

D2. Axis and Allied Troops/Officials in Morocco, 1940-1945

As a 'protectorate' of France, Morocco had a variety of experiences during World War II. The fall of France in 1940 resulted in France being divided into two parts: a region directly occupied by the German army and another (Vichy France) which was supposedly an independent French state but really a puppet of Germany. Much of Morocco fell under the control of Vichy France until 1943 – though most Moroccans supported the Free French forces of Charles de Gaulle, who were fighting against the Germans in North Africa.

Under the new government (Vichy France), life became more difficult for the country's 250,000 Jews. Luckily, they were protected from the worst Nazi atrocities, partly because of their relative distance from the center of persecution (Central/Eastern Europe), partly because of support from the Moroccan sultan himself (who famously told Nazi supporters, "There are no Jews in Morocco. There are only Moroccan subjects.").

In November 1942, the British and Americans launched 'Operation Torch,' an invasion of Morocco and Algeria. The goal was to open a second front against the Axis forces. (The Soviet Union was fighting to the East, and the Western Allies were as yet unable to launch an attack on German forces from Western Europe. Therefore, the Allies sought to spread out German and Italian forces by attacking from the south: in North Africa.) The invasion was launched through Casablanca, a Moroccan port city on the Atlantic coast. Most Moroccans supported the Allies.

In January 1943, British leader Winston Churchill and U.S. leader Franklin D. Roosevelt, along with their advisors, met in Casablanca to discuss war efforts. (An interesting footnote: The Germans learned of the meeting in advance. However, because 'Casablanca' means 'white house' in Spanish, they assumed the meeting would be at the U.S. president's residence in Washington DC: the White House. Germany was, thus, unable to prevent or disrupt the meeting.) While in Morocco, Roosevelt met with Sultan Mohammad V and encouraged him to seek independence from France and Spain.

When the war ended in May 1945, Morocco remained under French rule. However, the U.S. remained involved in Morocco and fully supported the country's independence a decade later.

Assignment: Imagine you are a Moroccan living in the 1940s. Write 2 diary entries, each at least one double-spaced page long. Choose names for your characters that are authentic. Also, include at least 5 facts or factual details drawn from the history/geography of the area. (Be sure to look up additional information in addition to the information found in this reading.) Underline the pieces of information you include in each of your diary entries.

-- In one diary entry, you are a Moroccan Jew living in Casablanca in 1942. (Look up about the situation of the Jews of Morocco and in Vichy France.) Describe the new government, your fears, and your hopes.

--In another diary entry, you are a Moroccan official present during the sultan's meeting with President Roosevelt in early 1943. Describe the Allied presence in Casablanca. What are they doing there? What is happening in North Africa? What do you hope will happen during the war? What do you hope for your country's future?