

Orders at Oran 1942

by Brendan B. McBreen

Operation TORCH was the Allied invasion of North Africa. On November 8, 1942, five U.S. divisions—over 100,000 American soldiers—seized three widely-separated objectives: Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers. See Figure 1. The resulting Allied control of ports and airfields along the southern Mediterranean coast neutralized threats to Allied shipping and enabled a ground advance east against German and Italian forces in Tunisia.

The 1st Infantry Division, supported by the 1st Armored Division, seized **Oran**, Algeria. Units landed at three widely-separated beaches—X, Y, and Z—and then converged on the city from all three directions. The main landings at Beach Z, thirty kilometers east of Oran, occurred at 0100.

A Ranger battalion secured the port of Arzew and two regimental-sized combat teams (CT) secured the beaches. CT 18 was halted by enemy fire at the village of St Cloud, but Combat Command B (CCB) of the 1st Armored Division raced inland to seize a critical airfield. See Figure 2.



Figure 1. Operation TORCH objectives.

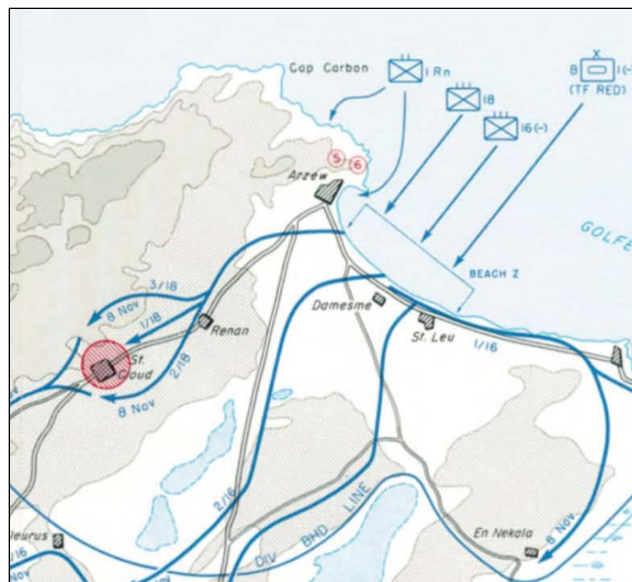


Figure 2. 1st Infantry Division landings at Beach Z.

Task Organization of the 1st Infantry Division, 8 November 1942

MajGen Allen

Combat Team 16 (5,608 men): 16th Infantry Regiment, 7th Field Artillery, AA

Col Cheadle

Combat Team 18 (7,092 men): 18th Infantry Regiment, 32d Field Artillery, AA

Col Greer

Combat Team 26 (5,262 men): 26th Infantry Regiment, 33d Field Artillery, AA

Col Stark

+ Combat Command B (4,772 men), 1st Armored Division

BGen Oliver

+ 1st Ranger Bn

LtCol Darby

Major General Terry Allen commanded the 1st Infantry Division. See Figure 3. Aggressive, impatient, and tactically competent, General Allen was a fighter who was well-respected by his men. As a lieutenant colonel in 1940, he had been directly promoted to general. Unlike other

generals, however, he slept on the ground, kept his command post near the front, and personally directed units under fire. Although General Allen had been wounded in combat in World War I, the landing at Oran was the first combat experience for the vast majority of his soldiers. See Figure 4.

General Allen did not tolerate incompetence. He emphasized weapons maintenance and insisted on realistic company and battalion-sized training exercises, especially at night. His orders were short and direct, coupled with clear graphics to convey his concept of operations. See Figure 5. Many of his directives said simply, “See graphic.”

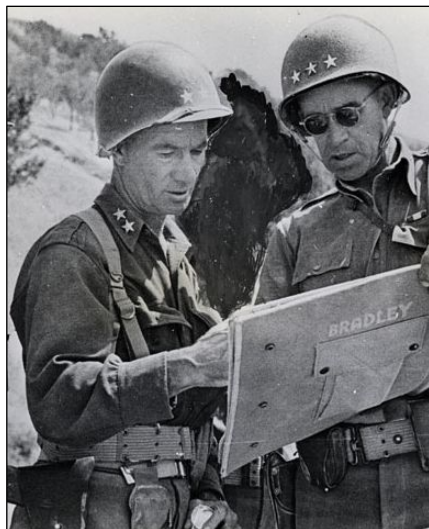


Figure 3. MajGen Terry Allen



Figure 4. 16th Infantry at Beach Z.

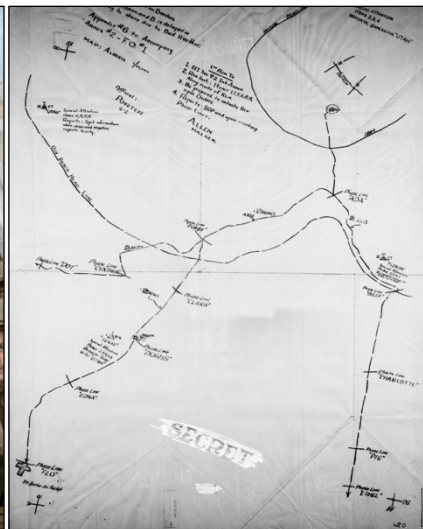


Figure 5. Division order graphic.

General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, was also a proponent of concise, effective, and unambiguous orders in combat. Five months after Operation TORCH, he praised the orders of Terry Allen in a memorandum to the President of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt:

Memorandum for the President

March 27, 1943

Washington, D.C.

Subject: Development of Army Operational Technique

In France in 1918 a Division attack order was sometimes fifteen or twenty pages long. After the war continuous efforts were made to cut down this verbosity but even as late as 1927 when I took over the Infantry School I found a battalion order three and four pages in length.

It is very hard to break down a highly developed technique which had indoctrinated a great many officers as a result of trench warfare procedure.

Finally in 1930, I obtained through General von Blumberg (the head of the German Army whom Hitler fired because he married a carpenter's daughter of doubtful reputation), the data on recent German maneuvers where divisional attack orders were not only brief but at times purely oral.

Through the following years the matter was still one of bitter discussion but it was not until the preliminary to the maneuvers in Louisiana in 1940 that we succeeded in cutting division orders down to a simple operational statement based on the high state of training of combat teams (CTs)

within the Division, consisting of a regiment of Infantry and a battalion of Artillery with or without attached supporting units.

With this too lengthy explanation, I am attaching a copy of the order for the attack on Oran by the 1st Division (15,000 men) issued shortly after the landing on November 9th by Terry Allen, the Division commander who is now in command of the operation at Maknassy. All our field orders have five paragraphs, each one dedicated to a certain purpose; the first, to information regarding the enemy and our friendly troops; the second, to the general plan; the third, to the details for the operation; the fourth, to supply matters; and the fifth, to the location of command posts (CPs).

General Marshall

Hq 1st Inf Div
RENAN
2210, Nov 9, 1942

FO: 3

1. Omitted.
2. Division atks at 0715 10 Nov 1942 (See operation map scheme maneuvers and time of atk). CCB atks from S at 0730 in conjunction with 1st Div.
3.
 - a. CT 18 see operation map.
1st Bn CT 18 follow CT 18 after mopping-up around ST CLOUD.
 - b. CT 16 less 1st Bn see operation map.
1st Bn CT 16 (brought forward in trucks follows in Div reserve).
 - x. Civilian snipers caught red-handed will be summarily shot.
 - x. Nothing in Hell must delay or stop this atk.
4. Attached.
5. Div CP initially follows 16th Inf.

ALLEN
MajGen

Hq	Headquarters, 1st Infantry Division.
RENAN	Algerian village inland from Beach Z.
FO	Field Order.
CCB	Combat Command B: (2) tank, (1) infantry, and (1) artillery battalion, plus tank destroyer (TD), engineer, anti-aircraft (AA), medical, and maintenance units.
CT	Combat Team: Reinforced regiment of (3) infantry and (1) artillery battalion, plus anti-aircraft (AA), cannon, and anti-tank units.
ST CLOUD	Enemy-defended Algerian village inland of Beach Z.

Sources:

The Papers of George C. Marshall: Volume 3—The Right Man for the Job. December 7, 1941–May 31, 1943.

Howe, G.F. (1957). *Northwest Africa: Seizing the Initiative in the West.* U.S. Army Center of Military History.