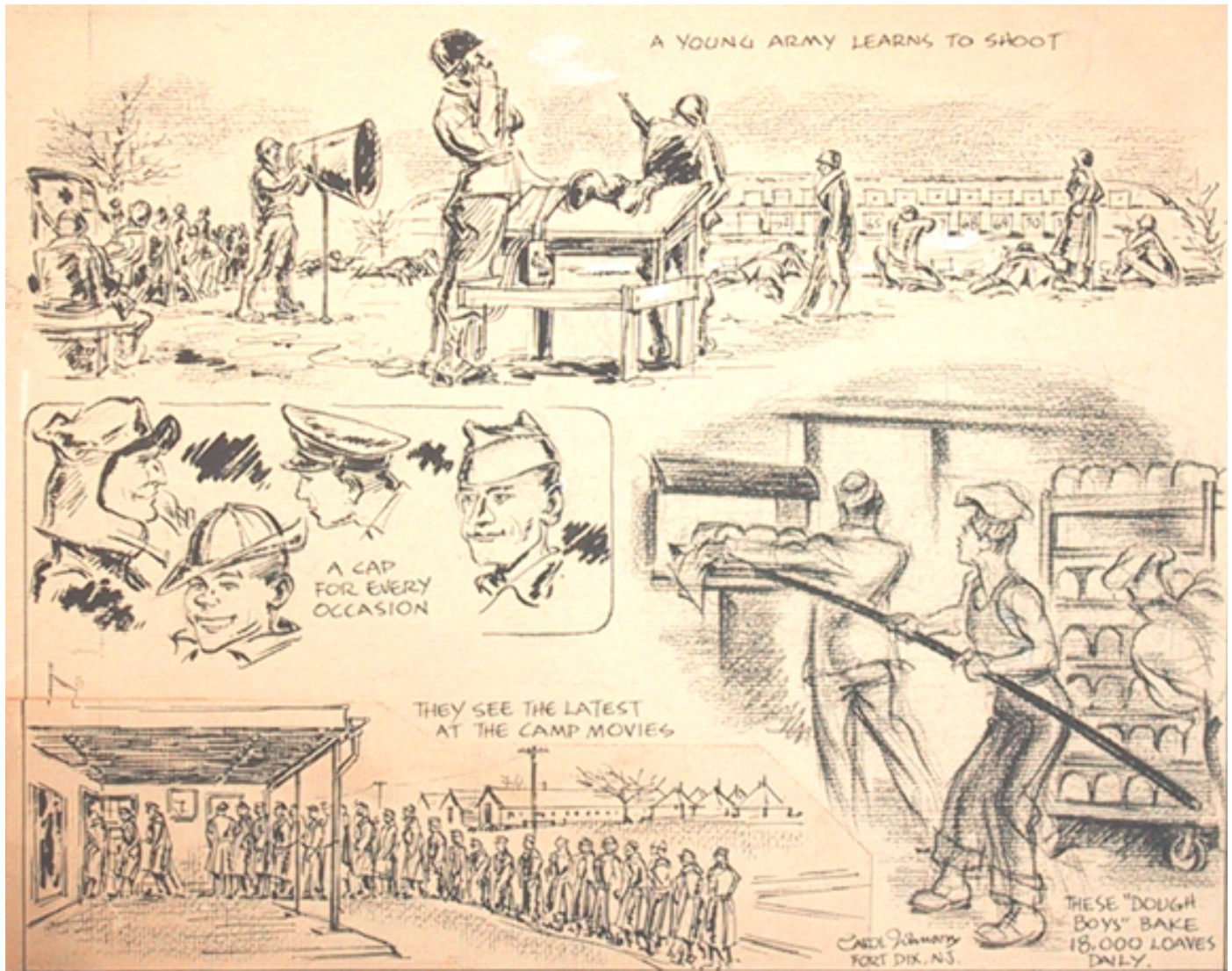
Africa by naval convoy. New York was the major departure point for all US convoys. Fort Dix, In New Jersey, was a major gathering point for these departing troops.

They would not stay long in camps, just a few days. During this time they would make final preparations for their mission: getting new equipment and uniforms as needed, getting a GI haircut, receiving final training. They would be sleeping in barracks, eating at chow halls, getting some last minute rifle practice, then drinking at the base PX or going to a movie in the evening. And waiting.

Then they would ship out, about 5,000 per convoy, to play their part in the North African Campaign.



Camp life in the USA: drinking at the PX,
getting uniforms and haircuts



Camp Life in the USA
Rifle training, baking bread, in line for a movie. Caps for every occasion.

Convoy to North Africa

The convoy route was from New York to Casablanca. They took about 17 days to make the voyage across the Atlantic. These convoys were typically 20 ships with 12 escorts. They were very heavily guarded, more so than most Atlantic convoys, due to the strategic value of the North Africa campaign. In these convoys were the men, equipment and supplies needed to for their mission. Equipment included the tanks that were needed to fight Rommel's forces.

There were three main American convey efforts for this invasion: for Operation Torch, the Western Task Force, and the Tunisia Campaign. All of these arrived intact, with no lost ships. It was with this third set of convoys in which Carol Johnson arrived in North Africa. The later convoys were routed directly from New York to Gibraltar, after French North Africa was secured by the Allies.

The Submarine War

The submarine war of WW2 is a story that is largely untold (as compared to D-Day), and was a vital success for the USA and our allies. This is known as The Battle of the Atlantic, and was the longest continuous military campaign in World War II, running from 1939 to the defeat of Germany in 1945.

The Battle of the Atlantic pitted U-boats and other warships of the Kriegsmarine (German navy) and aircraft of the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) against the Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Navy, and Allied forces, and later, the US Navy and Air Force, and allied merchant shipping.

With Europe mainly under Hitler's control, Allied success in WW2 depended on the ability to move great numbers of men, and enormous amounts of war machines, armaments, and supplies from the USA to Europe and North Africa. In addition, Britain required more than a million tons of imported material per week in order to be able to survive and fight. So WW2 can be looked on as a "logistics war" in which the victor will be the side that best supplies its war machine and allies, and both sides knew this.

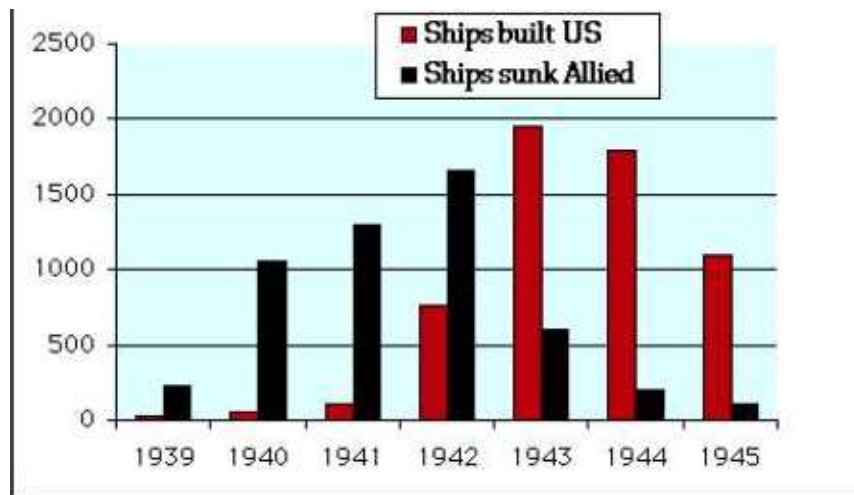
As with all the other elements of WW2, the submarine war started off badly for the USA and England. German submarines were at sea, and started attacks within a few hours of the beginning of the war against England and France. After many losses, England started using convoys with escorts ships. Germany countered with "Wolf Packs" which could attack the escorts and then the convoy. New tactics and equipment would continue to be developed and deployed throughout the war.

German U-boats caused enormous damage to naval shipping in WWI, and in the early years of WW2. During WW2, German submarines sunk more than 6,000 Allied vessels.

In 1941 and 1942 Germany was having particular success in the area off the eastern coast of the USA, through which our ships had to navigate, and which were out of range of the protecting US aircraft. By the time of this convoy, in early 1943, real progress had been made though.

The convoy system greatly reduced losses to these U-boats. Once put in place, the submarine kills were mainly unaccompanied ships. These losses must have worried those on board these convoys, like the young Carol Johnson.

The loss of ships in the first years of WW2 was outstripped by the ship building in the USA, once the USA was really mobilized after the attack n Pearl harbor and subsequent declaration of war.



From <http://www.usmm.org/ww2.html>

Anti-submarine efforts improved as the war drew on. Convoys with escort ships and radio silence made shipping safer. Then in 1943, improved airborne radar made a big difference. You can see the effects of the improved radar in the chart below. Starting in 1943 German loses of their U-Boats increase significantly. This turned the tide in the Battle of the Atlantic.

U-boat Fates

The guide to all U-boat losses

Chart of U-boat losses 1939-1945

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
1939									2	5	1	1	9
1940	2	5	3	4	1	1	2	2	1	1	2		24
1941			5	2	1	4		4	2	2	5	10	35
1942	3	2	7	2	4	3	12	9	10	16	13	5	86
1943	7	18	15	17	42	16	38	25	10	26	19	8	241
1944	14	22	24	21	23	24	23	32	20	9	7	15	234
1945	14	21	29	48	24								136
Total U-boats lost													765

The Tunisia Campaign – Drawings of Carol Johnson



Boarding ships to North Africa



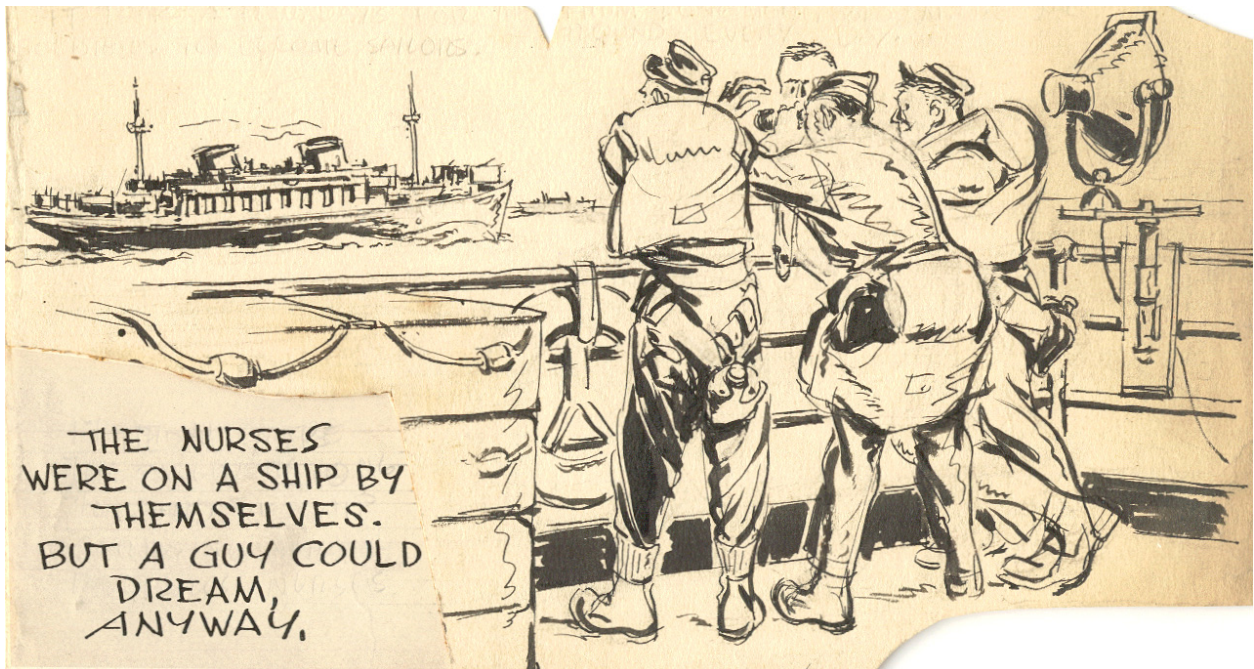
On the way from the USA to North Africa



Using semaphore flags to prevent German submarines from locating the convoy



Bunks onboard a US Army troop transport, home for 2 1/2 weeks.



GIs gazing at a nearby ship,
"The nurses were on a ship by themselves but a guy could dream, anyway."

Tunisian Campaign: Operation Flax

As of mid-March 1943, Germans were still able to deliver large quantities of supplies and ammunition to northern Tunisia. Allies tasked General James Doolittle, commander of the Northwest African Strategic Air Force (NASAF) to design Operation Flax to interfere with this supply operation.

While Operation Flax was a key element of the Tunisia Campaign it must also be understood in terms of what was called the “the Battle of the Mediterranean.”

One of Benito Mussolini’s main objectives for entering WW2 on the side of the Germans was to restore to Italy the glory days of the Roman Empire. This included control of the Mediterranean as a key objective. With the Italians move into North Africa in mid 1941, only one thing stood in the way: the British base in Malta.

The Siege of Malta

In 1940, in the early months of WW2. Malta started to come under pressure from the Italian forces. Malta, 95 square miles in area, smaller than London, found itself surrounded by enemy territory and bases.



Malta had been the centerpiece of Britain's strategic naval position in the Mediterranean for almost a century and a half. The map, above, shows Malta’s strategic position as a small island country, south of Sicily. Control of Malta went a long way towards English control of

naval traffic in the Mediterranean Sea.

Malta was a key element in the Battle of the Mediterranean, a major WW2 naval theatre, where the Allies, mainly English, fought Italy and Germany from 1940 - 1945. Outside of the Pacific theatre, the Mediterranean saw the most naval warfare during the war. Malta sat in the middle of the Mediterranean, in between Sicily and Tunisia, the major Axis supply route for Rommel's North African forces. The Axis recognized this and made great efforts to neutralize the island as a British base, by air attacks and starving it of supplies.

The English had to supply Malta by convoy. A number of Allied convoys were decimated by Axis air and sea power in 1941 and 1942. The turning point in the siege came in August 1942, when the British sent a very heavily defended convoy under the codename Operation Pedestal, which broke through, but with great losses.

For the British, it was a success, even though 35% of the merchant fleet was lost. The arrival of about 29,000 tons of cargo, together with gasoline, oil fuel, kerosene and diesel fuel, was enough to give the island about ten more weeks supply beyond the few weeks of supplies that remained. Royal Navy gunners and Fleet Air Arm fighters shot down 42 of about 330 Axis aircraft that flew against the convoy. And now they had ten weeks more fuel.

Operation Pedestal was a strategic victory, raising the morale of the people and garrison of Malta, averting famine and what would have been an inevitable surrender. In September and October, Malta was supplied by submarines (in what were called Magic Carpet runs) with ammunition, aviation fuel and torpedoes. Submarines made more Magic Carpet runs and the fast minelayer HMS Manxman made a dash from Gibraltar with more urgently-needed supplies. Malta was supplied.

Malta's air defense was repeatedly reinforced by Hawker Hurricane and Supermarine Spitfire fighters flown to the island from HMS Furious and other Allied aircraft carriers. The situation eased as Axis forces were diverted from North Africa for Germany's attack of Russia, and eventually Malta could become an offensive base once again.

In September, with Malta supplied, Allied forces sank 100,000 tons of Axis shipping, including 24,000 tons of fuel destined for Rommel, leaving the Axis forces in Egypt consuming supplies faster than they received it, contributing to tactical paralysis during the Second Battle of El Alamein. The British victory of this battle was the biggest of the war in Europe up until that time, and Field Marshal Montgomery's greatest triumph. Malta went on to play a strong role in later combat, including Operation Flax.

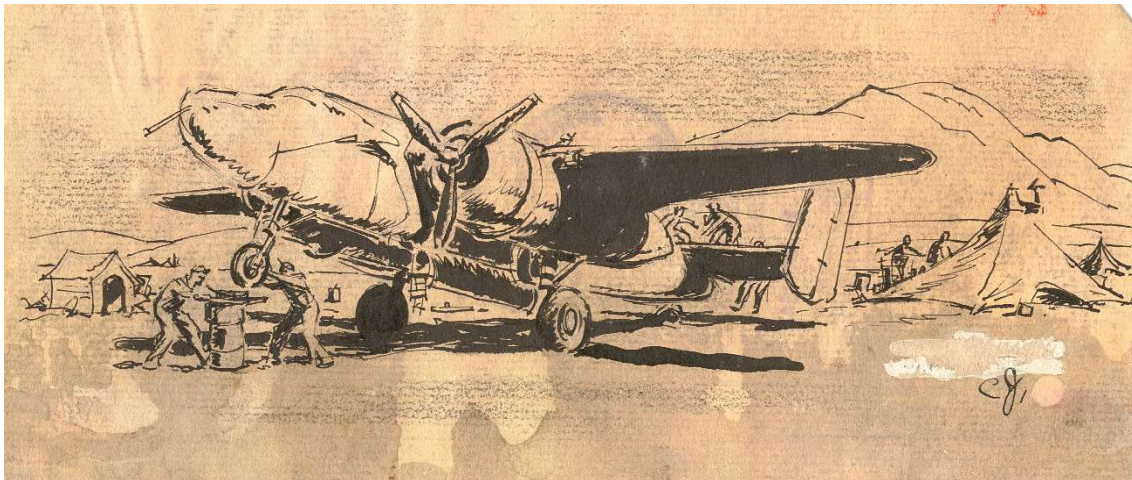
Operation Flax

Operation Flax was a furious series of air battles, and convoy and airbase attacks, from April 5 - 27, 1943. Using intercepts from the Italian version of Enigma coded communications, the outnumbered US forces were able to inflict great damage on the German forces.

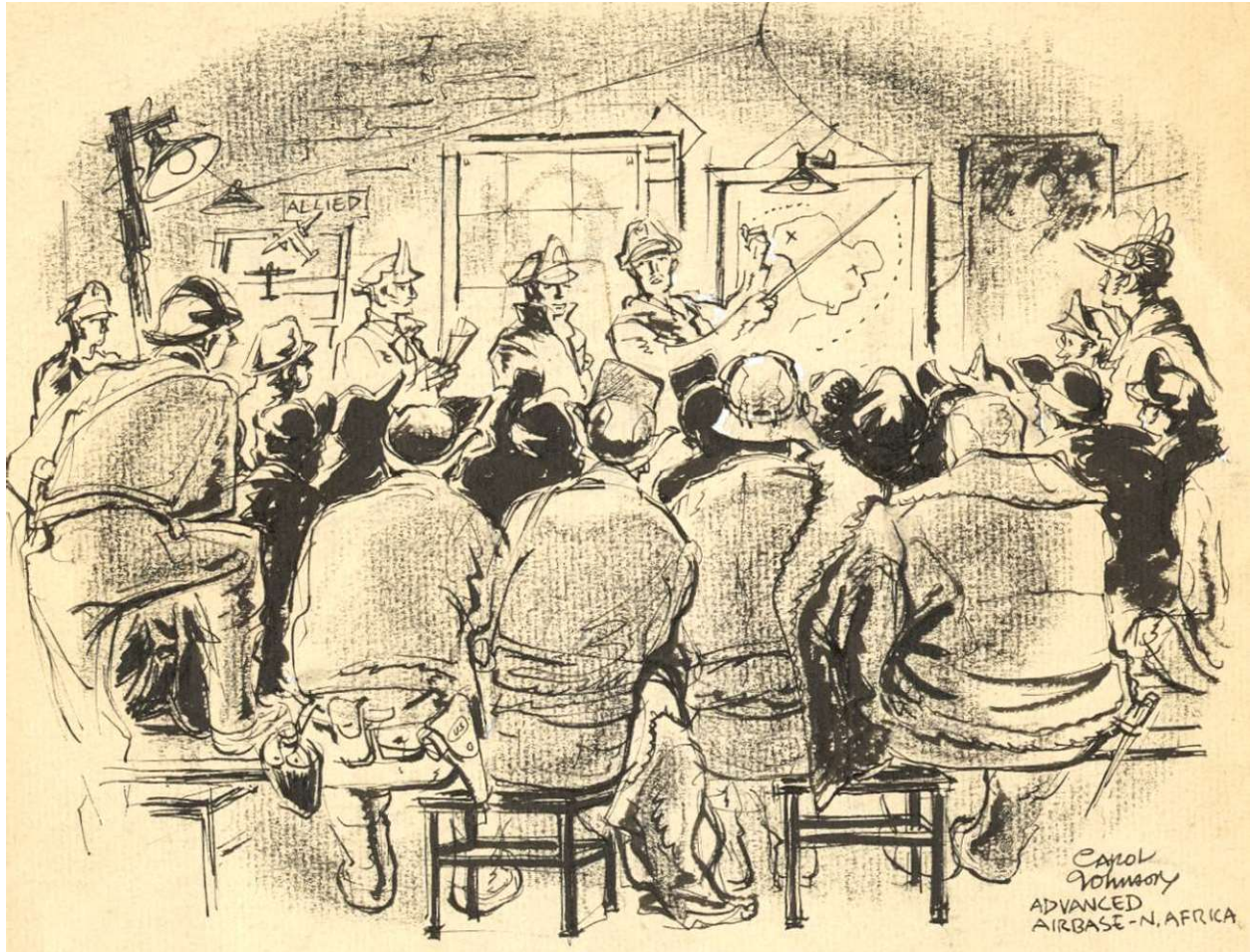
With the heavy losses incurred on the German air transport fleet in April 1943, Hermann Göring ordered all transport runs to Tunisia to cease, continuing only after Albert Kesselring. *Wehrmacht* Commander-in-Chief of Italy and North Africa complained. Transport runs continued, but at a much smaller scale, and only at night. This pretty much insured Rommel's defeat; tank armies need fuel, and there was no longer an adequate supply.



Flight crew, watching film, I think to prepare for a mission



B-25 Mitchell being worked on



Briefing before a mission



Riding in a jeep to the flight line. Can they carry any more people?

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