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Blood, sand, and silk: The implementation of airborne forces in North Africa by the United States Army, 1942

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Blood, Sand, and Silk:

The Implementation of Airborne Forces in North Africa by the United States Army, 1942.

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Thomas Spencer Harvey

May 2014

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of History, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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Introduction

The Second World War saw the development and implementation of countless new technologies and strategies, from aircraft carriers to jet fighters to combining all dimensions of warfare, all of which forever changed the science of warfare. One such innovation was the deployment of airborne forces in combat. While the United States was the leader in the idea of using soldiers jumping from the sky in modern combat, they fell far behind the rest of the world in the pre-war years with the development of this new force. Once the war began however, the United States Army adapted quickly and eventually led the world in the overall implementation of airborne forces. As with all new technologies and developments, the later more successful uses tend to overshadow the initial, foundation building, operations. This was the case with the first use of airborne forces by the United States during the invasion of North Africa in 1942. Despite being dismissed by many historians as disastrous, or forgotten entirely, this operation set the cornerstone for United States airborne doctrine as well as the eventual development of United States Army Special Forces, the latter of which was formed and led by the men who spearheaded this operation.¹

¹ See: Rick Atkinson. *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002); William B. Breuer. *Geronimo!: American Paratroopers in World War II*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); Jim Travis Broumley. *The Boldest Plan is the Best: The Combat History of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion during WWII*. (Sequim, Washington: Rocky Marsh Publishing, 2011); Roger Burlingame. *General Billy Mitchell: Champion of Air Defense*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952); Carlo D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean: 1942-1945*. (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1990); Burke Davis, *The Billy Mitchell Affair* (New York, Random House, 1967); Vincent J. Esposito, ed. *The West Point Atlas of American Wars: 1900-1953*. Vol. 2. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1959); Arthur Layton Funk. *The Politics of Torch: The Allied Landings and the Algiers Putsch 1942*. (Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1974); Norman Gelb, *Desperate Venture: The Story of Operation Torch, The Allied Invasion of North Africa*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992); James A. Huston, *Out of the Blue: U.S. Army Airborne Operations in World War II*. (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1972); Peter S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Gavin Mortimer. *The Daring Dozen: 12 Special Forces Legends of World War II*. (Long Island City, New York: Osprey Publishing, 2012); Patrick K. O' Donnell. *Beyond Valor: World War II's Ranger and Airborne Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat*. (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Robert K. Wright and John T. Greenwood, *Airborne Forces at War: From Parachute Test Platoon to the 21st Century*. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007); James A. Bassett, "Past Airborne Employment." *Military Affairs* 12, no.4 (Winter 1948): 206-216; Tanja M. Chacho, "Why Did They Fight? American Airborne Units in World War

The 1942 invasion of North Africa not only saw the first large scale trial by fire for the United States Army in the European Theater of Operations during the Second World War, but also the implementation of new technology, leaders, and a unique body of soldiers. The Army took its first step in transitioning to a modern force that sought to accomplish its most important objectives by placing an emphasis on special units who employed speed and violence of action in order to take the fight to the enemy. A vital element in this transition was the use of airborne forces by the Army to achieve aims that would have otherwise impaired conventional ground forces in the completion of their own objectives and the overall completion of the strategic mission. The first step for United States airborne forces had been achieved in April 1940, in the United States, but it was in the skies above Algeria, on 8 November 1942, that the first leap was taken.

Despite the airborne component of this operation serving as a key launching point for the modern strategy of the United States Army there is very little surviving research material about it. The reasons behind this phenomena are not quite clear; perhaps it was too early in the war, perhaps the situation was quickly overwhelmed by more fantastically announced

II.” *Defence Studies* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 59-94; Bernd Horn, “The Airborne Revolution.” *MHQ Quarterly Journal of Military History* 17, no. 4 (2005): 62-71; and William Liell, “United States Airborne.” *Journal of United Service Institute of India* 92, no. 387 (1962): 139-148. The best primary sources are Edson Duncan Raff, *We Jumped to Fight*. (New York: Eagle Books, 1944); William Pelham Yarborough, *Bail Out Over North Africa: America’s First Combat Parachute Missions, 1942*. (Williamstown: Phillips Publications, 1979); Charles H. Doyle and Terrell Stewart. *Stand in the Door!: The Wartime History of the 509th Parachute Infantry*. (Williamstown, New Jersey: Phillips Publications, 1988); Kurt Gabel, *The Making of a Paratrooper: Airborne Training and Combat in World War II (Modern War Studies)*. (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1990); James M. Gavin, *On to Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander, 1943-1946*. (New York: Viking Press, 1978); William Mitchell. *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power-Economic and Military*. Rev. ed. (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971); Mark W. Clark. *Calculated Risk*. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950); Donald Burgett. *Curraheel!: A Screaming Eagle at Normandy*. (New York: Dell Publishing, 1967); Edna Daves McCall. *Silver Wings and a Gold Star: The Story of T/5 Robert D. Daves 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion First U.S. Paratroops to Jump in Combat*. (Drexel, North Carolina: C&M Resources, 2003); and David Kenyon Webster, *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper’s Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich*. (New York: Dell Publishing, 2002). The best primary sources (newspaper and magazine articles) used in this essay are the *Marion Star*, 1942; the *New York Times* 1886,1912, 1925; the *Oakland Tribune*, 1942; the *Portsmouth Times*, 1942; *American Magazine*, 1943; and *Yank, the Army Weekly*, 1943.

accomplishments, or perhaps there is only a desire to remember clear cut victories that produce profound results on the map and greatly change the nature of the war. There are some sources that reveal the nature of the operation and its context during the war. More importantly, the primary sources allow the researcher to gain in-depth, personal, knowledge about how the drops unfolded and the experiences of the men on the ground. In addition to various magazine articles, newspaper articles, journal entries, memoirs, diaries, letters, etc. there exist three primary narratives, which form the core of research on this particular subject.

The primary source that is most often quoted in secondary accounts, as well as this paper, is *We Jumped to Fight* by Colonel Edson Duncan Raff.² Colonel Raff led the 509th Parachute Infantry during the assault into North Africa in the fall and winter of 1942. In 1944 he published his personal account of the operation, including the impact that the operation personally had upon him as well as what he saw as lessons learned for the Army. A problem with the work is the nature of its prose, the work is often confusing because of the writing style that greatly detracts from the work, and however it is the foremost primary source document relating to the operation.³ Because of his status as a field commander and one of the first pioneers of airborne warfare in the prewar days, Raff establishes himself as the most authoritative scholar, when it comes to understanding the context of the operation as it unfolded on the ground.

While his work is not cited as often, the account provided by William P. Yarborough in *Bail Out Over North Africa: America's First Combat Parachute Missions, 1942*⁴ is an excellent account of all operational phases. Yarborough conceived the original combat plan for the airborne assault into Africa and served as executive officer of the unit during the bulk of the operation. His work is more reflective than Raff's in that he presents more carefully the

² Raff, *We Jumped*.

³ For a period reflection regarding the literary nature of the work, refer to: Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, 63, 67-68.

⁴ Yarborough, *Bail Out*.

planning stages leading up to the operation. His analysis of events is fuller, which may be because he wrote the work in 1979, as opposed to Raff who published his account in 1944. Despite not being as referenced as much as that of Edson Raff, the work by Yarborough illustrates not only the operation, but also the spark that began his career as a senior officer in the sector of special operations for the United States Army.

The third primary source is: *Stand in the Door!: The Wartime History of the 509th Parachute Infantry* by Charles Doyle and Terrell Stewart.⁵ It is unique because it is written by two veterans who combined the historical record with their own wartime experiences into a work that is impressive in its detail, clarity, and purpose. A problem with this source is its rarity because the work is hard to unearth. Despite these challenges, the work is essential to understanding not just the operation in question, but the operational situation of the airborne forces during the Second World War as a whole. While the work is well written, the status of the authors is what warrants this document's inclusion as a primary source for the purposes of this narrative.

In addition to providing the core of the primary source scholarship on this subject, these works also form the core of what is referenced in the secondary sources that discuss the operations in North Africa by the airborne forces. Despite the excellent information, such repetition effectively dilutes the scholarship and leads to the researcher only including the main details that are often repeated instead of also looking at the details that require more in-depth focus and dedication to uncover, because it is in these details that the true heart of the soldiers and nature of the operation lies. Furthermore, the uncovering of such detailed information is challenging considering the fact that looking for works that encompass and discuss (even in passing) these events is often futile in outcome. The majority of published works that pertain to

⁵ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*.

the airborne in the Second World War focus upon the jumps into Normandy and Holland; the operations in the Pacific, North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Southern France, and Germany are often mentioned only in passing reference. This lack of scholarship lends support to one profound conclusion that was drawn early in the research of this subject: outside of select circles, little is known about this operation despite the foundation that it laid for the modern airborne, both in heritage and in tactics of battle and leadership.

Revolutionary technologies, strategies, tactics, etc. require a first implementation, a cornerstone in their foundational history. This cornerstone was provided by the United States Army airborne forces by the 1942 jumps into North Africa by the men of the 509th Parachute Infantry. Through their dedication, tenacity, and intestinal fortitude they established the reputation of the airborne as an elite fighting force, capable of any mission no matter the challenge. While the tactical outcome of the operation is up for intense focus and debate, what cannot go unstated is the situation that arose from the initial implementation: the rise of an elite airborne corps and the eventual rise of the importance of special operation units in American military doctrine.

Beyond eventual doctrinal influence, the lessons learned in the desert greatly impacted the men who witnessed, participated in, led, planned, and learned from the combat in Africa. Foremost, lessons in leadership can only truly be learned through experience and without the decision to experiment with airborne warfare in Africa these lessons may have only been learned later with potentially worse results. The men who learned these lessons went on to starring roles not only in combat during the Second World War, but later with the foundation of special operations for the rapidly developing postwar Army.

The purpose of this thesis is not only to analyze the combat jumps that occurred in the fall of 1942 in North Africa, but to understand the lessons from the desert and the impact that they had upon the men and women of the United States Army in the modern day. In order to understand these outcomes, one must first understand the basic context surrounding the development of the vertical dimension of warfare. This background will be followed by an understanding the developments made by the United States immediately prior and at the beginning of the Second World War. Next, the paper will examine the three combat, jump, operations that occurred in the fall and winter of 1942. It is then possible to grasp the nature of the operation not only in the context of WWII but also in the postwar years, during which great leaps and bounds were made in establishing the United States Army as a revolutionary global fighting force.

Airborne Warfare

The concept of soldiers descending from the skies to fight stretches back further than the first powered flight by the Wright Brothers in 1903. The idea is recorded as far back as Ancient Greece. The mythically great warrior Bellerophon tore through the heavens atop his magnificently winged Pegasus wreaking havoc and terror amongst the monsters he sought to vanquish. While these musings by early writers, such as Homer, were only products of the imagination in that period, they provide evidence that the idea of airborne warfare reaches back as far as ancient times and was just as prevalent then as it was during the hay day of airborne development in the 20th century.

Not until the mid-eighteenth century did the once mystical ideas of airborne, or airphibious, warfare gradually evolved into a tangible reality. In 1784 the second ascent of a silk balloon filled with a combination of hydrogen gas and hot air was completed in Paris. Benjamin Franklin was a stunned observer.⁶ Mr. Franklin described the brilliance associated with the innovation of controlled flight in his writings and later pondered:

Where is the Prince who can afford to cover his country with troops for its defense, as that ten thousand men descending from the clouds might not, in many places, do an infinite deal of mischief before a force could be brought together to repel them?⁷

This idea of airborne forces being scattered over a battlefield to cause “mischief” eventually became one of the founding maxims for the airborne doctrine-the concept of using airborne forces to harass and confuse the enemy. Despite his powerful influence on the policy of the United States, the young nation had the more pressing demand of securing permanent sovereignty to focus on, and Franklin’s vision was never a focus of the miniscule American

⁶ Bassett, “Past Airborne Employment,” 206; Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 63-64.

⁷ Referenced in: Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 64.

army. However in France, the birth place of the balloon, the idea was not allowed to pass into the pages of history.

In March 1794 the French military established an organization under the name *Compagnie d'Aérostiers*, comprised of four manned balloons with the purpose of descending behind enemy lines, in this case across the English Channel, in order to land and cause chaos amongst the enemy. Napoleonic dreams of conquest turned into defeat for France and for the idea of using balloons filled with soldiers to wreak havoc amongst the British,⁸ regardless, the idea of employing the technology of balloons in warfare for the purpose of transport was not left idle. In the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, balloons were used by soldiers trapped inside the city of Paris, under siege, in order to escape to safety.⁹ While employed for transportation, the idea that airborne methods of transport could be used by normally ground oriented infantry continued to develop.

During times of peace military technology often transfers to the civilian sector. In the latter portion of the 19th century balloons were used as a source of entertainment for the masses at fairs and such events all across North America and Europe instead of weapons of war. From the balloons brave souls leapt out only restrained by crude static-line parachutes that lowered them to the throngs of amused spectators gathered below. *The New York Times* published an account in 1886 about a professor named Charles Leroux who leapt under a parachute from the Dime Museum Building in New York City, a height of 100 feet to the great delight of the crowd that had gathered below.¹⁰ In 1889, with the parachuting of Charles Leroux from a balloon before a group of military officers in Berlin, the military power of such technology was discussed for the first time since the 18th century. The famed German tactician, General Alfred

⁸ Horn, "Airborne Revolution,"64.

⁹ Bassett, "Past Airborne Employment," 206.

¹⁰ Editor, "Prof. Leroux's Leap" *The New York Times*, September 13, 1886.

von Schlieffen wrote, "...parachutes could provide a new means of exploiting surprise in war, as it would be feasible for a few men to wipe out an enemy headquarters."¹¹ As with the musings of Benjamin Franklin, General von Schlieffen envisioned the airborne soldier as a raider of sorts to decapitate an enemy command, thus harassing an operation, not a whole entity operating as a normal infantry unit would.

With the dawn of the 20th century, the world was confronted with changes so vast in number that most swept past the stunned eyes of the populace. Paramount among these was the concept of powered flight; and the possibility of armed men leaping from these aircraft to fight their enemies with thunderclap surprise.¹² With the birth of powered flight in December 1903 by Orville and Wilbur Wright, it was only a matter of time before this new technology shifted purpose towards implementation by the military. In 1912 U.S. Army Captain Albert Berry leapt from an aircraft over 1,500 feet above St. Louis, Missouri and landed safely using an early parachute.¹³ Two years later William Lewis was the first British parachutist to accomplish this feat; however, the peaceful concept of descending to the Earth under a parachute reverted back to the original dream of an armed assault with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

Throughout the war, aviators, especially Germans, used crude parachutes to descend from their crippled aircraft rather than attempt to safely crash land.¹⁴ The entrance of the United States into the war in 1917 saw not just a shift in the tides of war, but also in the potential of parachutes. In October of 1918 General William Mitchell¹⁵ was promoted to brigadier general as a member of the United States Air Service under General Mason Patrick, and in mid-October he

¹¹ Referred to in: Horn, "Airborne Revolution," 64.

¹² Horn, "Airborne Revolution," 64.

¹³ Editor, "Drops From Biplane With a Parachute" *The New York Times*, March 1, 1912.

¹⁴ Horn, "Airborne Revolution," 64.

¹⁵ For more on General William Mitchell and his thoughts regarding air power refer to his work: William Mitchell. *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power-Economic and Military*. Rev. ed. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971.

proposed to General Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), a radical new operation that he believed had the potential to change the war and warfare entirely with the introduction of the third dimension for tactics. Mitchell's plan included taking a division of United States Army infantry, placing them inside British Handley-Page bombers and dropping them in sticks of ten to fifteen men over German lines, to be safely lowered to the ground by parachutes. The bold, if seemingly irrational, General Mitchell seemed unconcerned over the great logistical feat needed to carry out this sort of operation. The problems included: the recruitment of soldiers, training, production of aircraft, and the manufacture of parachutes. Despite most believing the war was coming to a close, the idea was accepted by the command staff of the Army. However, with the Armistice on November 11th, 1918 the plan was shelved, luckily for the soldiers destined to leap from the skies in the world's first airborne assault.¹⁶ Regardless, the seed for the idea of a mass airborne drop by infantry to confound and destroy the enemy had been planted in the battlefields of Europe by an American; however, it was the Europeans themselves who nurtured and reaped the first fruit of this fledgling tree.

The first actual parachute drop by the United States Army occurred in 1928 at Kelly Field Texas. Twelve men dropped from an airplane, demonstrating the feasibility of such an operation. Despite this success, the focus of United States military leadership was on using aircraft for transportation rather than the deployment of soldiers into battle, as demonstrated by the United States Marine Corps in the Second Nicaraguan Campaign, 1925-1929. Later in the 1930s Army officers General Preston Brown and Captain George C. Kenney, among others, shuttled men and material via aircraft. This became the emphasis of the United States airmobile strategy in the pre-war years.¹⁷

¹⁶ Horn, "Airborne Revolution," 64-65; Burlingame, *General Billy Mitchell*, 101; and Huston, *Out of the Blue*, 47.

¹⁷ Bassett, "Past Airborne Employment," 206-207.

The court martial of William Mitchell forced the men in the United States Army, who favored pursuing new, seemingly radical, forms of warfare to take cover. In October 1925 Colonel Mitchell was charged with conduct subversive to military discipline and in November his court martial began. Mitchell used the trial in part as a podium to show the value of airpower and the apparent need for a change in strategy by the United States. The trial became a media spectacle because of Mitchell and the apparent military bias against him and his ideas; as *The New York Times* records, “Two members of the Court, General Summerall (originally the President) and General Bowley, were released when charged by the accused with ‘prejudice and bias.’”¹⁸ Mitchell was later found guilty on December 17th, 1925; he resigned in February of the following year rather than face suspension from active duty.¹⁹ He continued to write and preach about the importance of airpower; however, the American military paid no attention to his warnings. While the United States turned a blind eye to the proposals made by Mitchell about the versatile nature of airpower, the armies of Europe were attentive to his notions.

The first nation to recognize the potential of Mitchell’s vision was Italy. In 1921, General Giulio Douhet published *The Command of the Air*, detailing the strategic uses for an air force as well as the implications involved with lack of air supremacy on the modern battlefield. The work encouraged the Italian High Command to see the potential for air mobility to deliver supplies as well as troops strategically on the battlefield. In 1927 the Italians demonstrated the practical application of such a strategy when nine men jumped from an aircraft with their standard complement of equipment. In the next year supplies were dropped to the crew of the airship *Italia* near the North Pole. Next, the Italian Army formed several battalions of

¹⁸ Editor, “The Mitchell Court-Martial” *The New York Times*, November 5, 1925.

¹⁹ For a detailed record of the trial refer to: Davis, *The Billy Mitchell Affair*.

parachutists and was reported to have used them in 1929 North Africa.²⁰ The Italian Army was therefore the first to take the concept of airborne warfare seriously, the second was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.²¹

The Soviet military organized themselves in a modern fashion, relying on the principles of speed, maneuverability, and surprise. Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky embraced these lessons and crafted the Russian battle strategy of “Deep Battle” in which airborne forces were an integral component. In 1929 fifteen soldiers parachuted into Tadzhikistan to confront Muslim rebels, marking the first usage of airborne soldiers in combat by any nation. Because of the success of this action, the Soviet military established an airborne battalion.²² From the battalion an airborne force was formed growing to contain approximately 100,000 troopers by 1938.²³

The Soviet airborne forces grew quickly, so quickly in fact that by 1933 no significant field exercise was considered complete without the use of paratroopers as an integral part of the strategy. In the 1936 *Red Army Field Regulations*:

...provide an effective means of disrupting the enemy’s command, control and logistics. In conjunction with frontal attack, parachute units may play a decisive part in achieving complete destruction of the enemy on a given thrust line.²⁴

Despite the strategic advantage and rapid growth of airborne forces, the airborne fell victim to the wrath of Joseph Stalin. In 1937 when Marshal Tukhachevsky was executed in one of Stalin’s great purges. The militaries of the world, including the United States, had witnessed and taken note of his techniques and strategies, but it was the Germans who seized the initiative and began to implement these practices into their surging armed forces.²⁵

²⁰ Bassett, “Past Airborne Employment,” 207; and Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 65.

²¹ Due to the context of the sources and common occurrence, the terms “Russia” and “Union Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)” will be used interchangeably.

²² Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 65-66.

²³ Bassett, “Past Airborne Employment,” 207.

²⁴ Referred to in: Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 67.

²⁵ Bassett, “Past Airborne Employment,” 207; and Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 66-67.

The Treaty of Versailles restricted the military of the Weimar Republic. Even before the rise of Adolf Hitler, re-armament and the development of blitzkrieg with the airborne force a vital component was gathering momentum in Germany. By February 1933, Herman Goering as Minister of the Interior ordered the formation of a special police unit that parachuted from the sky to seize criminals. Under the command of Police Major Hans Wecke, a small band used parachutes to deploy suddenly upon communist hideouts, utilizing the power of shock and awe to confound their targets. Goering established a larger force under Wecke as a military unit in the Luftwaffe, the first German parachute battalion was thus formed with a training center at Stendal. In-fighting between the branches of the military as a result of competition for limited space at the school, resulted in the appointment of General Kurt Student as head of all German airborne forces. The air division under Student was eventually reduced to a nominal command within the German army; however, he remained as inspector for the airborne forces and continued to influence strategy and doctrine from this position until the conclusion of the Second World War.

By October 1938, the German paratroops had become a key part of the impending German war planning; however, there remained controversy on how best to employ the force. The air force insisted on a sabotage doctrine requiring the paratroopers to act as commandoes behind enemy lines, while the army embraced the vision of General Mitchell to use them more conventionally once behind enemy lines. Student advocated the later believing that the third dimension of warfare was vital to an understanding of the modern battlefield and insisted as such during the war.²⁶ This third dimension would be the foundation of German employment for airborne forces during the opening years of the war. However, events that transpired would lead to changes that can be viewed as over corrections.

²⁶ Horn, "Airborne Revolution," 67-69.

The first deployment of paratroop forces in World War II was on 9 April 1940 with the German invasion of Norway. In addition to air-landed (glider borne) soldiers seizing several key objectives, a company of parachute infantry assisted in the capture of Sola airfield, and days later another company of paratroopers were dropped to seize the key junction at Dombas. However, they were too scattered during the drop, and failed to accomplish their objective.²⁷ Paratroopers were also used to occupy the Low Countries, seizing vital objectives and locations. On the tenth of May 1940 three crossings over the Rhine were secured by airborne forces in Holland. Paratroops also distracted the Belgian reserve forces near The Hague. The stunning success of these operations led the Allied armies to conduct a similar operation in reverse in 1944, with much less pronounced results.²⁸

While successful, the German airborne operations in Greece and the island of Crete in the Mediterranean opened the eyes of the Allied commanders and led directly to the rapid development of airborne forces. On May 20th the German's parachuted against the three main airfields on the British occupied island of Crete. Despite spirited resistance by the British and Greek forces, the overwhelming tenacity and surprise that accompanied the German airborne led to the complete conquest of the island within ten days. The victory was not without cost 4,000 soldiers were listed as casualties of the total 20,000 dropped on the island, prompting Adolf Hitler to forbid the further large scale usage of paratroopers to avoid a massive loss in strength to such a force.²⁹

The Allied powers were shocked at the success of these operations, and embraced this new strategy. On June 6th, 1940 Winston Churchill ordered the development of a medium sized airborne force that played a significant role in airborne operations on the continent throughout

²⁷ Bassett, "Past Airborne Employment," 213.

²⁸ Bassett, "Past Airborne Employment," 209-210.

²⁹ Bassett, "Past Airborne Employment," 213-214.

the war.³⁰ The United States also took note. As General James Gavin later recalled, “I had access to many of the original documents relating to the German airborne operations in Holland. I also read avidly the reports from our military attaché in Cairo, Colonel Bonner Fellers, on the German parachute and glider operations in Crete. The whole concept of vertical envelopment was an exciting one, and it would seem to offer us a new dimension of tactics if we entered the war.”³¹

³⁰ Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 70.

³¹ Gavin, *On To Berlin*, 1-2.

The American Airborne, England, and Planning

As early as the late-1930s, Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall directed his Chief of Infantry to conduct a study on the potential development and implementation of an airborne force. Though the general conclusion that such a force, vulnerable to attack, was suicidal, Major General George Lynch determined several potential uses for the airborne: deployment of small combat groups, raiding parties, holding of a key objective, and working in unison with a mechanized force in advance of the main line of soldiers.³² In spite of this hesitance to only employ the airborne in relatively limited ways, the United States, after watching and analyzing the German formations and eventual operations, warmed to the idea of gradual large scale implementation.

Major William Lee was the project leader for this study. He had observed the actions of European parachute outfits in the 1930s and was sold on the idea. As a consequence the War Department approved the development of a Parachute Test Platoon in April 1940, earning William Lee his title as “Father of the Airborne.” On June 25th the platoon was officially formed with Lieutenants William Ryder in command and James A. Bassett as his executive officer, and on the eleventh of July 1940 volunteers began to be accepted from the 29th Infantry Division, 48 men were chosen, leading to a comprised strength of 50 to carry out the Army’s evaluation for a parachute infantry unit beginning on July 11th.³³

After intensive training and preparations, the first jumps were made on 16 August, 1940 followed by the inaugural jump and a mock assault as a unit thirteen days later. The reason behind this rapid development and pressure to perform arose from the successful usage of airborne units by the Germans during their blitzkrieg campaigns across Europe. This milestone

³² Horn, “Airborne Revolution,” 69-70.

³³ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 3 and Liell, “United States Airborne,” 139.

proved that the airborne had a place in United States Army. The Army established the 501st Parachute Battalion on 1 October 1940 to develop the airborne force as well as train and qualify the volunteers that began to flow in. In March 1941, now Lieutenant Colonel, William Lee became commander of the Provisional Parachute Group to develop and hone the United States Army Airborne as a body rather than a collection of growing, individual, combat teams. By the spring of 1941 the United States Army had taken a once detested idea and had begun to craft an effective fighting arm; despite the unending flow of questions regarding doctrine and deployment, the men, from privates to officers, were determined to survive these challenges and emerge as an elite force.³⁴³⁵

By July 1942 the 501st Parachute Battalion expanded into the 502nd, 503rd, and the 504th Parachute Battalions.³⁶ In March the 504th was changed to become 2/503,³⁷³⁸ and on 11 June arrived in Great Britain under the command of Lt. Colonel Edson Raff, adding approximately 500 men to the growing U.S. strength in the European Theatre of Operations (ETO). Here they trained in conjunction with the British airborne forces in preparation for the first combined offensive of the war; Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa.³⁹ After their arrival, the Paratroop Task Force under Colonel William Bentley was assigned temporarily to the British airborne command under General F.A.M. Browning,⁴⁰ to prepare for their planned role in the eventual invasion of the European continent by Allied forces. However, by this time, Winston

³⁴ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 3-7.

³⁵ For further reading on the motivational factor behind the men of the airborne, please refer to: Cacho, "Why Did".

³⁶ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 10.

³⁷ Yarborough, *Bail Out*, 15.

³⁸ Here confusion occurs; when first deployed to the ETO the unit was designated as 2/503; however, before its first operation the unit was designated as the 2nd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry. Many period as well as contemporary writers appear confused to this change and often refer to the unit in vary forms (based upon changes from various points in the war), including 2-503, 509, and 2-509. The final designation would be 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion from December 1943 to March 1, 1945. Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 29.

³⁹ The best works for Operation Torch include: D'Este, *World War II in the Mediterranean: 1942-1945*; Atkinson, *An Army at Dawn* and Gelb, *Desperate Venture*.

⁴⁰ Raff, *We Jumped*, 15-24.

Churchill had successfully convinced the American leadership to focus instead on the Mediterranean until a large and seasoned force was available to invade the continent.⁴¹

In September 1942 Major William Yarborough, the Airborne Advisor to General Mark Clark, commander of the U.S. Second Corps, met with General Clark and was presented with the plan for Operation Torch. Clark had long been a proponent of airborne forces and was eager to get them into combat.⁴² One of the primary obstacles for his wing of the operation was the capture of Vichy French airfields that were key to success in the coming campaign as well as protecting the Allied forces landing amphibiously in Algeria from French fighter aircraft. It was determined that bombing the airstrips and destroying the potentially hostile French aircraft would antagonize the Vichy French forces to the point of not accepting a deal with the landing Allies. After analyzing the success by the Germans at capturing airfields in Norway and later on Crete, it was seen as possible, under blitzkrieg styled doctrine, for airborne forces to be able to seize such an objective despite limited forces and time.⁴³ After conferring with Yarborough and later Colonel Raff, who led the operation, the decision to include the men of the 509th Parachute Infantry was elevated from a suggestion to being cemented in the operational outline.⁴⁴ When Colonel Raff was presented by General Clark with the basic premise of the mission, he responded, after two hours of personal debate, with: “There is no doubt in my mind but we can accomplish the mission, provided: (1) we get a break by the Air Corps and (2) by the weather. And provided, (3) I am permitted to command my paratroopers when we hit the ground.”⁴⁵ The decision was not made just to include the paratroopers and to get them into action, but also

⁴¹ Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 27.

⁴² Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 28.

⁴³ Gelb, *Desperate Venture*, 218.

⁴⁴ Yarborough, *Bail Out*, 17-20.

⁴⁵ Raff, *We Jumped*, 22.

because of how General Clark regarded the men who would lead the operation, Yarborough and Raff:

I always felt that the paratrooper operation was worth while-all things considered- and Ike seemed to have the same viewpoint, but he was under heavy pressure from the British and for a while there was doubt that the 509th Battalion would get a chance to show what it could do. Our paratroop officers, particularly Lieutenant Colonel Edson D. Raff and Major William P. Yarborough, were confident that they could carry out the assignment, and they finally got their way. They were men who always took the attitude that they could do any essential job...⁴⁶

Such an attitude was in great demand by leadership of the untested American Army for the coming fight in North Africa.

The battalion was assigned to seize the airfields at Tafaraoui and La Senia, Algeria; in order to deprive them to the Vichy French forces and provide a place for Allied air forces based in Gibraltar to land and begin operations in Algeria and Tunisia against Axis Forces. From the start, the optimism of the airborne commanders helped garner support for the mission, as outlined in Captain Yarborough's message to General Clark:

Debits:

1. No paratroop operations have ever been attempted over a distance of more than four hundred miles – the most usual distance being about two hundred and fifty miles. Would the paratroops be fit to fight after a nine or ten hour flight without oxygen at 10,000 feet?
2. The aircraft which we are to use, are not fitted with blackout curtains, flame dampeners for the exhausts, nor with night navigation lights invisible from the ground.
3. There are few, if any, celestial navigators available for use with our transports. Could our pilots hit what was essentially a point target, flying at night over fifteen hundred miles of unmarked and hostile land and sea areas?
4. The unarmed transports will have to fly without fighter protection due to the distance involved.

Credits:

1. Since the distance from Land's End to Oran is so great, surprise may be obtained through a possible enemy failure to consider such an operation feasible.
2. The landing of five hundred equipped and trained men behind enemy lines at the strategic center of his defense, may exert a tremendous effect on his morale.

⁴⁶ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 63.

3. The transport airplanes are going to be needed urgently in connection with further operations in Africa, and they might as well be flown there loaded with paratroopers as with freight.
4. With three months in which to train navigators and with mechanical navigational aids, finding the drop zones should not be impossible.
5. If the flight is made at night, fighter protection will not be necessary.⁴⁷

The merits outlined by Yarborough swayed the allied command in favor of such a mission; the problems that existed in addition to those outlined did much to sway the Allied command in the opposite direction.

The first detraction presented by Yarborough is perhaps the most pivotal. Without the men being fit to fight upon reaching their destination the outcome would most likely result in a bloody disaster for the Allies. The problems related to the impact on the men, from flying at 10,000 feet was addressed through training at the altitude, but the problem of the men being fit to fight after such an arduous journey could not. Despite this, the risk was willing to be taken, based upon the intensive training that the men had been under since first volunteering for airborne training.

The second detraction involves keeping the aircraft safe and secure was a vital concern for the planners of the operation because of the limited supply of transport aircraft that were available for use. While the lack of protective equipment is a justifiable concern, the planned route more than detracted from these concerns. The flight plan took place a considerable distance from the enemy coast and the surprise presented by the task force would more than overwhelm the need for these protective measures.

Thirdly, Yarborough points out the significant lack of navigational equipment for the aircrews. The problems associated with night flying have always been, and will continue to be, a major problem for aircrews and military strategists. Major Yarborough does not appear to have

⁴⁷ Yarborough, *Bail Out*, 18-19.

been swayed by this problem, because he believes that increased training and repetition will more than compensate for this deficit. Furthermore, additional navigational aids were to be employed so that the airmen would have the greatest chance of success in accomplishing their portion of the operation.

The C-47 transport planes utilized by the Army Air Force in the Second World War were largely unarmed and unarmored, therefore a major problem concerning all airborne operations during the conflict was the danger presented by enemy aircraft upon a formation of planes. Logically, the solution here is that the aircraft will be traveling at night and therefore are in little need of fighter protection. In conjunction with the paramount surprise of the operation, Major Yarborough appears relatively unconcerned with this apparent detraction.

In addition to the confidence in the intestinal fortitude of the young soldiers, Yarborough also provided two additional benefits for going forth with the mission (credits 1 and 2). In which he implies that the surprise and tactical advantage will not only confound the enemy, but also implicitly inspire the men of the 509th to do their utmost to weather the trip. Based upon his rationale, surprise appears to be the major asset counted on by Major Yarborough and the other planners of the operation to produce a successful outcome in the coming invasion of Saharan African.

The limited supply of transport aircraft was a problem for the Allies in 1942 and would continue to be one for the remainder of the conflict. Recognizing this, Yarborough points out in his third credit that the aircraft will be urgently needed and therefore it would be wasteful to not utilize them fully during their journey to Africa. Additionally, it can be argued that participation in such a revolutionary engagement would enhance the reputation of the Army Air Force. Even

in the case of potential failure, the willingness to participate in such a bold endeavor could serve as a propaganda victory.

For the crews and navigational flaws, Yarborough argues in the fourth credit that given three months of intense training and rehearsal, the aircrews should be more than capable to handle the situation and achieve their objectives. In addition to this the British assured that a warship, the *Alynbank*, would be present off of the Algerian coast to transmit a radio signal for the approaching pilots. The British also allowed the Americans to employ the experimental and classified technology of “Rebecca” and “Eureka”,⁴⁸ enabling the aircraft to pick up a radio beam, guiding them into their objective.

Finally, the safety of the aircraft was still considered paramount to the conduct of any mission concerning their employment. Because of this, a primary concern for the planners was that the transports would have to fly through the night without a protective screen of fighter aircraft to accompany them. Yarborough, presented a common sense response, the aircraft would be flying at night and therefore would be without the need of protection from enemy fighters. General Mark Clark reflected on the power of such common wisdom when he remembers General Eisenhower proclaiming in the weeks approaching Operation Torch that, “All of our problems are being settled by the fundamental rule of common sense.”⁴⁹

A final flight problem was not as common sense as some earlier detractions from the operation: the flight route over neutral Spain. The influence of the Germans upon fascist Spain was no secret to the Allied command, and if discovered the operation, and the invasion, could be reported to Axis forces in Tunisia as well as Vichy French forces in Algeria, who were themselves presenting as a unique problem to the planners of the invasion. But the risk of not

⁴⁸ For the story concerning the placement of the system on the ground in Algeria, refer to: Yarborough, *Bail Out*, 24-26.

⁴⁹ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 63.

arriving in time or on target to seize the airfields by taking the route over the water was deemed too great. There was still skepticism and worry as the men boarded their aircraft on the night of 7 November.⁵⁰

In October, General Clark had been secretly shuttled into French Algeria, to negotiate with the French command for their support for the American and British soldiers coming ashore. He had been told that the French would greet the Americans with open arms and the C-47s of the Army Air Force carrying the paratroopers could land safely on the airfields they were seeking to capture. However, no one was certain whether these reports and assurances could be trusted, leading Major Yarborough to comprise a plan for peace (Advance Alexis) and a plan for war (Advance Napoleon). Despite the gravity of the political situation, the true outcome of the situation would not be deliberated in a conference room, but rather on the ground with boots and bullets.

On 6 November Colonel Raff called the battalion together for one last speech, a speech that demonstrated his confidence in not only the mission, but his men:

Officers and men of the 2nd Battalion! You remember ‘way back when I took this outfit over, I called you together to tell you that if I had my way about it we’d get into action first of all paratroopers, that I wanted to make a fighting reputation for parachutists to replace the one they have in the States of being good jumpers but poor in ground combat. Well, our chance has come... We’re going to have a difficult job because some people down there will want to fight us and some won’t. If they welcome us-and some authorities say they will-we won’t fire a round. If they don’t-you have your orders!⁵¹

At 1710hrs on 7 November the men of the 509th received the code words “Advance Alexis” from Gibraltar, meaning that the plan for a peaceful invasion was in effect and they were to expect friendly French forces. However the men were not relaxed because “their adrenalin was pumping, the thoroughly keyed up paratroopers and the young aircrews now had to delay

⁵⁰ Gelb, *Desperate Venture*, 217-223.

⁵¹ Raff, *We Jumped*, 27.

departure for four hours-long enough to permit the formations to arrive over North Africa in daylight rather than under cover of darkness.⁵² As the men waited patiently for darkness, a signal was not relayed from Gibraltar negating the previous, saying that they may encounter unfriendly forces on the ground in addition to friendly forces. Despite the error in communication, by 2145hrs, 39 aircraft carrying 556 paratroopers were in the air, heading towards Algeria.

⁵² Yarborough, *Bail Out*, 39.

Invasion and the Second Jump

As the, thirty-nine ship strong, air fleet approached the Spanish coastline, fog coupled with poor navigational and communication equipment caused the aircraft to become scattered. In addition to this the signal from the British warship *Alynbank* was transmitted on the wrong frequency, requiring the American air crews to rely on limited maps and in some cases gut instinct to slowly approach their targets. On top of these problems, errors in communication had led the American scientist, Bantam, who was on the ground in Algeria with the Eureka set to not be informed that the mission had been delayed by four hours, because he did not see the aircraft approaching on time, he promptly destroyed the equipment and escaped into the Algerian wilderness dressed as a native Bedouin. Therefore, when the aircraft approached the coastline, they were not met with the prearranged homing signal and were further forced to rely on crude maps and blind instinct to guide in the paratroops.

Because of these errors in communication and navigation, of the thirty-nine aircraft that departed from Land's End in England, only thirty-two reached Algeria, and fewer of those actually deployed near to their intended landing zones. The first of these seven lost aircraft found itself running low on fuel very early in the flight, most likely due to the over consumption of gasoline combating weather conditions while in route to Algeria. Luckily the ship was able to reach Gibraltar and glide in for safe landing. Once here the crew was likely informed of the message that had been sent from Gibraltar to the aircraft, that given the political situation with the Vichy French on the ground, the paratroopers were in fact likely to receive a hostile reception from pockets of French forces who were loyal to their, German aligned, Vichy commanders.

Again, because of errors in communication, the men who were still aloft had not received the reports and were flying blind into Algeria.⁵³

Two of the seven planes that had become lost over Spain and the Mediterranean became lost over Spanish Morocco and eventually found themselves flying over French Morocco where they were forced to make spot decisions about whether to jump or crash land the planes that were dangerously low on fuel. Lloyd Bjelland was a young paratrooper who was on one of these aircraft. He remembers a discussion between the men and the pilot on whether to jump or crash-land; however the pilot noticed a French airstrip and decided to land the plane. Bjelland recalled:

We landed not knowing if we were on the Peace Plan or the War Plan. The pilot took charge (no paratroop officer being in this stick) and ordered us to leave our weapons on the plane. We were being circled by Legionnaires on Arabian horses. We were under heavy guard. One man who could speak French conferred with a nurse while we hatched plans to escape. The nurse tipped off the post commander. The next morning the French took us to the top of a high hill north of the outpost. There they pointed out to us the vast desert and informed us that no man could survive for long on it. Casablanca fell and the French received orders to release us. We took off for Casablanca, a flight of three and a half hours.⁵⁴

Despite the risk of danger, the men who landed in French Morocco were relatively safe and distanced from the dangers being faced by their comrades in Algeria.

The final four aircraft had also become separated over the Mediterranean and found themselves homing in on a light house in Spanish Morocco. One of the planes experienced an adventure seemingly taken directly from a Hollywood adventure script. Being forced to land because of low gasoline, the men found themselves chased by native Bedouins on horses and were forced to rapidly take off again. Eventually they were forced to land and were taken prisoner by Spanish forces along with two other crews who were forced to land because of low

⁵³ Gelb, *Desperate Venture*, 222-223.

⁵⁴ Doyle and Steward, *Stand in the Door!*, 55.

fuel. Of these four aircraft, one was able to jump its stick of paratroopers, however they were also captured by local forces. As Frank Keane remembered:

Once on the ground no one knew where. The plane did land safely, close to one of the mountains. A short distance away from us a camel caravan was passing, and some of us tried to talk with the people. We found out that our plane, “The Overloaded Oval,” had dropped us and then landed...in about an hour, Spanish soldiers came out and placed us under arrest.⁵⁵

Despite being placed under arrest, the situation for the men in Spanish custody were in more friendly hands than their brothers in French territory. Of this Frank Keane recalled that:

Our stay in Spanish Morocco was not unpleasant. We were free to move about the village of Tauima during the day, as long as we were on good behavior. For a time we were even permitted to walk the three or four miles to the neighboring town of Nador, where there was a movie house showing American films with Spanish dubbed in.⁵⁶

Despite their relative comfort, the men held in custody in both French and Spanish territory were eager to get into the fight with their brothers in Algeria as swiftly as possible. However, it would not be for five days, 13 November, that the men in French custody were released, and three months for the young paratroops in Spanish custody.⁵⁷

The remaining thirty-two aircraft that had departed England had broken up into three flights. The first flight, composed of fourteen aircraft found itself barreling at low altitude across Algeria in an effort to locate their landing zone at La Senia airstrip; however as they approached they learned that the “peace plan” was not in effect when French anti-aircraft batteries began to open fire on them. Not sure of how to proceed, the fourteen aircrews decided to land for a council of war on the nearby salt flats of Sebokra d’Oran. Once on the ground, the paratroops began to take fire from French soldiers on the hills surrounding the Sebokra and two squads were dispatched to deal with this problem. As the men began to form for battle against the French

⁵⁵ Doyle and Steward, *Stand in the Door!*, 54.

⁵⁶ Doyle and Steward, *Stand in the Door!*, 54.

⁵⁷ Gelb, *Desperate Venture*, 223.

forces, six more C-47 aircraft arrived on the scene, one of which was containing the battalion commander, Colonel Raff.⁵⁸

As the six planes began to approach the Sebkra, the aircrews noticed armored cars and tanks approaching the gathering of paratroopers and their aircraft on the ground. Thinking rapidly, Colonel Raff turned to the pilot of his plane and said, “Well, Ober, this is it! We’re going to jump to knock out the armor and give the troops on the ground a chance to do something.”⁵⁹ At approximately 0810hrs on November 8th, 1942 the United States Army completed its first combat jump. Upon hitting the ground, Colonel Raff broke several ribs upon a rock and in addition to this injury, he soon discovered that the forces his men and jumped to oppose were in fact units from the American armored forces.⁶⁰ After Colonel Raff had begun to gather all the men on the salt flat together to order the next course of action, Major Yarborough arrived in the air accompanied by the twelve remaining aircraft. Major Yarborough ordered his pilot to signal the other craft to land as close as possible to the other parked aircraft so that he could unite his forces with those of Raff. After locating the Colonel, he proposed that he should command a force of men, using the aircraft to taxi them to Tafaraoui; however this soon proved unfeasible because the ground was not totally dry and resulted in the landing gear of the aircraft bogging down in the mud. Because of this, the order was given to march for the airfield with Colonel Raff accompanying his men in a jeep borrowed from the armored units.⁶¹

In order to hasten the progress, and the change in terrain, Raff selected Captain Berry’s Company and some soldiers from Battalion HQ, along with Major Yarborough, to load into three aircraft and use them as shuttles to the air field at Tafaraoui. The airfield had already been

⁵⁸ Doyle and Steward, *Stand in the Door!*, 44-45.

⁵⁹ Raff, *We Jumped*, 37.

⁶⁰ Raff, *We Jumped*, 38-39.

⁶¹ Doyle and Steward, *Stand in the Door!*, 46-48.

secured at this point by United States ground forces, but there was a need for POW guards, to which Raff had readily agreed, because it meant getting his men to their intentional objective as quickly as possible in order to maintain morale and be prepared to be utilized if the need for combat men arose. While aircraft had been landing safely at Tafaraoui once it had been secured by American ground forces, the three aircraft containing the paratroopers were soon under attack by Vichy French fighter aircraft. Major Yarborough described the assault, “I could feel the impact as the Vichy machine gun bullets hit our ship broadside. The fuselage began to leak light as the rounds poured into the defenseless mass of men seated on the floor.”⁶² Despite the safe landing of the three aircraft, the first airborne casualties of the war occurred, with three men dead and fifteen others wounded.

Despite the casualties, as night fell on the 8th Yarborough prepared to move forward towards the airfield, leaving the wounded behind in the care of a unit doctor, his men began to move out until they rested after two hours, 0215hrs. By mid-morning, the men under Yarborough’s command had reached Tafaraoui, the first American paratroopers to achieve their objective. By mid-afternoon on November 9th, the forces under Raff had arrived at the airfield after conducting a weary, but safe, march across the desert. As the men set to work with their assigned task of guarding French prisoners of war, they also worked day and night to once again be combat-effective and ready for their next engagement.⁶³

On 11 November, a Colonel Hewitt from II Corps arrived to discuss with Colonel Raff the situation and readiness of his soldiers. He asked Raff two questions, when could they be ready for another jump, and how many men would be ready to participate? To these questions Raff answered honestly, he believed that one hundred and fifty men could be assembled by the

⁶² Yarborough, *Bail Out*, 54.

⁶³ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door!*, 51-54.

night of the 13th, and one hundred and fifty more men by the night of the 16th. Agreeing to this, Colonel Raff was ordered to Maison Blanche Aerodrome with the one hundred and fifty men that he had so far assembled, they departed at 1100hrs on the 12th of November. Once here they prepared for an upcoming operation, which had not yet been revealed to the commanders let alone the enlisted men, as they reequipped while awaiting the arrival of more of their comrades, one hundred and fifty of which would arrive by the night of the 14th.

On the 13th of November Raff was ordered by the Brigadier General in charge of Operations to seize the airstrip at Tebessa, Tunisia, on the 15th under orders from General Anderson in order “to deny the aerodrome there to the Axis.” Moving swiftly, Colonel Raff began to plan a hasty operation based on little intelligence or knowledge of the operational situation on the ground at the aerodrome. Undeterred, Raff soon had a plan in motion to use his assembled paratroops to move behind enemy lines and deny the enemy a valuable base for air operations.

On the 14th of November Colonel Raff was approached by two Frenchmen who told him that there was a much larger airstrip that had been used by the French to support bombers in operations against the Italians in the years before the Second World War. The airstrip was located at Youkes-les-Bains, approximately 20 kilometers northwest of Tebessa, on the Algerian side of the border. Recognizing the strategic importance of the target, the Colonel adjusted his strategic plan and began to gather intelligence on the situation at Youkes-les-Bains. The most important area of this intelligence was who was in command of the field, and if the Vichy French forces were in charge, would they put up resistance towards the Americans? No matter the situation on the ground, it was seen by First Army Headquarters as vital to deny both airstrips to the advancing German forces, and Raff was given the orders to deploy his forces on the morning

of the 15th to seize the airfield at Youkes-les-Bains with his recently assembled force of approximately three hundred paratroopers and then march the roughly nine miles and seize the defenses at Tebessa.⁶⁴

At 0730hrs on November 15th three hundred paratroopers departed the Maison Blanche aerodrome for Youkes-les-Bains and Tebessa airfields, as they approached the field they received what they perceived as the answer to the question of the French. The trenches surrounding the strip were full of soldiers actively moving about and preparing for the landings. No matter the danger, at approximately 1030hrs Colonel Raff led the way, and leapt from his C-47 into Algeria for the second time. As his men landed, they encountered a rocky plain that resulted in almost every soldier being peppered with bruises and cuts, and fifteen men having broken bones. Despite the injuries, with Colonel Raff in the lead, the paratroopers cautiously arose from the ground and moved slowly up the hill towards the silent French defenders. The uncertain intentions of the French were soon made clear when an officer strolled towards Colonel Raff and calmly outstretched his hand to embrace his new ally.

The Frenchmen who surrounded the airfield soon came to the aid of their American allies by providing medical care, in some cases driving them to the hospital at Tebessa, to which Colonel Raff had just dispatched Major Yardley and Company E to march the nine miles and secure the aerodrome. Colonel Raff soon met with Colonel Albert Berges of the 3rd Zouaves Regiment and learned that the French forces had been in the process of preparing for a German airborne assault to seize the airstrips. Upon learning of this, Raff soon discovered that the only potential landing zone was covered by camouflaged machine gun and cannon emplacements that could have easily destroyed his three hundred strong force as they drifted aloft.

⁶⁴ Raff, *We Jumped*, 47-54.

By nightfall Tebessa had been secured by the forces under Major Yardley, Raff and Yarborough soon arrived to establish a concrete defense to hold the line against a German assault. While a German assault did not occur, the men of the 509th believed that they drew their first blood against the Germans in North Africa. A German JU-88 aircraft approached the field on the 16th and received ground fire from the American soldiers before departing. Later that day some locals came into camp with wreckage that they claimed was from the aircraft, which had later crashed into the mountains. Despite the apocryphal nature of the claim, for the men of the 509th it meant that they were finally in a true fight against a confirmed enemy.⁶⁵

By the end of the day on the 16th, Colonel Raff became frustrated with the defensive nature of his situation and wished to switch to the offensive and take the fight to the approaching Germans instead of waiting for his relief by advancing Allied forces and thus completing his mission. Until the German and Italian surrender in March 1943, the 509th under Raff acted as a spirited and dedicated infantry force, becoming what was known as the Raff's "Tunisian Task Force", comprised of his battalion as well as French forces, taking the fight to the enemy in Tunisia. General Eisenhower recalled in his memoir that these operations undertaken by Colonel Raff were a "minor epic in itself."⁶⁶ As the men fought with valor and distinction as conventional ground infantry throughout the Tunisian campaign, there were still calls for their implementation as airborne shock troops to disrupt the enemy behind his own lines as the war raged in North Africa in the winter of 1942 and spring of 1943.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Broumley, *The Boldest Plan*, 93-99.

⁶⁶ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 125.

⁶⁷ Raff, *We Jumped*, 67-200; and Wright and Greenwood, *Airborne Forces*, 31.

The Third Jump

By mid-December 1942 the men of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion were called upon to destroy a bridge located deep inside Axis lines in Tunisia, six miles from the town of El Djem. After repeated attempts by the Army Air Force to destroy the vital artery, the Eighth Army requested the Allied Force Headquarters send a force of paratroopers to infiltrate enemy lines and destroy the bridge to disrupt the forces under Erwin Rommel. The mission was perceived as doomed from the start, not only by the men who were selected to participate, but the command staff who planned it.⁶⁸

The mission called for two assault-security teams comprising enlisted men and one officer, coupled with a demolition team comprised of six men and one officer. In addition to a radioman, a medic, and two Free-French paratroopers there would be a grand total of 33 soldiers present for the operation. To lead, new battalion commander Major Yardley selected Lieutenant DeLeo who was fresh in from the States. Choosing an unseasoned officer to lead a dangerous mission was a decision made by the commander because he felt that the mission was extremely dangerous and the bridge was not worth the loss of seasoned soldiers. He chose men who would be “least missed” or “most easily replaced.” However, he did assign three men to the mission who were fluent in valuable languages: one man for French, one for Italian, and one for Arabic, but not one for German.⁶⁹

In addition to green leadership, the men were also hampered from the start in terms of equipment. Private Charles Doyle remembered that, “each equipment bundle would contain a musette bag with a supplemental canteen, 12 anti-tank mines, an M1903 Springfield rifle with grenade-launcher, and four anti-tank grenades. The only maps to be taken along were large-

⁶⁸ O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 28.

⁶⁹ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 85-87.

scale, cloth “escape maps” originally issued for the TORCH operation.”⁷⁰ For the combat portion of the operation the men were equipped to fight against the columns of German armor moving throughout Tunisia. However, they would be required to walk sixty miles as the crow flies or ninety miles through the terrain, across hardly mapped desert and mountains, in order to return home to Allied lines after the completion of the mission.

Marching across relatively uncharted desert without proper equipment and maps was only the first of many problems that plagued the operation before it even began. One overarching problem was that changes were being made on a near constant basis to the original operational plan. Originally, the men were to arrange a series of panels on the ground that would be read by a passing aircraft to acknowledge the outcome of the mission and the status of the force on the ground. This rendezvous of sorts would have provided the men with a connection to their own forces and potentially allow for assistance if that was required. Secondly, if it was practical the men could head towards a French outpost in order to acquire motorized transport to shuttle them back to their safe lines. Despite these deviations from the original mission plan, the mission itself was the largest problem for the men who were tasked with its completion.

The men were ordered not only to destroy the target, but to act as intelligence agents while behind the Axis lines. They were instructed to gather all possible intelligence about the position, movement, and situational status of the Axis forces in Tunisia. From this, Charles Doyle remarks on why the airborne was chosen for such a dangerous mission, “So the bridge stood, a monument of stubbornness. When machines cannot do a job, the job goes to mere men. But the paratroopers were hanging around, and according to their reputation, they could do anything!”⁷¹

⁷⁰ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 86.

⁷¹ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 85.

Despite the problems and suicidal nature of the mission, the men persevered to undertake and complete it. Originally scheduled for 24 December, the mission was delayed until the day after Christmas. Upon arriving at Tebessa, Lieutenant DeLeo briefed Colonel Edson Raff on the structure of the mission and the Colonel was appalled. He even attempted to contact Allied headquarters at Algiers to arrange a twenty-four hour delay so that he could work with other officers to restructure the mission in order to give the men a probable chance of success. His pleas with headquarters were of no avail, and 26 December 1942 at approximately 2030hrs, three C-47s carrying thirty three soldiers departed eastward towards Tunisia.⁷²

The flight was expected to take approximately an hour to reach the drop zone; however, as the flight reached the village of Godsinn, they ran into anti-aircraft fire. Luckily none of the three aircraft received hits and the flight continued onward towards El Djem, but the pilot had difficulty locating the bridge and was forced to rally on the town itself and circle until flying north, parallel to the railroad tracks. As the men prepared to jump they began to take rifle fire from a convoy of German soldiers who were passing near the railroad tracks. As tracers flew through the air, the men leapt out into the night. Once they landed upon the soft ground, they found themselves isolated in the darkness, their problems began. As the men rallied together on the improvised drop zone, they were approached by five Arabs, and instead of eliminating them in order to ensure their silence, Lt. DeLeo attempted to buy their silence with a gift of parachutes. From this moment the plan began to deviate even worse than expected, because Raff had not been able to discuss with DeLeo the untrustworthy nature of the locals before his jump, DeLeo was confident that the Arabs would accept the gifts and remain quiet about the location of the American paratroopers.

⁷² Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 85-88.

After the locals had ridden away, the men took stock of their situation. They were missing one man, who would be forced to find his own way back to Allied lines; and half of the TNT that was needed to destroy the bridge. This resulted in arguing and debate amongst the men as to whether the bridge could still be destroyed. It was decided that it was possible, and the men set off into the darkness hoping to follow the railroad towards their target. Without knowledge of their exact location, with no relevant maps, and little to no intelligence of the local area, Lt. DeLeo led his force in what he hoped was the proper direction. As the hours past, the presence of German forces searching for the raiders began to increase, and after several false starts and turns the men found themselves near surrounded. In a scramble to determine their best course of action, the decision was made to seize the initiative and destroy the tracks in their proximity to deny them to the enemy. The demolition team destroyed several layers of track, and immediately scrambled to the west in hopes of outrunning their German pursuers.⁷³

As the men ran westward towards Allied lines and reached a hill, they noticed that they were again almost surrounded by German forces. Thinking fast, Sgt. Collins suggested that the men should split up into groups and scramble in every direction, save the obvious one, and for each group to do their best to reach safety. Promptly the five man demolition team, including Collins ran off towards a ravine that seemed to provide a break in the German forces. However, after a brief firefight, the men decided that there was no shame in surrender if the only other option was a suicidal last stand that would only result in their deaths. Collins along with Caruso, Rodgers, and Harris surrendered and were promptly captured and marched away by the Germans.⁷⁴

⁷³ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 88-91.

⁷⁴ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 91-92.

Another group of four Americans, including Lieutenant DeLeo and Ronald Rondeau, and the two Frenchmen began to head away from the German forces. After several hours of hiking through Tunisia they seized a vehicle belonging to a local and either hid in the back or disguised themselves as locals in the cab. Because of the disguises and the apparent disregard to local vehicles, the men were able to bluff their way past several German roadblocks and drove through hordes of Axis soldiers. However, they were forced to abandon the vehicle and walk across the Tunisian mountains on a several day long odyssey. After days of marching only at night, they were able to reach a French outpost at Hadjeb el Aioun, where they received aid and transportation back to American lines.⁷⁵

Charles Doyle was one of the men on the “ill-fated” mission deep into Tunisia. He explains his sentiment not only on the mission, but also on the situation of the airborne warrior in North Africa:

This completes the story of the ill-fated El Djem mission. The episode falls far short of being a proud chapter in the annals of American fighting men. Yet those with the Battalion at the time firmly believe that these men did not cause the failure. The equals of “elite” American soldiers in history, they were in many ways just “let down.” Considering the errors made by others, their accomplishments were heroic and irreproachable.⁷⁶

The El Djem mission concluded airborne operations for the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion in North Africa. The men continued to distinguish themselves with courage and bravery as regular ground infantry until the surrender of Axis forces in North Africa on the thirteenth of May, 1943.

⁷⁵ Interview with Ronald Rondeau in: O'Donnell, *Beyond Valor*, 28-31.

⁷⁶ Doyle and Stewart, *Stand in the Door*, 96.

Analysis

The North African campaign ended on May 13th, 1943. It was the first large scale offensive engagement for the United States Army since the conclusion of the First World War in 1918. From its actions across North Africa, the Army learned numerous valuable lessons, both internally and externally. Internally the Army learned that better training and solid leadership, were not only essential to success, but next to impossible without it. Externally, the primary lesson of Operation Torch for the Army was how to plan and carryout a joint operation between many, diverse, nations. General Eisenhower lamented:

Within the African theater one of the greatest products of the victory was the progress achieved in the welding of Allied unity and the establishment of a command team that was already showing the effects of growing confidence and trust among all its members.⁷⁷

These lessons in unity would allow the Army to grow externally in its influence and ability to function dynamically as a growing force.

In addition to these lessons, there were other benefits of Operation Torch for the Army and the United States. Primarily, the main benefit of Operation Torch was the combat experience gained through the harsh months in Africa. The Army experienced its first taste of real combat and from this combat came all the lessons that are essential for the formation of an effective combat force. An additional benefit of this combat experience was an increase in morale for the Army and the peoples of the Allied nations, who had up to this point been hounded by defeat at the hands of the advancing Germans and Italians. The victory in Africa forced the Axis powers not only to reevaluate the combat effectiveness of the United States and allied Armies, but also to reevaluate their global strategy. Supreme Commander of the European Theater of Operations, General Dwight Eisenhower, commented:

⁷⁷ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 158.

The Tunisian victory was hailed with delight throughout the Allied nations. It clearly signified to friend and foe alike that the Allies were at last upon the march. The Germans, who had during the previous winter suffered also the great defeat of Stalingrad and had been forced to abandon their other offensives on the Russian front in favor of a desperate defense, were compelled after Tunisia to think only of the protection of conquests rather than of their enlargement.⁷⁸

In addition to an overall reassessment of the United States Army and their own tactical situation, the Germans were further forced to confront a new threat, one that had been turned against them, airborne forces.

The first airborne unit to see combat in the US Army, the 509th Parachute Infantry, would go on to participate in some of the fiercest fighting of the Second World War, and continued to grow their reputation as courageous and brave fighters. After the conclusion of combat operations in Tunisia in May of 1943, the 509th would go on to participate in combat operations during the invasion of Italy (Naples-Foggia), Anzio, Rome-Arno, Southern France, the Rhineland, and Ardennes-Alsace. In addition to hard fighting, mountain warfare, as infantry in the Italian and German Alps, the men also participated in two more airborne operations, Italy and Southern France.⁷⁹ While the men of the 509th did not participate in the more storied airborne operations of the European Theater (Normandy, Holland, Varsity), they did cement the reputation of the airborne through being the first to fight, and continuing to operate with tenacity and diligence from the Second World War to the modern day.

The combat witnessed by the men of the 509th in North Africa, and the lessons they learned, were typical of those experienced by their non-airborne counterparts. However, these lessons were learned with increased severity and importance because of the dangerous nature of airborne operations and the future that the leaders of the 509th participated in. For example, commanding officer Edson Raff recorded in his 1944 work pages of lessons learned not only for

⁷⁸ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 157-158.

⁷⁹ For more information, refer to: Doyle and Steward, *Stand in the Door*; and Broumley, *The Boldest Plan*.

the airborne forces but all units and compartments of the military. Raff would go on to serve with distinction through the war, and would remain in the service after the conclusion of the Second World War. By the conclusion of the war Edson Raff was already seen as a legend in the airborne and by the men of the Special Forces community that was beginning to develop. Among other assignments, he commanded the 7th Special Forces Group and the Army Psychological Warfare Center at Fort Bragg.⁸⁰ In addition to his mystique and fame as a commanding officer, Raff published his work during the war, which not only helped to establish the combat reputation of the airborne, but also to cement himself as someone who understood the nature of modern war and whose lessons were highly valuable. In the last pages of *We Jumped to Fight* the author proposes three categories of lessons for the contemporary soldier, WWII, and warriors of all ages. The first category, “The Enemy”, focuses upon how to combat both the German and Italian soldier, in which he praises the tenacity of the German soldiers that his men fought, but disregards the Italian fighting man unless he is led by German officers. The second category, “American troops”, focuses upon the lessons that he learned during his experience in North Africa. He focuses on booby traps, land mines, and night combat because of how his men reacted upon encountering such obstacles and how they performed when forced to navigate and fight after the sun had set. Furthermore, he makes a note regarding the discipline required to fight and save lives on the modern battlefield and how he frequently noted a lacking in this category during combat operations. A final lesson for the American soldier, as noted by Raff, is the need for junior officers who are not afraid to become personally involved in heavy combat and willing to utilize the men at their disposal in order to achieve their objectives and accomplish the mission.⁸¹ Perhaps the most important category is directed “To leaders who direct the

⁸⁰ Mortimer, *The Daring Dozen*, 78-79.

⁸¹ Raff, *We Jumped*, 201-202.

fighters and to the fighters themselves read again these billboards on your road to battle” which he divides into three components: “In the Attack”, “On the Defense”, and “In General”.

“In the Attack” focuses directly on the lessons learned by Colonel Raff and his men in the Tunisian Task Force. While these lessons are seemingly universal, they can be directly applied to the airborne operations experienced by the men of the 509th. The five lessons are as follows:

1. It is good sense to have *more than enough* force present before making an attack.
2. Before attacking the enemy in the hills have, at least, three-to one advantage in infantry, supported by artillery. Tanks don’t help much in mountainous terrain.
3. Perfect night tactics. The Germans dislike darkness. Americans can usually beat them in it.
4. Infantry must fire *and maneuver* around enemy flanks.
5. Before attacking, select a good defensive position to fall back to in case your attack goes astray.⁸²

The first lesson does not directly apply to airborne forces because the training and doctrine was designed with superior numbers in mind and how best to combat them. The second lesson also does not directly apply to airborne forces, but would become essential for the men of the 509th once engaged in the mountainous terrain of Italy and the Alpine mountains. Despite not being in command or associated with the operation, points three through five appear to be in direct reference to the El Djem bridge mission. The majority of the mission took place at night and was a major factor in the men not being able to locate their objective nor their current position. Had the men had increased training in night navigation and orienteering they could have stood a better chance at locating their intended objective. As the paratroopers became encircled by German forces their only seemingly feasible option was to break away in small groups in order to avoid death or capture at the hands of the Germans. However, had the men recognized the situation of the German soldiers they may have been able to assault the flanks and maneuver

⁸² Raff, *We Jumped*, 202.

around them. Finally, there was no order given to establish a defensive position to fall back to after the demolition of the railroad tracks. Without such a defensive posture, the men were forced to think rapidly, resulting in a disorderly withdrawal into the darkness in order to escape the Germans. Had these lessons been applied to the operation, the outcome had the potential to be very different. These lessons about the nature of attacking ones enemy would become instrumental to future doctrine of the United States Army and the airborne and Special Forces community in particular.

“On the Defense” does not readily apply to the airborne units under Raff’s command in North Africa, but they are essential lessons for both the foot soldiers and commanders alike. The two lessons are presented as follows:

1. Your defense must be active. Patrol! Patrol!
2. Conserve your force for a hard blow. Detachments sap your strength. A strong *mobile* reserve is essential in an active defense.⁸³

Seeing that airborne forces are designed to operate behind enemy lines in order to confuse and harass the enemy in addition to completing their mission, a proper defense is an essential skill for the airborne warrior. The importance of constant patrols while on the defensive became a cornerstone of strategy during the war and into the modern day, without a doubt a portion of the credit for this measure belongs to the keen strategic mind of Edson Raff.

“In General” encompasses twenty lessons that result from a variety of experiences that apply to an equally diverse selection of military practices and procedures. The lessons that immediately relate to the airborne are:

1. The boldest plan is the best.
2. Keep teams together.
3. The squad and platoon must be perfectly trained. They win battles.

⁸³ Raff, *We Jumped*, 202.

4. Your best officers should be commanders, not on your staff, with one exception-your supply officer. He should be the best man you have.
5. Let members of our staff know what's going on. Otherwise give them rifles. They would rather fight.
6. Let your leaders have responsibility.
12. You must have communications to the rear and reconnaissance to the front.
14. Improvise to be sure, but remember, though a wrench may be used to drive nails, it will not drive them as efficiently as a hammer.
19. Airborne operations must be preceded by subterfuges in terms of diversions, ruses, rumors, and decoys. The enemy observer must cry "Wolf" so often that when the real operation takes place no one listens to his cries.⁸⁴

These nine lessons can be grouped into three categories: team orientated, combat, and airborne only lessons.

Team orientated lessons are two, three, four, five, and six. They relate to the lessons learned by Raff during his experiences in Africa when it comes to utilizing the team based structure of infantry units in order to form a cohesive and effective unit. Keeping teams together in a perfectly trained manner (2 and 3) was a lesson learned by Raff, because the men were often found on their own without officers to lead them, or they were forced by the situation to improvise, adapt, and overcome dangerous situations. An example of which is during the El Djem mission and the planes that found themselves stranded in Morocco and elsewhere. These men were forced to think rapidly as a team, utilizing their training, to ensure their survival and the success of the mission at hand. Lessons four, five, and six revolve around the leadership of a combat unit, particularly the role of junior officers in such an organization. The most obvious lesson learned from his African experience is number six, because the junior leaders often found themselves in positions where they were responsible for their men, because they were detached from the main force or found themselves without a concrete plan of action. Examples include the leaders of the sticks of troopers who were separated from the main body, who were forced to work with the aircrews in order to decide on a course of action for the young men under their

⁸⁴ Raff, *We Jumped*, 202-204.

command. After the problems of inexperience encountered on the El Djem mission, it can be argued that Raff began to understand to a higher degree the necessity for leaders to not only be comfortable with making decisions, but also being able to learn from the experience of those around them in order to make capable and informed decisions. Small unit leadership and the ability to adapt to changing missions became a hallmark of airborne operations later in the conflict and into the modern day, a lesson undoubtedly shaped, in part, by the reflections of Colonel Raff and his adventure in Africa.

The lessons pertaining to combat are twelve and fourteen. Communication, number twelve, was a major problem for the men of the 509th from the very start of their operation upon leaving England. Had the men received word regarding the situation of French forces on the ground, Advance Alexis or Advance Napoleon, they would have been better prepared for the potential reception they would have received on the ground. Furthermore, because of this communication error, Bantam shut down his homing beacon, resulting in further confusion for the aircrews which were attempting to locate the drop zones. Communication is essential to success in battle, a lesson that Colonel Raff was confronted with before his soldiers even departed England.

Problems with communication forced Colonel Raff and his soldiers to improvise in order to overcome obstacles and accomplish their objectives. Of the three combat jump operations, the only one that was not harshly plagued by communication errors was the second jump at Youkles-Bains, yet even here there were problems due to the unknown loyalties of the French forces on the ground. Which forced the men of the 509th to improvise when they hit the ground, instead of immediately opening fire upon the soldiers who surrounded them, they waited and stood their ground while the situation resolved itself. The first combat jump was essentially a lesson in the

merits of improvisation, from the men who landed in Morocco, to the usage of the C-47s as transports at low level to Tafaroui, to the men under Colonel Raff who jumped out to stop a potential assault by armor, they quickly learned the necessity of adapting to the situation in order to accomplish the mission as it changed and reformulated. This allowed the men of the 509th to prove their usefulness to combat operations by always being ready to change their objectives in order to accomplish the greater mission.

The last lesson, number nineteen, is the most directly associated with the airborne operation. Colonel Raff decries the high command to always precede airborne operations with ruses and diversions so that the enemy is not prepared. While this was not a problem for the men of the 509th because they represented the first airborne operation by the American Army against the axis. His warning speaks to the impact that the airborne had in North Africa, because they had been used in Algeria and Tunisia, the Germans would be expecting airborne employment on a greater scale in the course of future invasions and combat operations in the European Theater. Therefore, he argues that in order to preserve the success of the initial landings of paratroopers, the enemy will need to be so weary of hearing about airborne assaults that they are discounted by the superior officers.

The final lesson, number one, was not only a major learning point for the Army airborne, but for the United States military on a whole. According to Colonel Raff the days of conventional tactics and strategy were gone, the era of speed, surprise, and violence of action had begun. A hallmark of airborne doctrine during the Second World War was bold plans that confused the enemy because they combined chaos and surprise with traditional doctrine to confound the enemy and complete the objectives. This strategy became a hallmark of United States military strategy in the postwar years, in both conventional and unconventional warfare,

this lesson is perhaps the most influential of those published in 1944 by Colonel Raff, but other lessons would be learned from the assault into Africa by the 509th. It is from the lessons recorded by Colonel Raff that the American public and those wishing to join the airborne read the first tales of an airborne soldier. He cemented the value of the airborne in the minds of the public and helped educate the leaders of airborne units that were being organized stateside.

The primary lesson from the exploits of Colonel Raff and his men in North Africa was the employment of airborne soldiers in combat, while the Germans had tried and made examples of the usefulness of airborne soldiers, the allies were compelled to test such units out themselves in small roles before employing them in larger bodies. This is what the men of the 509th accomplished in Africa, while their direct mission objectives were often compromised, they proved themselves as a force capable of always seizing the initiative and working their hardest to accomplish the objective. Every major invasion in the European Theater after this point encompassed an airborne component on some scale, small or large. Into the modern period, airborne qualified soldiers and whole units are a major component of United States Army doctrine and strategy. Along with airborne warfare, the combat in North Africa taught the Army the necessity for highly skilled groups trained in operating behind enemy lines, while also being dual trained in conventional warfare. Missions such as those conducted by Bantam and the El Djem bridge mission demonstrated the necessity for operating behind enemy lines effectively while utilizing the indigenous population to help them accomplish their aims. As pointed out by Edson Raff in his lessons, perhaps the most vital component of these special operation forces is expert leadership on all levels, enlisted and officers alike.

As a whole, the US Army learned the value of well-developed leadership skills during the North Africa campaign of 1942 and 1943. This was especially true in units like the 509th, where

men of all ranks were forced to make spot decisions that had the potential to drastically alter the entire mission. Raw desire and tenacity also became desired characteristics for combat leaders, luckily for the men of the 509th the higher leadership of their unit greatly personified these traits. Both Raff and Yarborough were known both then and now as natural leaders who carried inside them a bold fire to accomplish the mission no matter how daring it seemed. William Yarborough was even described by General Mark Clark as “one of the finest combat soldiers produced in the war.”⁸⁵ In addition to officers, enlisted men of the 509th also set the tone for how a leader of men is to conduct himself. An example being Sgt. Collins who rallied the men of the El Djem mission after they had blown the railroad lines and were in danger of being completely surrounded and either slaughtered or captured in mass. While his quick thinking divided the force, and he was eventually captured, it did provide others an avenue of escape. After the war, men such as Raff and Yarborough carried these lessons and others, mainly those of terrain, proper intelligence, effective planning, and the importance of communication, into their postwar careers in the Army Special Forces community.

In all three of the combat jumps, terrain played a vital role. Even before the first jump, the navigational problems experienced by the aircrews were heightened by having to fly across vast expanses of ocean, devoid of features on which to base their navigation. In the first jumps around Tafaroui, the men encountered the salt flats at Sebkra d’Oran and were forced to march across it, slowing their progress considerably due to the nature of the terrain. Later at Youkes-les-Bains the men parachuted onto rocky terrain that left almost every man badly bruised and battered, with many having broken or sprained bones. The third jump, while the men landed on soft sand, was equally confounded by harsh and unforgiving terrain. The men were forced to march across deserts and mountains for which they had no proper maps. Problems regarding

⁸⁵ Clark, *Calculated Risk*, 417.

geography and terrain have forever plagued foot soldiers and commanders alike, one way to avoid such problems, as noted by the men of the 509th, was through proper intelligence and later planning to help compensate for these shortcomings.

Part of understating the effectiveness of ground forces upon a certain terrain stems from proper intelligence and planning. Intelligence was lacking in all aspects of the 509th's combat experience in Africa because of the overall lack of intelligence at the disposal of the Army in regard to the situation in Africa. Not only were planners confounded by the terrain and geography of the area of operations, but also by the situation regarding the locals as well as the colonial occupiers. Regarding the locals, the men were unsure how to handle the indigenous Bedouins and whether or not they could be trusted. Adding to this was the fact that only a small handful of the soldiers, in the entire Army, had a rudimentary understanding of Arabic, making communication and true understanding next to impossible. The largest problem for the 509th in the initial stages of the operation, was the situation of the Vichy French forces on the ground. Initially believing that the French forces on the ground would greet them as allies, the men of the 509th relaxed slightly as they were shuttled towards Algeria. However, once they were opened up on by French aircraft and harassed by snipers upon landing, the situation drastically changed. As the political situation changed in favor of the Allies, the men were still unsure of French intentions when they landed at Youkes-les-Bains and found themselves surrounded by French soldiers in ideal positions to annihilate a parachute landing. Thankfully, during the El Djem mission, the men were assisted by French guides as well as given shelter and transportation from a French outpost. Without this change in political standing, the approximately thirty-three men who participated in the ill-fated mission would have been met with further problems. While the impact that the Vichy French forces had upon the status of the 509th was minimal, they did

hamper their movements and strategic planning. Proper and logical planning was also a lesson that was taken by the participants as well as by the Army from the operations of the paratroopers in North Africa.

Planning is the essential key to all military operations; however, when new technology or tactics are implemented, planning becomes much harder. Making matters worse for the men of the 509th was the intelligence available to them, and the problems with communication. While they were able to adapt and overcome in the course of the first combat jump, they were severely hampered by the flaws in the plan and how they were forced to carry it out. The second jump at Youkes-les-Bains, while planned quickly, was simpler and more direct in nature, allowing the paratroopers a much higher margin of success in achieving their objectives. The jump at El Djem was hampered by numerous problems, one of the primary was the utter lack of planning that was conducted. Little to no planning was done, even the primary outline of the mission was vague and unclear to the men who participated, in addition to being presented at next to the last minute before the operation jumped off. The failure to plan the mission adequately, by any measure, undoubtedly increased the chance of failure for the men who undertook it. Despite the questionable success of some of the operations, Raff's credo of always choosing the boldest plan, was always present in the planning of airborne operations in Africa. A key to proper planning, is communication amongst all parties, as outlined by Colonel Raff, communication is vital to success in any military operation.

As Colonel Raff listed in his work, communication was essential on all levels during a military operation. As previously described, communication greatly plagued the men of the 509th during their assault into Africa and their subsequent combat operations. Proper communication would not only have improved navigation to the drop zones, but also informed

the men in the transports, as well as Bantam on the ground, about the current status of the mission and the political situation on the ground. Communication was a problem for the entire military during the Second World War and continues to be so to the modern day.

Regardless of the tactical situation that resulted from the involvement of the 509th in Algeria and Tunisia in the winter of 1942 and the spring of 1943, the men were the first experimental combat forces utilized by the United States Army during the Second World War. The lessons and combat experienced gained are secondary to the spirit and legendary status that these brave troops cemented with their blood in the sands of Africa.

Conclusion

Operation Torch was the first large scale combat operation conducted by the United States Army in the Second World War. The result was a generally slow campaign highlighted by political intrigue, changing alliances, early disasters, and eventual victory. In addition to forcing the Axis forces out of North Africa, the Army gained valuable seasoning through the lessons of combat. Commanders learned the values of increased training and skilled leadership, because they began to understand the nature of the army that they commanded. A new army was born in Africa, an army with different styles of operations, new technology, and a new breed of soldier to carry out the mission. This is the army that not only met the Germans in combat, but eventually took the fight into the heart of Germany and defeated them. A prime example of this new army is best represented by the men of the 509th Infantry, who exemplified all the characteristics of this force.

The men of the 509th were some of the best in the Army, they were all volunteers who had signed on for the extremely physically and mentally challenging training that allowed them to qualify as United States Army paratroopers. By doing so, these paratroopers were better trained for the fight they experienced in Africa, not only physically, but mentally as well because of the challenges they were forced to endure. Of these men stand a distinct group, the men who led them into battle. Luckily for the men of the 509th, their officers were of high quality and skill, who led them into the fight with valor and distinction time and time again. Men such as Edson Raff and William Yarborough led these men into the fight with great skill and bravery, resulting in swift actions that seized the initiative and took the fight to the enemy. Because of these leaders, the men found themselves not having to learn the lessons of leadership that plagued the rest of the Army during the North Africa campaign. These men, officers and

enlisted alike, led the fight into North Africa and continued to take the fight to the enemies of the United States during the remainder of the war and after.

In Africa, and after, the commanders of the US Army learned that under them served men who represented a new army. Not new in terms of longevity, but new in nature and practice; an army that possessed the potential to undertake new missions and to employ new technology in order to defeat the Axis forces. Again, the men of the 509th exemplify these characteristics, in addition to their airborne missions, the men acted as lightning infantry and in some cases as period Special Forces to accomplish whatever tasks were dealt down to them. In doing so, while utilizing new technology in the process, the men established the reputation of the Army and the airborne as a new fighting force that had begun the steady march forward against the Axis tide. It took more than technology and new mission orders to accomplish this task, it took foot soldiers. Men who were willing to take great risks and make the ultimate sacrifice in order to complete the mission and ultimately win the war. The men of the 509th in Africa personified this, they took extreme risks and undertook harrowing missions in order to complete their objectives while simultaneously cementing the reputation of the new airborne force.

In addition to helping to forge a new army in the African desert, the paratroopers were among the first to come into combat with the seemingly unstoppable German Army, and after time, defeated them on the field of battle. These victories were not without great sacrifice on the behalf of the paratroops. However, they were able to learn from these sacrifices and begin to understand the German soldier. Colonel Raff wrote:

Germans-businessmen who know their business. They have the finesse of experience. Watch out for deception when fighting them. To try the same ruse twice against them is fooling yourself. A possum game they love to play will cause you to underestimate their strength. Their equipment is excellent. Tanks and 88-mm. guns are part of a team. When you meet them separately, consider yourself lucky, as a rule, you won't. Forget the words, "air superiority" as long as

there is one Nazi plane around. It will smack you night and day when you think you're safe. Mines and booby traps of the nastiest type are Nazi specialties.⁸⁶

When it was published in 1944 the US Army had been in almost constant combat with German forces for two years. However, these lessons go beyond those of the German Army, what they taught the men of the airborne and the command structure of the United States Army was to never underestimate an opponent. Enemy forces must be studied and tested through trial and error in order to find exploitable weaknesses. On one level this reconnaissance in force is what the men of the 509th, and the Army as a whole, accomplished in Algeria and Tunisia in the winter of 1942 and the spring of 1943: they met the German soldier on the field of battle and learned how to fight a modern war against a modern and revolutionary enemy.

Volumes have been written about the United States airborne in the Second World War. However, the majority of the literature revolves around the airborne components of Operations Overlord and Market Garden. Far less is written regarding the airborne operations in the Pacific, Africa, Sicily, Italy, southern France, and Germany. This is because the airborne components of Operations Overlord and Market Garden were massive and widely recorded in the period because of the impact that they had upon the operations they were associated with. Despite the celebrity status attached with these jumps, it is paramount to never forget the other operations, in particular the operations that established the foundation of airborne doctrine, which made the other jumps possible. The combat jumps into North Africa established not only the reputation of the airborne, but also that of the later United States Army Special Forces.

Beyond their country and the airborne, the men of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment fought for each other. They had volunteered to serve as the elite of the United States Army, and in doing so were volunteering to go directly into the fight, this was often done because they

⁸⁶ Raff, *We Jumped*, 201.

sought to fight side by side with men who had the same sense of adventure, courage, and duty as they did. It is these men for which this paper has been written, and why it deserves to be read and added to the annals of history, to do justice to the men who fought and died for far away freedom in the sands of Algeria and Tunisia.

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Account of Professor Leroux, an early parachute pioneer, jumping from the Dime Museum Building in Philadelphia, to the street 100 feet below. Shows the public fascination and the mysticism surrounding early parachute attempts.

“Drops From Biplane With a Parachute”, *New York Times*, March 1, 1912.

An account special to the New York Times recording the first descent from an airplane by a human being safely, under a parachute. This moment served as the springboard for all future parachutists.

“The Mitchell Court-Martial”, *New York Times*, November 5, 1925.

A brief summation of the court martial of Colonel William Mitchell, his charge of conduct subversive of military discipline was critical for the early American air forces as well as the parachutists who were seeking to follow up on his ideas from the war.

“Infantry of the Skies”, *Oakland Tribune*, 1942.

This entry is a brief pictorial relating to the advanced and special training by the early airborne forces.

“An Ohio Boy”, *Portsmouth Times*, November 15, 1942.

The article is an obituary relating to the death of John T. Mackall, the first American soldier to perish in North Africa. He was a paratrooper who was killed by gunfire from a French aircraft.

Magazine Articles:

“Headfirst into Africa.” *American Magazine*, 1943

Article gives a brief biography of an early airborne leader and figure, Edson Raff, the man who led the jump into Africa.

“The Army’s New Streamlined Airborne Troops.” *Yank, the Army Weekly*, 1943

A brief article relating to the implementation of early United States airborne forces, mainly focusing on training and the jump into Sicily.

Memoirs:

Burgett, Donald. *Currahee!: A Screaming Eagle at Normandy*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1967.

An autobiographical account of the author's time with the 101st Airborne Division from before his enlistment to the end of the war. This work is the first part in a four part series in which the author recounts his experiences from the war, in which he provides astonishingly clear detail for almost all aspects of his service, especially training and combat.

Clark, Mark W. *Calculated Risk*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950.

The memoirs of General Mark Clark, one of the most influential and important generals in the Mediterranean theatre in the Second World War. As an early supporter of the airborne movement within the United States Army, he was instrumental in getting the first American paratroopers into combat during Operation Torch.

Doyle, Charles H. and Terrell Stewart. *Stand in the Door!: The Wartime History of the 509th Parachute Infantry*. Williamstown, New Jersey: Phillips Publications, 1988.

This historical account of the 509th Parachute Infantry during the Second World War was composed by two veterans of the unit, who combined personal experience with the historical record to produce the most authoritative account of this revolutionary unit.

Gabel, Kurt. *The Making of a Paratrooper: Airborne Training and Combat in World War II (Modern War Studies)*. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1990.

Kurt Gabel was a recently arrived German immigrant, who earned his citizenship while fighting for his nation in the United States Army as a paratrooper. His narrative provides a good analysis for the motivations to joining the airborne as well as an in depth look at the training that it took to earn the coveted silver jump wings.

Gavin, James M. *On to Berlin: Battles of an Airborne Commander, 1943-1946*. New York: Viking Press, 1978.

This autobiographical account is a richly detailed narrative describing the operations of the airborne troops under General James Gavin, from Sicily to the end of the war. Written in his own hand, he provides a dynamic and historically significant commentary to his actions and those of the men both above and below him.

McCall, Edna Daves. *Silver Wings and a Gold Star: The Story of T/5 Robert D. Daves 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion First U.S. Paratroops to Jump in Combat*. Drexel, North Carolina: C&M Resources, 2003.

This work is deceiving in nature, because it initially presents itself as a primary source account from Robert D. Daves. However, it is in fact a compilation of the letters that he sent home to his family until his death during the Second World War. There is value in the work, in that it shows what the first paratroopers felt was necessary to include when they wrote home about their new unit and status as airborne warriors.

Raff, Edson Duncan. *We Jumped to Fight*. New York: Eagle Books, 1944.

The first person account of Edson Raff, the leader of the 503/509 Parachute Infantry battalion during the Operation Torch actions, is cited in almost every work on the operation as well as American airborne forces. In it, he records his experience in this operation as well as the formation of parachute infantry for the United States, of which he was an intricate and essential element. These experiences, coupled with his thoughtful and essential conclusions regarding the future of airborne operations, are vital to not just understanding airborne tactics, but also the outcome of the war in Europe.

Webster, David Kenyon. *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich*. New York: Dell Publishing, 2002.

This memoir is very different from those commonly found, it is obvious that Webster hated the army, but none the less loved his outfit and was a very hard fighting soldier. Having dropped out of Harvard to fight the war from the perspective of a frontline soldier, he is able to provide a richly detailed analysis and commentary based upon his training in English literature. While he was not involved in the airborne operations in question, he does provide a quick commentary to the work by Edson Raff, *We Jumped to Fight*, which he was reading while preparing to jump in Operation Market Garden.

Yarborough, William Pelham. *Bail Out Over North Africa: America's First Combat Parachute Missions, 1942*. Williamstown: Phillips Publications, 1979.

A richly detailed first person account of the authors' experiences in the first United States airborne operations of World War II in North Africa. While it is occasionally lacking in detail in the actual text (retelling of his personal actions), it makes up for it by usage of appendixes, which include not just pictures for reference, but also complete rosters of the paratroopers involved in the operations.

Monographs:

Mitchell, William. *Winged Defense: The Development and Possibilities of Modern Air Power-Economic and Military*. Rev. ed. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1971.

This work by General William Mitchell, originally published in 1925, discusses his advanced and, in some cases, radical theories regarding the future of air power. This discussion encompasses not just military implications for the new technology but civilian as well.

Secondary Sources:

Monographs:

Atkinson, Rick. *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002.

This work is a heavily detailed work about the first large scale engagement by the United States Army in the Second World War, Operation Torch. The author does an excellent job blending detail and analysis into a seemingly narrative account which makes the work very simple and pleasant to read.

Breuer, William B. *Geronimo!: American Paratroopers in World War II*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.

William Breuer is certainly one of the most recognizable authors when it comes to the Second World War, particularly airborne operations. In this work, the author expertly compiles a detailed and in-depth account of the United States' employment of airborne forces during the war; particular attention is paid to the early stages and operations of the airborne forces.

Broumley, Jim Travis. *The Boldest Plan is the Best: The Combat History of the 509th Parachute Infantry Battalion during WWII*. Sequim, Washington: Rocky Marsh Publishing, 2011.

An exceptionally detailed account of the 509th PIB during the Second World War from its formation until the conclusion of the Second World War. The author has expertly compiled secondary and primary sources into a single destination resource for the topic.

Burlingame, Roger. *General Billy Mitchell: Champion of Air Defense*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952.

An authoritative and detailed work regarding the life and accomplishments of General William Mitchell, one of the United States earliest and most outspoken advocates for the development of air power as an effective weapon in war. This work validates the theories of Mitchell, including his proposed usage of airborne forces in the First World War.

D'Este, Carlo. *World War II in the Mediterranean: 1942-1945*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1990.

The title of this work is misleading, it would suggest an overarching summation of the events of the Second World War in the Mediterranean theatre, and this is, sadly for the reader, not the case. The book primarily revolves around the actions of command of the Allied Armies and is noticeably lacking in its coverage of key areas such as logistics and the operations of some nations navies. Certain operations (such as the airborne jump into North Africa, and the textbook invasion of Southern France) are barely mentioned by the author. Despite good writing style and proper references, this work is noticeably lacking.

Davis, Burke. *The Billy Mitchell Affair*. New York: Random House, 1967.

An in-depth and authoritative account surrounding the court martial of Colonel William Mitchell, of World War I aviation fame, during the 1920s. Burke provides a thorough and step by step account of the days before the trial, the trial, and the resulting implications for the United States.

Esposito, Vincent J., ed. *The West Point Atlas of American Wars: 1900-1953*. Vol. 2. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., Publishers, 1959.

Included in his atlas, in addition to detailed and highly accurate maps regarding United States military operations in the years covered, 1900-1953, it also provides short but sufficient commentaries to not just understand the maps but also to put them into perspective.

Funk, Arthur Layton. *The Politics of Torch: The Allied Landings and the Algiers Putsch 1942*.

Lawrence, Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1974.

Funk dictates a developed and detailed look at the complex political situation that befell Operation Torch, regarding the position of the French forces in Algeria at the time. The main focus is on the political rather than the military aspects of planning and carrying out the invasion, which is vital to an understanding of the operation.

Gelb, Norman. *Desperate Venture: The Story of Operation Torch, The Allied Invasion of North Africa*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992.

This source is one that should not be overlooked by those studying the effects of Operation Torch or the Second World War in general. It is excellently detailed and written, in a manner that does not overwhelm nor confuse the reader. By reserving his conclusion for the end of the work, it allows the reader to gather their own opinions based upon the presented evidence without felling the influence and inclinations of the author.

Huston, James A. *Out of the Blue: U.S. Army Airborne Operations in World War II*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1972.

Huston's work is not one to be read by those who were involved in these events to rekindle nostalgia; it is intended for the historian and researcher to get a richly detailed understanding of the subject. Despite this lack of flair, which is commonly associated with the airborne forces and the works concerning them, this work is an invaluable research tool due to its detail in both facts and analysis of events.

Kindsvatter, Peter S. *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

An interesting read that provides the reader with a sense as to why American soldiers fight on the ground, in terms of spirit and morale. Throughout this work, Kindsvatter, brings light to several

misconceptions regarding the spirit level of American ground soldiers throughout the wars, and the factors that influenced them. This is a vital work when attempting to understand the motivations of American soldiers.

Mortimer, Gavin. *The Daring Dozen: 12 Special Forces Legends of World War II*. Long Island City, New York: Osprey Publishing, 2012.

A profile of Edson Raff is given to illustrate a daring commander of the Second World War's Special Forces and how they carried the fight to the enemy through unconventional means. While the work lends little to the scholarship, it does provide detailed citations and references for further scholastic endeavor.

O' Donnell, Patrick K. *Beyond Valor: World War II's Ranger and Airborne Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat*. New York: The Free Press, 2001.

Accounts of Edson Raff, William Yarborough, and Ronald Rondeau are given in this work to highlight the true nature of combat during the Second World War by highlighting men who saw unique actions. While the first two character sketches are almost carbon copies of those written by other authors, the third soldier participated in the daring commando style raid carried out by the 509th in Tunisia.

Wright, Robert K., and John T. Greenwood. *Airborne Forces at War: From Parachute Test Platoon to the 21st Century*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2007.

Wright and Greenwood present an informative and detailed work regarding all aspects of airborne forces from the beginning to modern day operations. Fully complemented with illustrations and rare photographs, the information is very presentable and richly detailed, so that the reader comes away with a deep understanding of the topic.

Scholarly Articles:

Bassett, James A. "Past Airborne Employment." *Military Affairs* 12, no. 4 (Winter, 1948): 206-216.

This article is very informative, while being written in a manner that is very easy to read and understand. The work covers almost all aspects of the usage of airborne from the very beginning to the then modern day, 1948. By being written in 1948, the author gives the reader a contemporary view to how the jumps of World War II were being viewed and understood.

Chacho, Tanja M. "Why Did They Fight? American Airborne Units in World War II." *Defence Studies* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 59-94.

This unique and informative work revolves around what motivated the American Airborne Forces in the European Theatre of Operations to fight so tenaciously and with such dedicated

spirit. Through a non-over bearing tone and by providing proper statistics and references, the author is able to draw a convincing and informative conclusion.

Horn, Bernd. "The Airborne Revolution." *MHQ Quarterly Journal of Military History* 17, no. 4 (2005): 62:71.

This journal article is a very detailed and interesting account of the early formations of the world's first airborne combat units. Primarily revolving around the early experiences of the United Socialist Soviet Republics and Nazi Germany.

Liell, William. "United States Airborne." *Journal of United Service Institute of India* 92, no. 387 (1962): 139-148.

Brief but informative article regarding the history of the United States Army airborne forces, gives a brief look at the jumps made by these forces during the Second World War. In particular it provides a quick, but informative, look at the jumps made into Africa by the United States Army in World War II.

Reference Works:

Howe, George F., ed. *United States Army in World War II: The Mediterranean Theater of Operations: Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West*. Washington D.C.: Center of Military History United States Army, 1991.

The official account of the United States Army in the Second World War as recorded by the United States Army in the wake of the war, this work provides the specific detail that is either glazed over or simply referenced in secondary as well as some primary accounts.

Chambers II, John Whiteclay, ed., *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

This work documents the experience of the American military in World War II event by event. There are sections that provide great detail and information regarding almost every aspect of the war. With significant attention paid, in various sections, to the concept and evolution of airborne warfare.

Dear, I.C.B., and M.R.D. Foot, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Similar to the work by John Chambers II, this work is a companion to an individual wishing to research the Second World War. Differing from Chambers' work, this work, does not only focus on the activities of the United States Military, but in the prospective of all aspects of the global war.

Tucker, Spencer C., ed. *The Encyclopedia of World War II: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2005.

Despite its relation to the other works of the same style and subject, World War II encyclopedias, this work by edited by Mr. Tucker, lends itself a new. It provides a style of writing that feels lighter and more in general terms than many other works. Whilst still providing a proper degree of references to enable the reader to conduct further and more specified research.

Zabecki, David T., ed. *World War II in Europe: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.

Similar to the preceding companion guides and encyclopedias, this work provides entries on almost all aspects regarding the Second World War. What differs is that the articles contain slightly different information, due to source selection, than there related works.