

THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE—  
AN HISTORIC MEETING OF  
WORLD WAR II ALLIES

HON. BENJAMIN A. GILMAN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 14, 1999

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, the following article by Ambassador Joseph Verner Reed, former U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, from the March 1999 Newsletter of the American Society of the French Legion of Honor, documents the war time diplomacy between the United States and Great Britain. The Casablanca Conference between President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill took place in early 1943, and as this article documents set the stage for the end game of World War II in the European theater.

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THE CASABLANCA CONFERENCE, JANUARY 1943

(By Ambassador Joseph Verner Reed)

In the spring edition of the ASFLH Newsletter (June 1998, Vol. 5, No. 2), an article on the history of the White House by our President, Guy Wildenstein, caught my eye. Regarding the historic 1943 meeting of President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill in Casablanca, Morocco, it was noted that Marshall Josef Stalin and General Charles de Gaulle were also participants at the conference. In point of clarification, Marshall Stalin did not attend the Casablanca Conference. General de Gaulle had a "cameo role" on the last day of the ten-day event.

Herewith are some details on the Casablanca Conference which took place in Morocco in early 1943—a summit meeting which determined the future course of American and British wartime operations and history.

As a former Ambassador to Morocco, I spent many days at the elegant Villa Mirador, the official residence of the Consul General of the US in Casablanca. Villa Mirador served as Prime Minister Churchill's residence during the Casablanca Conference. President Roosevelt was hosted nearby in Villa Dar es Saada (House of Happiness). The master bedroom is located on the ground floor—a suitable layout for the handicapped President.

In the closing months of 1942, debate over European strategy had entered a new stage. On November 25, President Roosevelt wrote to Prime Minister Churchill that a high level meeting should be held with the Russians, perhaps in Cairo or Moscow itself, to discuss the Alliance war effort. The US had been at war for less than a full year. Roosevelt and Churchill had yet to meet jointly with Stalin to discuss the basic strategy of their "Alliance"—an odd alliance forged only through the necessity of combating a common enemy—Nazi Germany and the apocalyptic horrors of World War II.

Roosevelt, believing a meeting of the Alliance would be held in Cairo, proposed to Churchill in a second letter dated December 2, 1942, to have a private bilateral Anglo-American meeting at a site south of Algiers or in Khartoum prior to meeting with the Russians. The President wanted to keep this advance meeting secret as he did "not want to give Stalin the impression we are settling everything between ourselves before we meet him." In his letter, Roosevelt noted that "Stalin has already agreed to a purely military conference to be held in Moscow."

Two weeks later, on December 17, 1942, Roosevelt reported to Churchill that Stalin had sent a reply expressing his regret that he would be unable to attend a meeting of the Alliance leadership as it was "impossible for me [Stalin] to leave the Soviet Union either in the near future or even at the beginning of March. Front business absolutely prevents

it, demanding my constant presence near our troops." (N.B. During the winter of '42-'43, Marshall Stalin was in day-to-day command of the defense of Stalingrad.)

In his communiqué Stalin said nothing about a military meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill in Moscow—a proposal to which Roosevelt believed Stalin had already agreed. Roosevelt sent word back to the Kremlin that he was "deeply disappointed" with Stalin's reply. Marshall Stalin responded by stating they could discuss questions by correspondence until they were able to meet in the future. On substantive issues, Stalin wrote, "I think we shall not differ."

In that same message, Marshall Stalin called for the opening of a Second Front in Europe. "I feel confident," he went on, "the promise to open a Second Front in Europe, which you, Mr. President, and Mr. Churchill gave for 1942, or the spring of 1943 at the latest, will be kept and that a Second Front in Europe will be opened jointly by Great Britain and the USA next spring." Thus, without having to attend, Marshall Stalin left his imprimatur on the proposed Allied conference by raising the question of a Second Front.

Even without Marshall Stalin, President Roosevelt believed he should meet face-to-face with Prime Minister Churchill to discuss the war effort. But where? England was out as a meeting place "for political reasons," and the President wanted to depart the highly charged atmosphere of Washington. With no Josef Stalin, the US and British leaders would have no need for foreign affairs specialists because their discussions would be essentially military-related. Foreign Secretary Eden and Secretary of State Hull did not attend. Was it possible to meet in a convenient and recently vanquished territory under Allied control? What about Morocco?

On December 21, 1942, Roosevelt wrote to Churchill proposing a meeting in "a safe place—Casablanca." Churchill agreed. The conference was code-named "Symbol."

The President departed on January 11 from Miami, Florida, for his fourth official meeting with Prime Minister Churchill. The Casablanca Conference turned out to be the first in a series of great midwar international conferences.

January 11 was further marked as an historic occasion as it was the first time a US President had flown in an aircraft while in office. It was also the first time that a sitting American President had left the US in a time of war.

President Roosevelt's departure and his destination were carefully guarded secrets. The Navy Department was assigned responsibility for overseeing all travel operations. Casablanca, the site of the conference, lay across the hazardous Atlantic; a circuitous route covering some 7,372 air miles was selected, and the presidential party was in the air and taxiing for 46 hours and 38 minutes (ample time for talks with the Presidential Advisor Harry Hopkins, cards and martinis).

The President and his entourage boarded a Pan American World Airways "Flying Boat" Clipper Ship (a Boeing 314) in Miami, Florida (the Dixie Clipper). They flew to Port of Spain, Trinidad—on to Belem in Brazil—then on to Bathurst, a former British colony in The Gambia, West Africa.

An identical back-up Clipper followed the President's plane as a precautionary measure—setting further precedent for the tradition of two identical Air Force Ones to be flown in tandem as the US President travels. Roosevelt and his entourage then transferred to an Air Transport Command plane of the Army Air Corps (a C-54) for the last leg of the journey—the flight to Casablanca.

President Roosevelt arrived in Casablanca on the afternoon of January 14, 1943. Prime Minister Churchill arrived the day before. The Hotel Anfa was to serve as the conference headquarters. The hotel and the villas surrounding it were renamed "Anfa Camp" for the duration of the conference.

Surrounded by palm trees, bougainvillea, orange groves and with sparkling sunny skies overhead, the conference was still held amidst a wartime atmosphere. The perimeter of Anfa Camp was protected by barbed wire entanglements with only two entrances guarded by sentries; heavily armed infantrymen kept watch on the Hotel Anfa and all residential villas, and the skies were filled with patrolling fighter squadrons.

Only two months previously, the Allies had landed in Morocco on November 8, 1942. A fellow member of our Society, General Vernon A. Walters, landed as a 2nd Lieutenant in the coastal port of Safi, south of Casablanca in Operation Torch. (The other landings were at Port Lyautey [now Kenitra] and Mohammedia.)

Though the strange alliance of the Western Powers and the Soviet Union was linked by the common bond of Axis danger, they had yet to agree on an overall strategy for containing and confronting the Wehrmacht German Army, and, in January 1943, the issue of opening a Second Front in Western Europe remained entirely an unresolved issue.

Even between the US and the UK, fundamental war strategy and joint planning for the immediate future were unsettled. These were not easy matters, and in addition to plenary sessions, the participants of the Casablanca Conference carried on informal discussions over luncheon and dinner. The dinners sometimes lasted into the early hours of the next morning!

Even so, the Casablanca Conference progressed and, at its conclusion, marked many strategic milestones and decisions. During the ten-day event, the two groups of leaders and advisors held fifteen separate official joint meetings. The military objectives derived from the intense deliberations in Casablanca were:

Defeat the German submarine force in the Atlantic.

Increase the number of American troops in Great Britain.

Strengthen the air campaign against Nazi Germany.

Attempt to bring Turkey into the war against the Axis.

Prepare for the ultimate invasion of Western Europe.

Invade Sicily.

At the conference, President Roosevelt first introduced the principle of "unconditional surrender" of the Axis—a concept that was to have important consequences for the Allied Coalition for the remainder of the war.

While in Casablanca, President Roosevelt also had a dinner meeting with the Sultan of Morocco, Mohammed V, on January 22. Among the subjects discussed was "post-war colonial liberation." Did this "exchange of views" between President Roosevelt and Sultan Mohammed V that evening portend independence for Morocco?

Toward the end of the conference, General Charles de Gaulle was "invited" from England to meet with Roosevelt and Churchill. General de Gaulle, the London-based leader of "the Free French Government in Exile," arrived in Casablanca on January 22. On the last day of the conference, the U.S. President and the British Prime Minister met separately with de Gaulle and General Henri Giraud, the High Commissioner of French Africa, who had replaced Admiral Darlan after the latter's assassination in Algiers on December 24, 1942.

Both Giraud and de Gaulle were rivals for leadership of the Free French. The conference was winding down, and though the President and the Prime Minister considered the ten-day effort a "great success," the exception was a failure to obtain a real conciliation between Generals Giraud and de Gaulle.

Nonetheless, it was an important public relations objective to demonstrate "solidarity," and on January 24, Lord Moran, the personal physician of Prime Minister Churchill, wrote in his diary, "The President decided the lawn behind his bungalow, Villa

Dar es Saada, should be the site of an interesting ceremony . . .”

The Allied war effort continued. General George C. Marshall was immediately dispatched to Moscow to debrief Marshall Stalin on the results of the conference. When Stalin learned that Roosevelt and Churchill had decided to forego, for the immediate future, a Second Front through an invasion of France, he declined to receive General Marshall. For the Russians, the “Great Patriotic War” would go on for another year and a half before the opening of a Second Front with the Normandy invasion in June 1944.

Later that year, President Roosevelt did meet with Marshall Stalin in Teheran, Iran, for the first time on November 28—December 1, 1943. Despite Stalin’s disappointment over the timing of the Second Front, at the final dinner Marshall Stalin made the memorable toast, “Without America, we [Russia] would already have lost the war.” (N.B. Churchill first met Stalin in Moscow, in July 1942.)

NAPERVILLE (IL) LIBRARIES RANK NUMBER ONE IN THE UNITED STATES

**HON. JUDY BIGGERT**

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, September 14, 1999*

Mrs. BIGGERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer my warmest congratulations to the city of Naperville and its two public libraries.

For the second year in a row, the Naperville Public Libraries have been named the number one public library system in the United States when compared with other facilities of comparable size.

The ranking revealed in a recent article in the magazine “American Libraries,” looked at factors such as collection turnover, materials expenditure per capita, periodicals per 1,000

residents, cost per circulation and circulation per full-time employment staff hour.

It’s time that public libraries receive more recognition. They are the great equalizer in our society as they ensure free and unlimited access to invaluable educational resources for anyone who simply has the desire to learn.

Librarians and employees continually go above and beyond the call of duty with their exceptional service and commitment to provide enriching and enlightening information to everyone in the community.

Libraries enhance our knowledge of ourselves and the world around us. Great libraries, like Nicols and Naper Boulevard, deserve our highest praise and recognition.

Congratulations to the Naperville Public Libraries—the very best in their class