



On October 22, 1942 — on the eve of Operation 'Torch', the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa — a secret meeting took place in French Algeria between a party of five high-ranking American officers led by Major General Mark W. Clark, which had been covertly put ashore by submarine that night, and a party of pro-Allied officers of the French Vichy army led by Général Charles Mast. The aim of the clandestine

conference was to co-ordinate French and American plans so that the landings would not be opposed by Vichy-French armed forces. The meeting took place at an isolated seaside villa at Messelmoun, a locality near the town of Cherchell, 110 kilometres west of Algiers. Above: The northern façade of the villa, as seen from the wadi (dried-up riverbed), with the beach where the American party came ashore just off to the right.

OPERATION 'FLAGPOLE'

By Jean Paul Pallud

In mid-June 1940, as the French government left Paris in the face of the threat of the approach of German forces, the American embassy staff followed although the Ambassador, William C. Bullitt, remained in the French capital to oversee the evacuation of American and British civilians. By the end of the month, most of the embassy personnel had departed for the United States, Bullitt following on July 11.

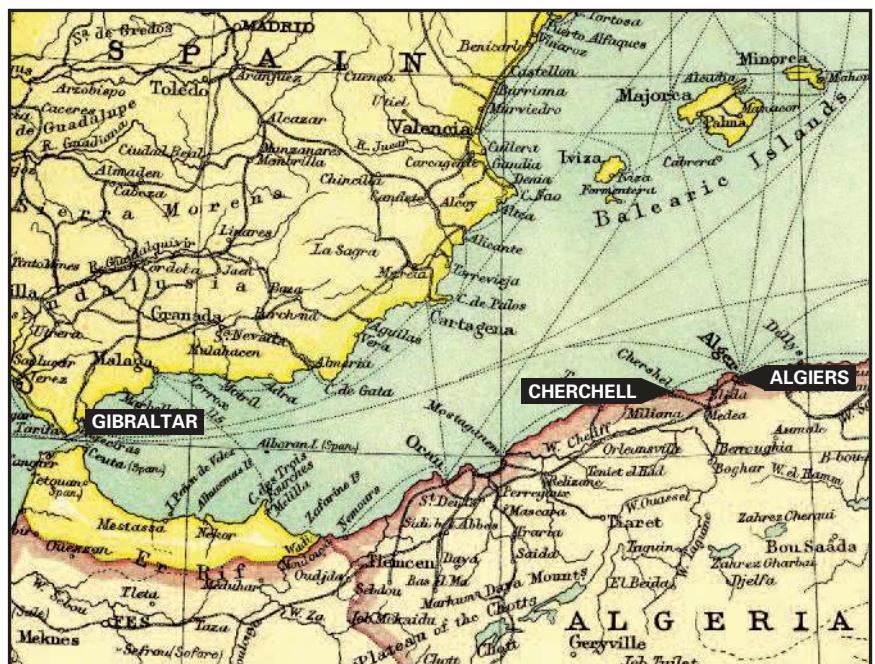
The small staff that remained relocated to the town of Vichy along with the French government, two of its senior members being Robert D. Murphy, the Chargé d'Affaires, and Commander Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, the Naval Attaché (see *After the Battle* No. 170).

That summer Commander Hillenkoetter travelled to French North Africa to assess the situation there and he was surprised to find that the French were still administering the territories as before with only a few German and Italian members of the Armistice Commission in evidence. He discovered that the French military establishment there was far stronger than he had expected, with about 125,000 combat-trained men on active service and about 200,000 more in reserve. And he was encouraged to see that these officers and men were all confident they could protect and control their African empire. 'If France is going to fight again anywhere in this war, I believe North Africa will be the place', wrote Hillenkoetter.

Hillenkoetter's report, together with Murphy's assessment of the political and diplomatic situation in Vichy, was relayed to the State Department whereupon President

Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Murphy to come to Washington to discuss it personally. The President then instructed Murphy to return and make contact with Général Maxime Weygand, Vichy's Governor of North Africa, to ascertain his authority in the region.

Murphy returned to Vichy and quickly gained permission from the authorities to tour French North Africa. He reached Algiers in mid-December for a three-week fact-finding mission throughout the French colonies while meeting with Général Weygand and senior staff. Later, Murphy would say: 'I was delighted to meet Frenchmen who were strongly anti-Nazi, who were more



pro-British than I anticipated, and who acted as if they would really fight for their independence in their African Empire'. Murphy then departed for Lisbon en route to Washington.

Meanwhile, a new American Ambassador, William D. Leahy, presented his credentials to the French head of State, Maréchal Philippe Pétain, in January 1941.

Murphy's report was well received by Roosevelt who immediately sent him back to North Africa to negotiate an economic agreement with Général Weygand, but the secret rationale for such an agreement was the intelligence value of a diplomatic presence in France. The agreement reached on February 26 provided for the United States to continue to trade with the French colonies as long as the goods and services remained out of Axis hands. To monitor this, control officers were to be posted in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia to supervise all shipments. Weygand and the Vichy administration knew quite well that these men would spy, not only on the Germans and the Italians working in French North Africa, but also on the French themselves, but that was clearly not a concern and Weygand made large concessions to let the American consular staffs work undisturbedly, free to use diplomatic bags without inspection.

Following his success, Murphy was officially assigned as American Consul to Algeria in the spring of 1941 with the US 'food control officers' working under his personal supervision. However, as the officers staffing the existing seven American consulates in French North Africa were not trained to perform intelligence duties, the State Department hastily recruited 12 new vice-consuls for this particular mission. The men selected came from a variety of occupations: four were bankers, two of which had lived in Paris before the war; one was a lawyer; another an advertising executive, one a California oil man and one an anthropologist from Harvard University; Ridgway B. Knight was a wine merchant, and John H. Boyd a Coca Cola branch manager in Marseilles. They soon became known as the '12 disciples' or '12 apostles'.

Having been hastily schooled in basic French culture and politics, they took up their duties in June and July although the resident consuls were not informed of their true function.

Even though they had little training in espionage, they began their work immediately, acquiring maps, charting fields, measuring coastlines, sounding out French and Arab relations, and recording shipping movements.

PLANNING FOR OPERATION 'TORCH'

In early 1942, when the Soviet Union was pressing the Western Allies to open a second front, the Americans first favoured launching a landing in occupied Europe as soon as possible. However the British disagreed, pointing out that such an operation at this time would be bound to end in failure, and instead proposed the invasion of French North Africa. Roosevelt finally agreed to support British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and on July 30 he notified his military advisors to defer plans for a cross-Channel attack in favour of landings in North Africa.

In August, General Dwight D. Eisenhower was designated to be Allied Supreme Commander of the operation, soon code-named Operation 'Torch'.

As a result of the anti-British feeling in France following the attack by the Royal Navy on the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kébir in July 1940, Roosevelt cabled his reservations to Churchill on August 30: 'I am reasonably sure a simultaneous landing by British and Americans would result in full resistance by all French in Africa, whereas an initial landing without British ground forces offers a real chance that there would be no French



From late 1940, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, through reports from Robert D. Murphy, the American Consul to Algeria, and others he had tasked with gathering information, deemed that North Africa would be the place where French troops would return to the war against Germany. It was for that reason that in early 1941 he directed Murphy to negotiate an economic agreement with Général Maxime Weygand, Vichy's Governor of North Africa, the secret rationale behind it being the political and military intelligence that a reinforced American diplomatic presence in North Africa could generate. The agreement was reached in February and from April, vice-consuls were hastily recruited to monitor the agreed trade and secretly perform intelligence duties. They were soon known as the '12 apostles'.



The planning for 'Torch' started in July 1942, when Roosevelt agreed with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to commit US forces to the invasion of French North Africa before the year's end. From the early stage, the Allies sought to find a French leader who could rally the Vichy armed forces in North Africa and lead them in renewed war against the Axis powers. Murphy fostered the contacts and led the discussions with the French until Général Henri Giraud was finally chosen. For security reasons, the pro-Allied groups in Algiers were only informed of the actual date of the landings less than a week before, giving them very little time to prepare. They insisted through Murphy that the landing be postponed for three weeks but the assault force was already on its way and the proposal was rejected as 'wholly impracticable'. This photo of four of the key personalities in the events was taken later in November, after the success of 'Torch' (L-R): General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Allied Commander-in-Chief; Admiral François Darlan, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Vichy (whom the Allies had just then recognised as High Commissioner for North and West Africa), General Clark, who was Eisenhower's deputy, and Robert Murphy.

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resistance or only a token resistance.' Thereafter, as far as possible, the planning for 'Torch' took on the outward appearance of being an American operation. Major General Mark W. Clark was appointed Deputy Commander with 'Torch' headquarters located in Norfolk House on St James's Square, London.

Early in September, military planners decided to make the initial landings at three places in French Morocco and at half a dozen beaches around Algiers and Oran in French Algeria, Eisenhower setting Sunday, November 8, as D-Day for 'Torch'.

One vital aspect was to secure the co-operation of the French armed forces in North Africa and, to this end, it was important to find a leader who could rally them in a renewed war against the Axis powers. He had to be a man able to persuade the officers of the armed forces to turn aside their differences for reasons of higher patriotism and seize the opportunity to liberate France. It was thought that an officer in the Vichy military establishment might offer the best solution and Amiral François Darlan, the C-in-C of Vichy's armed forces; Général Alphonse Juin, C-in-C of the French Army in North Africa, and Général Auguste Nogues, Resident General of Morocco, were all considered but the question remained: if they were appraised of Allied intentions, would they assist or would they betray the project?

Général Weygand, with whom Murphy had negotiated the earlier agreement, had since been recalled from Algiers, being dismissed by Vichy in November 1941 following pressure from the Germans. After receiving a recommendation from his pro-Allied military contacts in Algiers, Murphy then turned to Général Henri Giraud. Then in his early sixties, Giraud had achieved considerable distinction in a career which involved many years of service in Morocco; combat, capture, and escape in both World Wars; instruction for three years at L'École Supérieure de Guerre in Paris, and four-star rank as commander of the 7ème Armée in 1940. His escape from the Königstein prison in Saxony through Switzerland to unoccupied France in April 1942 had attracted wide attention. He had undertaken to support Maréchal Pétain's authority and had been permitted to retire to Lyon.

However, in the spring of 1942, Giraud nurtured a secret desire to bring about a successful return to arms in unoccupied France and, although his residence was kept under surveillance, he had still managed to establish contact with French patriots in Algiers and, through them, with others in the major centres of French North Africa, as well as with demobilised officers in France. His principal representative in Algiers was Général Charles Mast, commander of the Algiers Division, and in Casablanca, Général Émile Béthouart, commander of the Casablanca Division. Giraud also had communication with the Allies through his friends in Algiers and through the US Military Attaché at Bern in Switzerland.

Murphy flew back to Washington early in September. He presented his appraisal and reported that a reputable military group in Algiers recommended that the Allies accept Général Giraud as a French leader. Having received detailed instructions, and to avoid drawing attention, Murphy then flew to London under the fictitious name and rank of 'Lieutenant Colonel McGowan'.

Murphy then discussed his findings with Eisenhower. The General explained the extent of the projected landings and Murphy confirmed that these closely approximated what the French in North Africa had estimated would be necessary. He also indicated the civilian and military co-operation that could be expected. However, it was accepted that, because of insufficient ships, escorts and ports, it would be impracticable to meet Giraud's wish for simultaneous assistance to



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The decision to send a party of high-ranking Allied officers to North Africa for secret negotiations with Vichy-French officers was taken on November 17 — just three weeks before the landings were to go in. The operation was code-named 'Flagpole'. The party had to leave in a hurry and Major General Carl Spaatz, commanding the US Eighth Air Force, was ordered to provide his best two B-17 pilots for the first leg to Gibraltar. He chose Major Paul Tibbets (later to gain fame as the pilot of B-29 *Enola Gay* that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945) and Major Wayne Connors. Taking off from Polebook on the 19th, Tibbets flew Clark and one half of the eight-man party in B-17 41-24444 *The Red Gremlin*, while Connors flew Brigadier General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, Clark's deputy on the mission, and the rest of the party in 41-24377 *Boomerang*, both aircraft being from the US 97th Bombardment Group. *Boomerang* was the first B-17 ever to land on Gibraltar's limited airstrip. Three weeks later, Tibbets was also the one who flew Eisenhower to Gibraltar. The latter mission, carrying the whole 'Torch' HQ staff, consisted of six B-17s, but one of these — 41-24388 flown by Brigadier General James H. Doolittle, commander of the US Twelfth Air Force, and carrying Lemnitzer and others — had to turn back due to engine trouble. It arrived a day later, November 6, when this picture was taken.



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A perfect comparison on Gibraltar airfield today. When Tibbets made the first-ever landing by a B-17 on Gibraltar, the runway was just 1,550 yards long, having just been extended from 1,150 yards in preparation for its planned role in 'Torch'. By July 1943 the runway had been extended to 1,800 yards, and today it is 2,000 yards long. The last RAF squadron left in 1966 and since then it has been a joint civil-military facility, which also functions as Gibraltar airport.

the French Army in southern France during the invasion of North Africa.

Also debated was the tricky problem of how long the interval should be between notification being given to the French before the Allied landings to enable them to muster their forces, weighed against the risk of losing the advantage of surprise.

The President's draft directive stated that no change was contemplated in the civil administration of the three territories of French North Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), but that supreme command over inter-Allied forces could not be given to Général Giraud. Although Giraud's supporters expected their man to be in charge, Eisenhower took the position (something he later explained to Giraud) that the French forces must first be re-armed by the Allies — and be in sufficient strength to defend north-west Africa — before the Allies could consider permitting them to exercise supreme command there. He said that French forces could remain under French command, but would have to co-operate fully with an Allied supreme commander.

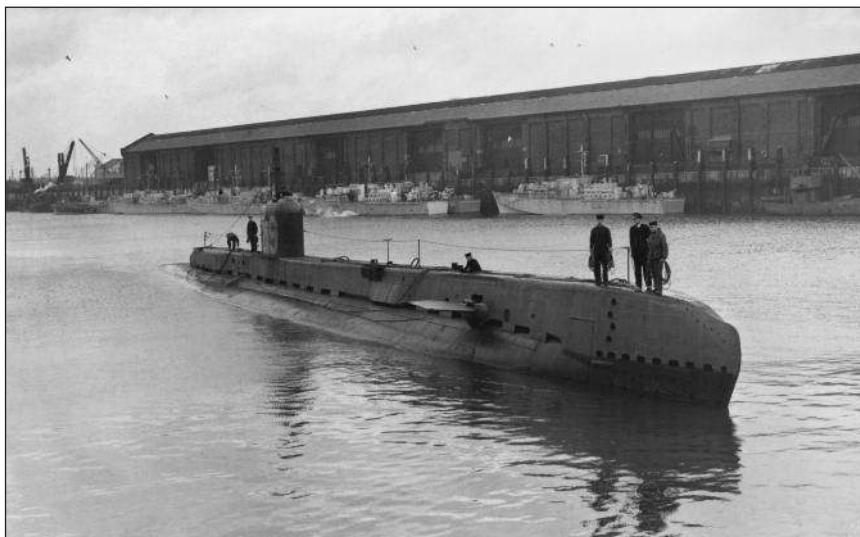
Just after Murphy returned to Algiers, he was approached by a representative of Admiral Darlan, who revealed that the latter was now considering getting involved, but to adopt this course of action the Admiral would require guarantees of ample American aid to offset French deficiencies in military equipment. However Général Mast made clear that Giraud would prefer to act apart from Darlan, confident that he alone could rally the French Army in North Africa and gain the support of the Navy there. Murphy therefore suggested to Washington that they should encourage a co-operative relationship between Giraud and Darlan.

Considering these new developments, both London and Washington agreed that Giraud should be recognised as Governor-General of all French North Africa, responsible for all civil and military affairs, and as such should receive Allied support and protection. At the same time, Eisenhower's proposal that Giraud be requested to negotiate with Darlan and to accept him in a military role was also approved. Eisenhower also had in mind the early activation of the US Fifth Army under Major General Clark and the elevation of Giraud to be the Deputy Commander-in-Chief. The British Chiefs-of-Staff, however, pointed out that the Governor-General (Giraud) would already have enough to do, and could not properly serve in that role as well, so that the latter position would be available only to Darlan.

With Giraud's willingness to co-operate with the Allies now assured, on October 12 Murphy informed his French contacts in Algiers that the Allies were soon to land a force of half a million men in North Africa backed up by 2,000 aircraft.

Appreciating that Murphy was really uninitiated when it came to military matters, Mast asked to meet senior American military officers to confer about the coming operation. Murphy wrote later that 'while I was not permitted to inform Général Mast how soon military operations were to commence, I was authorised to give him positive assurances of American support, and he urged that the time had come now for staff talks between French and American officers. This

Right: The helmsman of Seraph, Leading Seaman C. Bastone. One of the special missions carried out by Seraph later in the war was Operation 'Mincemeat' in April 1943, the release at sea, off the Spanish port of Huelva, of the body of 'Major Martin' ('The Man who Never was') in Royal Marines uniform and carrying a briefcase containing false secret documents to deceive German intelligence about Allied intentions in the Mediterranean (see After the Battle Nos. 54 and 64).



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Assigned to take the 'Flagpole' party to Algeria was Royal Navy submarine HMS Seraph (P219). An S-class vessel, she had been launched in June 1940 at the Vickers-Armstrong shipyard at Barrow-in-Furness in Cumbria.



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On the bridge of the Seraph (L-R): Lieutenant Frederick Harris, RNVR; Lieutenant Norman Jewell, the Commanding Officer; Warrant Engineer Malcolm Stevenson; and Lieutenant David Scott.



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was a possibility I had discussed with Eisenhower in London, and after an interchange of messages, the General asked me to arrange a secret meeting somewhere along the Mediterranean coast to which the Americans could come in a submarine.'

On October 16, a conference was held in Norfolk House to plan the next step. Present with Eisenhower were his deputy, General Clark; Brigadier General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, the head of the Allied planning section for Operation 'Torch'; Colonel Archelaus L. Hamblen, the staff expert on shipping and supply; Colonel Julius C. Holmes, the head of the civil affairs branch for 'Torch'; and Captain Jerauld Wright, US Navy liaison officer with the Royal Navy.

Eisenhower told them about Murphy's urgent cable requesting the immediate dispatch of a top-secret, high-level group to meet with Général Mast in North Africa. He said that he wanted Clark to go as his personal representative together with Lemnitzer, Hamblen and Holmes as the interpreter as he spoke French. Wright would serve as the liaison officer with the French Navy, with the objective of persuading the French to have their fleet presently anchored in Toulon join the Allied cause. The date set for the rendezvous was October 21, and the code-name for the secret mission was Operation 'Flagpole'. (Nothing is known about who chose this code-name but Clark — a man notorious for his burning ambitiousness and desire for publicity — is known to have once asserted: 'The more stars you have, the higher you climb the flagpole, the more your ass is exposed. People are always watching to misconstrue your actions.' This secret mission was going to be politically delicate and, if it was Clark who selected the code-name, was it a reflection of his estimation on the career risks involved? Quite apart from that, it is certainly peculiar that the family name of Général Mast, the principal contact on the French side, is another word for 'Flagpole' in English!)

Clark's instructions drafted in Washington covered various aspects of the projected relationship. He was to declare that selection of a French commander for French forces was 'a matter to be handled by the French themselves' with parallel guarantee that the Americans would not interfere with French civil government. He was not to mention the plan to have Darlan as a future French commander-in-chief for this might well disrupt the negotiations. To dispel any fears of a future British hold on French colonial territory, Clark was also to emphasise the American control of the operation. Finally, Clark was authorised to indicate that an overall French commander in North Africa might eventually be possible but that, in the interim, the Americans would equip French troops engaged in fighting the Axis powers.

An urgent meeting was then arranged in London, Churchill being summoned from Chequers where the Prime Minister was spending the weekend. Clark recorded that 'when Eisenhower and I arrived at No. 10 Downing Street there was about as dazzling an array of Britain's diplomatic, military and naval brain as I had yet seen. The Prime Minister, without knowing exactly what was on our minds, was as enthusiastic as a boy with a new electric train. When we read the cable he broke into a big grin behind a giant new cigar. "This is great", he kept saying.

'We discussed the implications of the trip at some length with Attlee, Mountbatten, Sir Dudley Pound, and Sir Alan Brooke. Anthony Eden chimed in on the political phase. What Ike wanted was a specific British opinion as to how much I could tell the French about Operation "Torch". We knew that Giraud would want an important position in the command, and I offered, if it would help matters, to step down as Deputy



Lieutenant Jewell, pictured on the bridge of the *Seraph* in Holy Loch, Scotland, after the submarine returned home on January 25, 1943, having completed 'three highly important secret missions' in the Mediterranean.

Commander to Ike in favour of Giraud. That was rejected. At the end we told Churchill, happy as a detective-story fan, the more fantastic details of our plans for this secret rendezvous on which the fate of thousands of British, American, and French soldiers and sailors might hang.

'Escorting me to the door, Churchill emphasised Britain's entirely co-operative spirit. We would have the submarine, destroyer, amphibious planes, and facilities at Gibraltar that we needed. He has an unaffected way of speaking in ringing phrases at important moments. "The entire resources of the British Commonwealth are at your disposal", he said in parting. "I want to assure you once more how important it will be to get this information and to cut down French

resistance. You have my genuine support. Keep in mind that we'll back you up in whatever you do." He shook hands gravely.'

For the assignment, Clark replaced his rank with lieutenant-colonel's insignia and the party made for the Eighth Air Force base at Polebrook to be flown to Gibraltar. Their departure, delayed by bad weather, finally got underway in two B-17s early on October 19, Clark in *The Red Gremlin*, Lemnitzer in *Boomerang*.

Clark: 'Even before we had identified Gibraltar, Spitfires were shooting up to look us over. Lemnitzer's plane went in first, and we were all relieved to see the big bomber make a safe landing on Gibraltar's limited strip. One of the pilots had already climbed out of my plane when the British rushed up



The 'Flagpole' party was to get ashore from *Seraph* by means of four Folbots, collapsible canoes of the type seen here being used by commandos during an exercise in Scotland in 1941. Three British commando officers from the Special Boat Service were assigned to handle the boats and help the five American officers ashore.

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and motioned to everybody to stay inside. They explained that the Gibraltar field was always under full observation by German agents in Spain. The arrival of two B-17s — the first sent there — would give the Nazis enough to think about without their spotting high officers aboard. The British suggested that we leave off our coats and hats. A big car with drawn curtains pulled up as close as possible to the plane; we jumped swiftly into it, to be whisked off to the Governor's house.'

When informed of the proposed meeting, Mast asked Jean Queyrat, a lawyer faithful to the pro-Allied preparations to find a suitable place for a landing. Queyrat turned to his friend Jacques Tessier who owned an isolated farmhouse on the bluff overlooking the beach at Messelmoun, 70 miles west of Algiers.

Meanwhile, Murphy asked Ridgway Knight, the 'apostle' at Oran, to come to Algiers to take care of the logistics of the operation as he was the only completely bilingual person available and Murphy wanted him to act as a second interpreter. On October 19, Knight and John Boyd, another 'apostle', finalised preparations for the meeting and the arrangements to get all parties to secretly reach the farmhouse in the early morning of the 20th. Everyone was ordered to travel by private car to avoid attention, and to depart at different times.



On the night of October 21/22, the party landed on the beach at Messelmoun, an isolated locality near the small town of Gouraya, ten kilometres away. The house where the secret conference took place stands on top of the bluff, just off to the right. This is one of a series of pictures taken especially for us by an Algerian friend.



Left: In November 1950, on the ninth anniversary of 'Torch', a memorial commemorating the historic meeting was inaugurated near the villa (see page 11). A French newsreel crew covered



ered the event and they began by shooting all the locations where the story unrolled, starting with the beach. Right: The same beach today, looking westwards.

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Left: A view of the villa, seen from the beach where the American party came ashore. Right: The house is today ruined and



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thus no longer visible from the beach but the terrace wall remains.

THE SEA PARTY

Clark conferred briefly with Lieutenant-General Noel Mason-MacFarlane, the Gibraltar Governor, and with officers of the Royal Navy, including Captain Barney Fawkes, the commander of British submarine fleet in the Mediterranean. The party was then taken down to the submarine tender HMS *Maidstone* where they had a quick meal in Fawkes's cabin. The submarine HMS *Seraph*, captained by Lieutenant Norman Jewell, was moored alongside.

Clark: 'I had never been aboard a submarine before. I soon realised that they were not made for a six-foot-two man. All the time I was in *P219* I had to bend over and watch my head. The officers' quarters, which the submarine crew had hospitably given up to their passengers, was only a cubby-hole alongside the middle catwalk. The submarine crew, almost all youngsters, welcomed us aboard. All they knew was that they "were going on a crazy mission with some Americans."

In addition to the American party, *Seraph* embarked four Folbots — small collapsible, wood-framed canvas canoes — and three British officers of the Special Boat Service (SBS) to handle them: Captain Godfrey B. Courtney, Captain Ronald P. Livingstone, and Lieutenant James P. Foot.

The submarine slipped anchor at 2200 hours on October 19 and proceeded due eastwards. The escort returned to Gibraltar in the early hours of the 20th and HMS *Seraph* went on her way uneventfully. That evening, when it was completely dark, Jewell stopped engines to carry out a rehearsal for launching and retrieving the Folbots, and to test the radio set and the R/G infra-red signalling gear. (R/G standing for Red/Green, this equipment projected a beam of invisible



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Jacques Tessier, who made his house available for the secret talks in 1942, was still the owner of the farm estate in 1950 and the cameraman asked him to point out the significant spots of the story, here the first-floor window facing the sea, from where the signal light to the submarine was lit at 11.15 p.m. on October 21, 1942.

infra-red light from an Aldis-type lamp, the signal being visible only after the beam was intercepted on a receiver with an eye-piece that would show the beam as a green spot.)

Clark: 'The sea was choppy. Holmes and Captain Livingstone launched their boat first, after practising stepping into the frail

and very tipsy craft on the dry deck. They paddled noiselessly away, and from a distance of several hundred yards tried out the infra-red signal-light with which we had been supplied. This light cannot be seen by the naked eye, but with a proper sort of glass it becomes a useful signal-light. The light



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Left: The villa's entrance on its western side, as it appeared in 1957. It still looks in good condition although the villa had already been gutted by fire after fellaghas (armed anti-colonial



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militants) had set it alight in the spring of 1956. Right: The villa was never rebuilt and suffered even more damage after Algerian independence in 1962 but this side can still be recognised.



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Mr Tessier stands on the terrace overlooking the beach, showing the newsreel team from where he saw the *Seraph*, some



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distance out at sea, before the waiting party rushed down to the beach to meet the Allied party.

worked perfectly. Holmes and Livingstone returned to the submarine, with Lemnitzer and Lieutenant Foot trying the next trip. The General got pretty wet, but they did it all right, and Colonel Hamblen and Captain Wright in their turn as well. Captain Courtney was my small-boat pilot, and we tried it last. He was the expert on these boats, and was in charge of instructing all of us. With small-boat exercises complete, the submarine was quickly under way again.'

At 0410 on October 21 *Seraph* arrived off Messelmoun having spotted the lone farmhouse overlooking the beach. The property was illuminated in accordance with instructions but it was now too late to risk a landing before daylight so the *Seraph* stayed submerged keeping observation through the periscope as two trawlers began fishing right in front of the beach.

In the afternoon orders were received from North Atlantic Station, Gibraltar, that 'your parties were originally expected night October 20th-21st up to 0500 GMT. If not contacted then, you will be expected on night 22nd-23rd.'

THE LAND PARTY

The villa that was to accommodate the secret meeting was a typical French colonial red-roofed, white stone house built round a courtyard, with the main highway to Algiers only 30 yards away. Jacques Tessier had sent all his Arab servants away, and to secure the sector, Queyrat had called in Lieutenant Georges Le Nen, commanding the auxiliary native gendarmes (the Douairs) on this sector of the coastline.

The French delegation was to comprise Général Mast and four officers: Lieutenant-

Colonel Germain Jousse (Army), Capitaine de Frégate Pierre Barjot (Navy), Commandant Louis Dartois (Aviation) and Colonel Alphonse Van Hecke, the chief of the Chantiers de Jeunesse, the Vichy youth organisation in Algeria. There were also three members of the 'Committee of Five', a civilian resistance group that was planning to take over key positions in Algiers just before the Allies landed. They were Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie, Jean Rigault and Bernard Karsenty.

On the 20th Murphy and Knight drove west from Algiers in Knight's official grey Studebaker coupé and stopped at Chenoua Plage, a beach resort some distance east of Messelmoun. There they partook of a couple of bottles of wine at a local café while referring loudly to the ladies who would soon be joining them — a cover story should anyone



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Left: Not surprisingly, no photos were taken of the American and French delegations during the few hectic hours of the secret conference. This picture of Clark dates from January 1944, when he was en route to the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead aboard a US Navy PT boat (as with all official photos of Clark, it shows his favourite left-hand side of his face). After his return from Algeria, Clark gave a very picturesque account of the Cherchell meeting to war correspondents, emphasising the more-comical incidents, such as the party having to hide in the



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wine cellar and him losing his pants in the surf as they tried to re-embark in the Folbots. As Robert Murphy observed, this served a very useful purpose as it 'diverted attention from the political aspects' of the meeting and downgraded 'the importance — actually the vital necessity — of French assistance to our precarious expedition'. Right: The French delegation was led by Général Charles Mast, commander of the Algiers Division, one of the first Vichy-French generals to start collaborating with the Americans.



Sent out to patrol the coastal road while the conference was underway, Aspirant Michel, the assistant of Lieutenant Georges Le Nen of the local Douairs (auxiliary native gendarmes), both of whom were in on the plot, surprisingly came across the chief of the Cherchell police who directed him to the Gendarmerie at Gouraya (left). It was crawling with Gen-



darmes and custom officials and Michel learnt that they had been tipped off about some smuggling activities going on at Messelmoun. When Le Nen telephoned him from the villa at 6.30 p.m., Michel gave warning: 'Lieutenant, act quickly, there is a police alert!' Right: The old Gendarmerie building is today the local station of the Algerian police.

question the comings and goings at the villa. They finally reached the villa later in the evening.

They spent the night watching for the signal but when the submarine failed to show up they realised that something had gone wrong. As the French delegates began arriving, Murphy had no alternative but to apologise for the hold-up and ask them to return. He and Knight drove back to Algiers.

The next day, Murphy received a message to say that *Seraph* was now on station and that the meeting was to be held that night. He straightaway visited Mast and the others to alert them and then drove back to Messelmoun with Knight.

HMS *Seraph* closed the shore on the evening of the 21st, but, seeing no lights, she turned about and surfaced out to sea to charge her batteries.

Queyrat, d'Astier de la Vigerie, and Lieutenant-Colonel Jousse arrived first, by bicycle, at around 2230. At 2315, Tessier switched on the signal light in a window on the first floor and it was soon spotted by the *Seraph*. Jewell described the landing plan in his report:

'The Folbots were to close the shore in company and stop when 400 yards from the beach, when Captain Livingstone and Colonel Hamblen would close the shore and



Le Nen rushed to the conference room to pass on the alarming news, whereupon all the French participants hastily gathered together their papers and maps and took off, while Tessier led the Allied party to hide down in the cellar. Both in his first radioed telegram report to Eisenhower and in his first verbal report after his return to London (recorded by the latter's naval aide, Lieutenant Commander Harry C. Butcher), and again in his subsequent press conference with Allied war reporters and in his memoirs *Calculated Risk* published in 1951, Clark would eagerly describe how the Vichy police had raided the house while he and the other four American officers and two of the SBS men were tensely hiding in the cellar. However, as becomes clear from the detailed account by Lieutenant Le Nen, in actual fact the police did not arrive and never searched the house. Tessier, Murphy, his assistant Ridgway B. Knight and Le Nen acted out a drunken banquet party to deceive the police should they come, so possibly Clark — down in the cellar — misconstrued the noise as coming from the police. Above: In 1950, Tessier operated the cellar's trap-door for the benefit of the cameraman.



Although several entrances to the house's old underground rooms can still be seen today, we could not find for sure the actual cellar where they hid.

once having recognised the reception committee as genuine, would flash back 'K's to the remainder if all was well, and 'F's if there was trouble. On receiving 'K' the remainder were to close the shore to disembark. If 'F's were received the remainder were to return to the submarine, reporting by R/T, and Captain Livingstone and Colonel Holmes would come back if they could.

'Once the party were ashore they were to switch off the light pointing seaward and as soon as they knew when they were to be coming off they were to report by R/T that all was well and that they would leave shore at a specified time. To ensure that R/T calls were genuine, each report by both sides was to be proceeded by mutual personal reminiscences.

'The Folbot party were to remain in shore until required by General Clark to bring off his party as it was decided that it was too much for one man to bring off his Folbot and two another back at the same time.

'In the event of the party's capture, or on hearing nothing after landing, the submarine was to remain in the vicinity until a.m. Saturday, October 24 and then five miles north of Granit until dusk Sunday, October 25. If the party could escape they would rendezvous with the submarine if possible in this position in a boat wearing something white in the bow and flashing 'S' by night. The submarine was to surface to pick them up if seen even if in daylight. If nothing of them had been seen by Sunday night the submarine was to proceed clear of the coast and report the fact.'

At 2350, the crew of *Seraph* commenced to launch the Folbots into the sea. In the first one were Colonel Holmes and Captain Livingstone of the SBS; in the second, General Lemnitzer and Lieutenant Foot; in the third Colonel Hamblen and Captain Wright, and in the fourth General Clark and Captain Courtney.

The first three Folbots were launched successfully and formed up ready to proceed to the shore but the last boat with Captain Courtney was swept under the fore planes and capsized. Fortunately General Clark was still on deck; later he wrote that 'the stalwart Commando was absolutely devastated at this accident at such a crucial moment'.

Folbot No. 3 was recalled and Clark took Hamblen's place with the R/T set while the fourth boat was righted. Once tested in the water, it proceeded ashore with Captain Courtney and Colonel Hamblen. The submarine now put out to sea to complete the charging of its batteries while remaining within radio contact.

Clark: 'We approached the beach in V formation, Holmes and Livingstone ahead. My boat and the others waited about 200 yards



The farm estate at Messelmoun comprised two separate clusters of buildings on top of the bluff overlooking the beach, the farmhouse and its outbuildings (left) and the villa where Mr Tessier lived (right). The main coastal road, now the N11, passes in front of the farm buildings, with Gouraya ten kilometres away to the west (left here), Cherchell 18 kilometres to the east, and Algiers 110 kilometres.

offshore until, through the darkness over the feathery surf, we saw the letter K flashed by a torch — the signal that the first boat had got ashore and all was well. We followed, coming pretty dry through a quite moderate surf.'

Meanwhile, in the villa, Murphy and the French party were anxiously waiting while Knight, who had drawn the first watch, stood behind a bush on the edge of the beach. Lieutenant Le Nen: 'D'Astier reported seeing the submarine some distance off shore and we all rushed down to the beach. We peered to the sea in the darkness for some time but nothing could be seen. And suddenly a kayak was there, only four metres away. We made the agreed coded signal with a torch light and the kayak came in. Quickly, three more kayaks landed. Our joy was immense.'

By 0125 all four boats were safely on shore and ten minutes later the party radioed to the submarine, reporting their safe arrival and stating that they would be ready to return at 2100. They all climbed up the stony

path over the bluff and entered the house. (Le Nen was clear that Murphy and the French party were already down on the beach for some time before the kayaks landed but in his book *Calculated Risk* Clark states that 'for a moment there was no one at all in sight on an embarrassingly wide beach'. Also, Le Nen reported that when the two parties met up Murphy gave Clark a hug, 'a spontaneous and emotional gesture', but in his book Clark only reported Murphy greeting them with a sober 'Welcome to North Africa'.)

Général Mast was not due to arrive before 5 a.m. and the American party, exhausted after having been submerged for 16 hours in the discomfort of the submarine's narrow quarters, took the opportunity to put their heads down in the upstairs bedrooms.

Le Nen had detailed his subordinate, Aspirant Michel, to monitor the coastal road while he kept telephoning his posts at Cherchell and Gouraya to check if there was anything untoward.



In November 1950 a memorial was inaugurated by the side of the road, near the bridge over the wadi, to commemorate the



historic meeting of October 1942. The French text on the plaque starts with 'Here began the road to liberation'.

CONFERENCE

Van Hecke arrived by car about 5 a.m. together with his number two, Capitaine George Lindsay-Watson, soon followed by Mast, dressed in civvies. Mast, who spoke little English, simply said 'Welcome to my country'. The French changed from civilian clothes to their uniform and, after breakfast had been served, the first conference began with Generals Clark, Lemnitzer and Mast, Lieutenant-Colonel Jousse and Murphy.

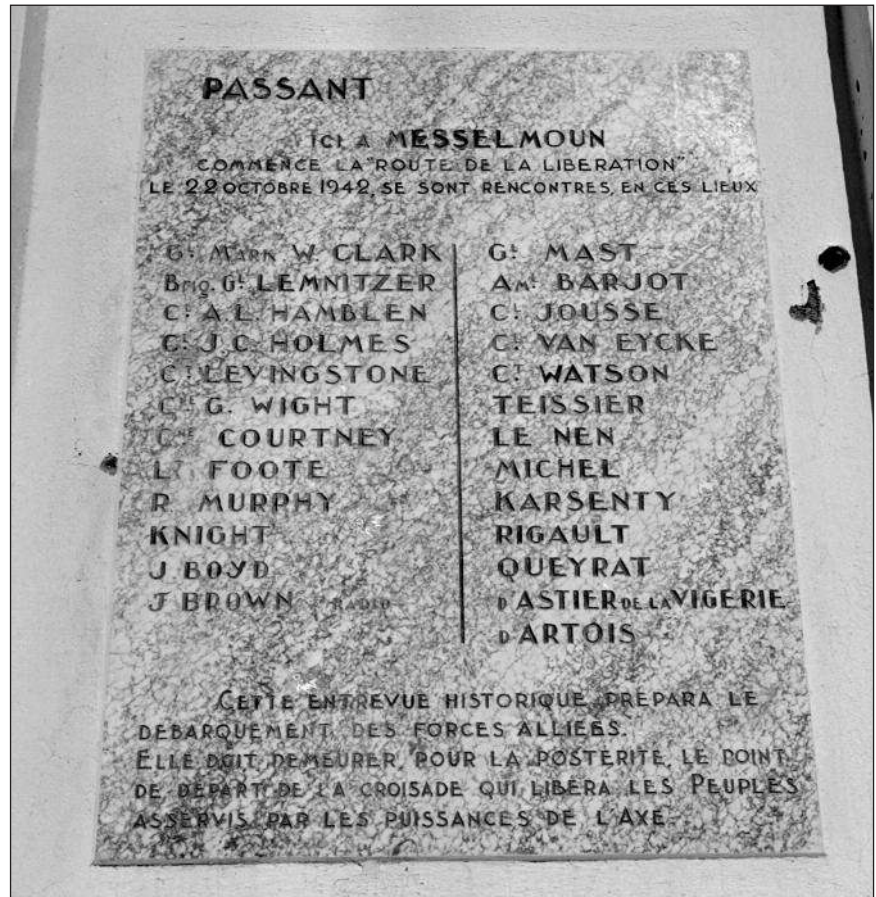
Murphy later wrote that 'the meeting at Cherchell was one of the oddest conferences of the war, because the French participants in those staff talks were ignorant of the essential details of the Allied plans. Both Clark and I were under instructions to avoid giving the French conferees specific information about the timing of the expedition or the exact locations selected for troop landings. So these discussions inevitably misled our French associates, who assumed they had months in which to prepare for African D-Day, whereas we Americans knew they had only 16 days. In fact, the first slow convoys of the expedition already were starting from the United States as we talked.'

Clark recalled that 'remembering my instructions not to reveal the facts of the impending operation, I was in a difficult position. Mast asked how big an American effort could be made. I tried to keep a poker face while saying that half a million Allied troops could come in, and I said that we could put 2,000 planes in the air, as well as plenty of the US Navy.'

Mast advised the Americans to prepare for the swiftest possible movement into Tunisia to counter-balance the Axis capacity to send in reinforcements by air. He also urged the necessity of establishing a bridgehead in southern France by simultaneous aid to French forces waiting there.

The discussion then shifted to the role to be played by Général Giraud. It was agreed, first, that he should receive from the Allies a letter setting forth their intentions. The draft letter was then prepared which was to be subject to approval by General Eisenhower. It covered the restoration of France to its 1939 boundaries; an acceptance of France as an ally; the assumption of the supreme command in North Africa by the French 'at the appropriate time' following the landings, and the establishment of bases, and the re-arming of French troops.

At midday Général Mast and Colonel van Hecke had to leave to return to Algiers in



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The original plaque listed the participants of the meeting, with those of the Allied party in the left-hand column: Clark, Lemnitzer, Colonel Archelaus L. Hamblen, Colonel Julius C. Holmes and Captain Jerauld Wright; the three SBS men, Captain Ronald Livingstone, Captain Godfrey Courtney and Lieutenant James Foot (misspelled Foot), and Murphy and Knight (one of the 'apostles'). Though none of the participants at the meeting ever mentioned them as being present the names of two more 'apostles' — John H. Boyd and Gordon H. Brown — appear at the end of the list, possibly because of their role in its preparation. The French participants were listed in the right-hand column: Général Mast, Capitaine de Frégate Pierre Barjot, Lieutenant-Colonel Germain Jousse, Colonel Alphonse Van Hecke (misspelled Van Eycke), Capitaine George Lindsay-Watson, Henri Tessier, Lieutenant Le Nen, Aspirant Michel, Bernard Karsenty, Jean Rigault, Jean Queyrat, Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie, and Commandant Louis Dartois. By the time French army photographer Jacques Bouchenoire took this photo in April 1957, the plaque showed bullet marks from a clash between fellaghas and a patrol from the 22ème Régiment d'Infanterie on the night of July 31/August 1, 1956.



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ARIF VELLES

Left: By then, Tessier's villa (seen in the background) had already been destroyed by fire. Right: The original plaque was broken after the independence in 1962 and when a new one was made in 2006, only bits of the original could be found and the new wording appears fragmented and jumbled.



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Left: As he wandered around in the ruined villa, Bouchenoire photographed what might be the living room where the main meeting was held in 1942. **Right:** Homeless families squatted in the ruined villa and farm buildings for decades until the Algerian authorities decided to safeguard and preserve the historic



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villa. The squatters were relocated in 2006, makeshift constructions built after the independence were cleared away, and the damage to the village provisionally repaired. In 2007, the Algerian Minister of Tourism, Mrs Khalida Toumi, personally visited the site to support the project.

order to prepare their commands for an imminent visit by Darlan.

The second meeting after lunch covered detailed discussions on the various phases of the operational plans. The French came with voluminous written information covering detailed positions and strengths of troops and naval units, and where supplies of petrol and ammunition were stored. They also provided details of those areas controlled by friendly commanders, like at Casablanca, Meknès and Constantine, and those commands that would prove hostile, like the Oran Division. Information was listed about airfields; where resistance would be strong, and where airborne troops could land safely. Clark commented that all this intelligence 'later turned out to be accurate in every respect' and Eisenhower's planners would say that 'the completeness and terrific value of the material was astounding'.

So far the meeting had not aroused any suspicion but at 1830, when Le Nen checked in with Gouraya, Michel himself answered: 'Lieutenant, act quickly, there is a police alert!' Although his tone was casual to avoid tipping off the Gendarmes within earshot, nevertheless it was obviously an urgent warning. Le Nen rushed back to the conference room to shout a warning. Suddenly, as Knight later wrote, 'it was sheer pandemonium'. The French swiftly gathered together their papers and maps, changed into civilian clothes, and took off in the direction of Algiers. Meanwhile Tessier led the Americans to a trap-door in the patio and they dropped down into the cellar with just two of the SBS men as the third, Captain Livingstone, had gone down to the beach with the radio set to liaise with the submarine.

'We had our musette bags with us', wrote Clark, 'stuffed with the incriminating French



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Centre right: Locally known as the Sitgès Farm, the estate is also referred to as 'the farm of the Englishmen' due to the graves of two English miners that stood for decades by the nearby road. The Wigan Coal & Iron Company, of Wigan, Lancashire, worked a mine at Messelmoun for a period till 1881. Robert Grundy, rector of the mines, died on November 24, 1876, and Gordon William Bove on September 29, 1877, although nothing is known of the cause of their deaths. Bouchenoire took this shot of their grave in 1957. **Right:** The graves were vandalised after the 1962 independence and even these few stones still visible in 2010 are today gone, removed when the road was widened.



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documents, which, if found upon us, would make it pretty difficult.'

From then on, only Tessier, Le Nen, Murphy and Knight remained in the house's living room, having agreed to pose as somewhat inebriated members of a raucous social gathering, talking loudly and clanking bottles. They anxiously waited for news from Michel, or for the arrival of some police squad, while the tension increased below in the pitch-black cellar. In their post-war memoirs, both Clark and Murphy claimed that the French police actually visited the house while they were there — with the five American officers and the two SBS men holding their breath in the wine cellar and Murphy, Knight, Tessier and Le Nen pretending their drunken banquet party in the living room to mislead the unwanted visitors. As Clark described it, he even had to give Captain Courtney a piece of chewing gum from his own mouth to stop him from coughing and give away their hiding place. Fortunately, so they say, the gendarmes did not find anything suspicious and thereupon left.

However, a little-known account written after the war by Lieutenant Le Nen — which gives a detailed hour-by-hour description of the events — makes clear that in actual fact the police did not inspect the house. Le Nen and the other three prepared to act out an intoxicated banquet party going on in the house to deceive the police should they arrive but, so Le Nen asserts, he and Michel prevented actual intervention and nothing of the sort happened. The police did not arrive.

At about 1930 Le Nen went out to check the road. With no sign of anything abnormal, he then climbed down to the beach. The sea was becoming rough so he returned to report that they should not delay the departure any longer so the cellar party were let out. It was now about 2000 hours.

The Folbots were recovered from the room where they had been hidden and everybody proceeded down to the beach. Surf was still heavy and two sizeable breakers could be seen rolling just off shore. The Folbots were camouflaged in the scrub and sentries posted while the party waited out of sight.

At 2102, Captain Livingstone radioed *Seraph* to come in as close as possible and within a few minutes the SBS officer operating the infra-red receiver picked-up the response from the submarine.

General Clark and Captain Livingstone embarked first but, as reported by Captain Courtney of the SBS, 'they nearly got through but were capsized by a large wave'. Clark: 'The waves looked impossible, but we had to make a try during the full darkness or risk ruining the whole mission. I knew that I was going to be soaked, so I stripped to shorts and shirt. It was cold paddling about in the water. We tried one spot, and were immediately overturned by a wave. I had put my money-belt — containing several hundred dollars in gold — in my rolled-up trousers, not wishing to be weighted down by the gold in a turbulent surf and heavy undertow. My trousers and the money were lost at that time. This attempt convinced us that a launching was impossible in those circumstances.'

At 2149 the SBS team sent a radio message to the submarine stating that they could not leave yet and that she must stand by for a further message. The boats were concealed and the SBS men posted as sentries while the rest of the party went back to the house.

Michel then returned and reported what had happened. While patrolling the road east of the villa, he had come across the chief of the Cherchell police who directed him to follow him to Gouraya. Reaching the Gendarmerie there, Michel saw several Gendarmes and custom officials already assembled. The Chief of Police explained that they had been tipped off about some



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While Bouchenoire was taking his photos, a local man approached him, claiming to be the guard of the estate. It turned out that he was Belkacem Tayebi who had previously worked at the farm as a stable boy. (Mr Tessier had left the property after the fellagha attack of July 1956, fearing for his life.) He showed them the spot from where he had seen the submarine during that October night.



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The original wall of the villa's terrace still survives on top of the bluff.

smuggling activities at Messelmoun and that they were preparing a systematic search of the sector, although not until the following morning — news that lowered the tension in the house. (It has never been determined as to who tipped off the police. One possibility is that one of Tessier's servants, suspicious at being sent away so suddenly, talked openly about it in a local café, and someone overhearing this, and thinking that smuggling might be involved, had gone to the police hoping to collect a reward for the information.)

Michel then returned to Cherchell to inform the Chief of the Police that the reason

for all this was that the American consul in Algiers happened to be at Messelmoun, having a little party with friends at the Tessier villa. He also reported that Lieutenant Le Nen had already gone to the house to inquire.

It was now about 2200 and the surf was still very heavy. The Americans asked if a fishing-boat could be hired or bought to take the party out to the submarine but the French pointed out that in the current situation, with the security forces all poised to surprise smugglers, trying to buy a fishing boat in the dead of night would be a recipe for disaster.

At 2300 Michel returned from Cherchell with good news: the story of the American consul having a party had been accepted so at 0400 the party returned to the beach to check the state of the sea. At 0438 the SBS sent a message to the *Seraph* to come in as close as possible, and they soon picked up the R/G infra-red beam from the submarine that was in position five cables (about 3,000 feet) from the shore. There was still a nasty swell and breakers were still rolling in, so Clark was hesitating, still talking about finding a fishing-boat.

After another half hour had been lost, and with daylight approaching, at 0500 Clark finally decided to go. All the heavy gear was discarded and two members of the shore party waded through the surf to steady each boat. The first with Clark and Captain Wright got off successfully but the following boat with General Lemnitzer and Lieutenant Foot capsized. It was righted and sent on its way followed by the third boat with Colonel Hamblen and Captain Courtney. However the last boat with Colonel Holmes and Captain Livingstone overturned but they managed to right it. Le Nen remembered how Murphy gave a hug to each of the launching party, all soaked to the skin, wet and cold, after each successful launch.

Clark: 'We passed the first breaker alright, and I heaved a sigh of relief. Just then the second loomed up ahead, gleaming just a little in the starlight and appearing about a hundred feet high. We managed it, however, and were in the clear after we had passed the second breaker. Our musette bags and briefcases, loaded with the secret papers, were soaked, as were the papers I had stored inside my borrowed sweater. We seemed to be paddling for hours without seeing anything before we spotted the loom of the *Seraph* in the blackness.' (Once again, Clark embellished his tale for in the Mediterranean, even the strongest breakers might reach ten feet high, not one hundred!)

Elated by the success of the operation, the shore party cleared the beach of the many pieces of equipment left behind.

The Americans and the SBS party boarded *Seraph* wet through and exhausted. Clark said that he heard somewhere about the British Navy having a rum ration even on submarines but Jewell said that it was only for use in case of emergencies. When Clark replied that *this* was an emergency Jewell explained that an order to issue rum had to be signed by 'an officer of sufficient rank', so Clark immediately signed for a double rum ration all round!

Clark was worried that the wreckage of Holmes' Folbot, which had broken against the submarine and been left behind, might be washed up on the beach or, even worse, that the bag containing the letters that Murphy had given Holmes to deliver in England might come ashore. Much against Jewell's judgement, Clark ordered the submarine to surface in the afternoon long enough for a radio message to be sent to Gibraltar: 'Request you will notify McGowan [code-name for Murphy] that letters he handed Julius [Holmes] were lost when his canoe broke up. They were in a weighted musette bag which may have fallen out. Canoe may float inshore. Search of beach should be commenced immediately.'

At first light, Murphy, Knight, Tessier and Le Nen carried out a careful inspection of the beach to pick up everything left behind. Once all had been loaded into the Studebaker, Murphy and Knight left for Algiers. Le Nen then went to the police in Cherchell to confirm the story of the noisy party. The explanation was believed and all enquiries were dropped. Some days later, however, a trawler recovered a purse full of golden coins, binoculars and a sizeable batch of documents and maps. Having seen a submarine off shore, 'all black and silent' some nights before, the captain knew the documents could mean trouble



USNA

The 'Torch' landings were scheduled to begin on November 8 and on November 5, needing to be closer to the battle, Eisenhower transferred his headquarters from the UK to Gibraltar. That same day he had a series of publicity photos taken at his new command post, this one showing him together with Lieutenant Commander Harry C. Butcher, his naval aide.



USNA

Clark had returned to England from the 'Flagpole' mission on October 24, and he flew with Eisenhower and the rest of the 'Torch' HQ staff to Gibraltar on November 5. He and Eisenhower shared a tiny office in the subterranean command post, measuring eight by eight feet and featuring just two desks and a cot.

so he weighted them with ballast and dumped them in a deep part of the sea. The valuables he shared out amongst his crew but one of them proved too talkative and the police soon made enquiries. Fortunately, nothing compromising was found and the coins were deemed a legitimate find. (Those kept as souvenir by Paul Di Maio were four coins of 10 and 20 Canadian dollars, dated 1912 and with King George V on them.)

Later in the morning Mast and the 'Committee of Five' were informed of the successful ending of the operation. In the meantime, *Seraph* proceeded westwards to Gibraltar radioing on the morning of October 24:

'Consider weather condition ideal for transfer to Sunderland. Request you will have Sunderland rendezvous as soon as practicable.' A Catalina was then despatched from Gibraltar and at 1520 all passengers were reported transferred aboard the aircraft. Reaching Gibraltar, a message was sent to London to report the successful outcome and early on October 25 the party returned to England in the two B-17s.

Clark: 'On arrival after a rough, cold trip I went directly to Telegraph Cottage, Ike's country place, where he and Bedell Smith were waiting for me. I gave them a complete account of the affair. Ike was delighted, and

phoned the Prime Minister to tell him that I was back. Churchill asked us both for supper that night. I was too tired to accept.'

The Western Task Force, coming directly from the US, had by then already commenced its voyage to North Africa, and the other task forces were about to sail, yet the French were still unaware that the operation was so far advanced.

Murphy was afraid that the French had not been given enough time to implement the measures agreed, and he wanted to inform Mast, but on October 27 Eisenhower cabled him, ordering him to wait another eight days: 'You are authorised to notify Kingpin [Giraud] or Flagpole [Mast] on November 4th of the assault date (November 8).'

On November 6 — just two days before the 'Torch' landings — Général Giraud ('Kingpin') secretly escaped from Vichy France to join Allied HQ at Gibraltar, embarking in a fishing-boat at La Fossette (right), two kilometres east of Lavandou, to make for HMS *Seraph* waiting just off the bay. Below: Today a memorial marks the spot.



PICKING UP 'KINGPIN'

At the very last minute Général Giraud, code-named 'Kingpin', was finally given informal letters confirming the three central features of Allied policy. Dated November 2, they stated: (1) France will be fully restored to her pre-war boundaries and sovereign independence; (2) purely French national matters will be left for determination by the French without American interference; (3) the government of the United States regards the French nation as an ally and will deal with it as such.

Giraud had already received the documents when he was summoned to leave France. For him, the decision was not an easy one for the Allies required him to advance the date for rallying the French by several months. It also meant that simultaneous military action in southern France, which he considered vital to effective liberation of all France, had been abandoned. Nevertheless he decided to co-operate.



On November 8, all three landings — at Casablanca, Oran and Algiers — took place without serious opposition from French forces. That evening a cease-fire was sounded at Algiers after a

meeting between Général Alphonse Juin, Commander-in-Chief of the French forces in North Africa, and Major General Charles W. Ryder, the commander of the US 34th Infantry Division.

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It was now top priority to extract Giraud from southern France and take him to Gibraltar but, in order to uphold the American character of the operation, HMS *Seraph* was put under US command with Captain Wright (the same man who had made the secret trip with Clark) in charge.

Late on October 27, Captain Wright and Lieutenant Colonel Bradford Gaylord, USAAF, boarded the submarine which arrived in a position 50 miles to seaward of Toulon on October 30. There she lay for four days, awaiting news of the rendezvous. Orders finally arrived at 2100 on November 4 to proceed immediately to a position 15 miles off the Île du Levant and await instructions.

At 0200 on the 5th the submarine received message that 'Kingpin' and three others would embark on La Fossette, one mile east of Lavandou, at 2300 on November 5. Recognition signal was to be an 'S' on a blinker, answered from the submarine by a dimmed blue light.

During the forenoon of the 5th, the submarine made a brief periscope reconnaissance of the rendezvous from about 2,000 yards from shore, studying terrain, skyline and local activity, and then returned to seaward. At 1900 *Seraph* headed in toward the rendezvous, now on the surface but carefully trimmed down to awash condition. She rounded the northern point of the Île du Levant, about three miles off, and then headed direct for Lavandou. At 2020 a small boat was sighted so the submarine submerged but it proved impossible to fix position through the periscope. At 2300 *Seraph* fully surfaced and recorded bearings which placed her about 1,500 yards south-south-east of La Fossette Point. With swells rolling in from the north-east, conditions were poor and no signal could be seen from the beach.

At 0015 on the 6th a garbled message was flashed in French that was interpreted to mean 'wait one hour'. *Seraph* closed to within 1,000 yards of the point of rendezvous and at 0115 the first flash of 'S' was finally picked up from the shore.

At 0140, guided by the blue light from the submarine, a fishing-boat came alongside with four passengers in addition to a small crew: Général Giraud, Capitaine André Beaufre, Lieutenant de Vaisseau Hubert Viret and Aspirant Bernard Giraud, son of the general.

The *Seraph* retired on the surface at maximum speed on one engine, charging batteries on the other, but when a message was received from Gibraltar indicating that an aircraft would take off in the early hours of the 7th, it was then discovered that all the submarine's radio transmitters were out of commission, so no reply could be sent.

With the radio still unserviceable, Captain Wright decided to sail on the surface during daylight to try to spot the aircraft, and at 1130 a Catalina was sighted on the northern horizon, heading south-east. Fortunately they were spotted and the pilot made a perfect landing in spite of the choppy sea.

Passengers and baggage were brought up on deck and Folbots were about to be launched when an aircraft appeared on the horizon. Everyone and everything was cleared down below (except the Folbots) with the *Seraph* preparing to crash-dive but the plane, still unidentified, circled the area for about 20 minutes before disappearing to the north.

The crew now redoubled their efforts to transfer the passengers to the Catalina, one at a time in the Folbots, but the sea was still rough, washing over the forward casing. Even so, Giraud, in spite of his age, did a masterful job, landing in the Folbot without falling into the sea. Within 40 minutes, all six passengers — the four French and the two American officers — and their baggage were successfully transferred to the Catalina and the party arrived Gibraltar at 1520 on November 7.



ECPAD

In November 1943, on the first anniversary of the 'Torch' landings, Général Giraud awarded the Croix de Guerre to (L-R) Lieutenant-Colonel Jousse, Colonel Van Hecke, and Jacques Lemaigre-Dubreuil, the latter a member of the pro-Allied civilian 'Committee of Five'. Capitaine Lindsay-Watson, Henri d'Astier de la Vigerie, Jean Queyrat and Bernard Karsenty, all participants in the 'Flagpole' meeting, also received decorations that day, as well as other members of the Committee and other pro-Allied organisations that had taken action when the Allies landed. France also awarded the Croix de Guerre to several of the American and British participants in the historic meeting, while most of them were also honoured by their respective country, like Robert Murphy who received the Distinguished Service Medal and Lieutenant Jewell the MBE.

Conferring with Eisenhower, Giraud was briefed on Operation 'Torch', which was now only hours away, only to find out that the question of the inter-Allied command had not been agreed as he believed it had. His position, as he wrote to a fellow countryman,

was clear: 'We don't want the Americans to free us; we want them to help us free ourselves, which is not quite the same.' When Giraud decided to come on board, he firmly believed that he had President Roosevelt's acceptance of his explicit requirement that



USNA

For its audacity alone, Operation 'Flagpole' certainly deserved the flurry of awards but that could not change the fact that it had failed to achieve its primary goal, namely to have the French defences not fire a shot against the Allied invading forces. The main cause of this was that the meeting was laid on much too late, leaving no time for the pro-Allied French military and civilian authorities to take wide-scale measures. A decidedly positive result, however, was the large amount of accurate military information given to the American delegation by the French. On December 8, 1943, President Roosevelt was all smiles when he awarded General Clark with the Distinguished Service Cross at Castelvetrano, Sicily, albeit not for his role in 'Flagpole' but for his command of the US Fifth Army in the invasion of Italy.

Right: With the 'Torch' landings a success, an agreement was soon signed with Admiral Darlan, the Allies recognising him as High Commissioner for French North and West Africa. This photo of Darlan and Clark shaking hands under the eyes of Maréchal Pétain almost symbolically illustrates the American willingness to deal with any French authority. Churchill saw the risk and warned Roosevelt that the Allies may appear 'ready to make terms with local Quislings'! The problem soon solved itself for on December 24 — just seven weeks after 'Torch' — Darlan was shot dead by a young Frenchman, Fernand Bonnier de la Chapelle. Giraud then took over as High Commissioner. Roosevelt and Churchill decided to meet to plan Allied strategy for the next phase of the war and they met in January 1943 in French Morocco for the 'Symbol' Conference in Casablanca. Both Giraud and de Gaulle were invited but de Gaulle was late in arriving and Roosevelt told his son Elliott that he knew the reason why: 'Our friend Winston has not chosen to bid him to come yet'. De Gaulle finally arrived and the President first received Giraud and then de Gaulle and he did his best to convince each of them to work with the other. Roosevelt finally succeeded to have the two outside for an official handshake in front of the Press.



USNA



Left: Certainly a very positive result of the 'Flagpole' meeting and the deal with Giraud was the swift re-arming of the French Army. On January 24, 1943, Roosevelt signed an 'Agreement in Principle' to provide the materiel required for three armoured and eight infantry divisions, as well as 1,000 first-line aircraft, and to extensively re-equip the French navy. In spite of logistic constraints (priority in shipping went to supply the Allied forces landing in Sicily and Italy) the results were impressive, and the divisions were formed and trained right that summer. A French Expeditionary Corps of four divisions joined the fighting on the Italian front under the US Fifth Army in November, soon taking part in the battles of Monte Cassino. Much of the credit for the swift rebirth of the French army was due to Giraud, seen here in July 1943 posing in front of a Curtiss P-40 of Groupe de Chasse II-5, the famous Escadrille Lafayette just re-created in Algiers. However, a self-confessed soldier with no interest in politics, he proved unequal to the task of High Commissioner and Eisenhower had to report that he was 'reactionary and old-fashioned' and had 'no, repeat no, political acumen whatsoever'. In June 1943, the French Committee of National Liberation (FCNL) was established in Algiers under the shared leadership of de Gaulle and Giraud. However, Giraud progressively lost importance and he finally chose to retire in April 1944, having served in the French Army for 44 years. He passed away in Dijon on March 11, 1949.

he be the Inter-Allied Supreme Commander wherever Allied troops fought beside French troops on French soil. At some point in his negotiations, if not through Murphy, a memorandum listing the four conditions governing his acceptance was returned initialled 'OK. Roosevelt'. This memorandum has survived although its authenticity cannot be established.

Giraud was convinced that he must appear before the French as a free national leader, not as the appointee of the Allies, and with resolute persistence, he refused to accept the secondary role which the Allies had planned for him: that of Commander-in-Chief of French forces only.

Although the matter became the subject of a prolonged and sometimes heated discussion, extending well beyond the time when the transports had begun to disembark troops, Giraud realised that he had been dealt a fait accompli. With Operation 'Torch' now underway, the pro-Allied French in Algiers, in ignorance of Giraud's whereabouts and status, were obliged to proceed without his support. On November 8, after the landings had been announced and President Roosevelt had sent a message of profound friendship with France, Général Giraud broadcast an appeal for support for the Allies.



ECPAD

Of the three armoured divisions created in 1943, the 2ème Division Blindée went to England to take part in the Normandy landings in June 1944, while the 1ère and 5ème Divisions Blindées remained in the Mediterranean to take part in the Riviera landings in August.