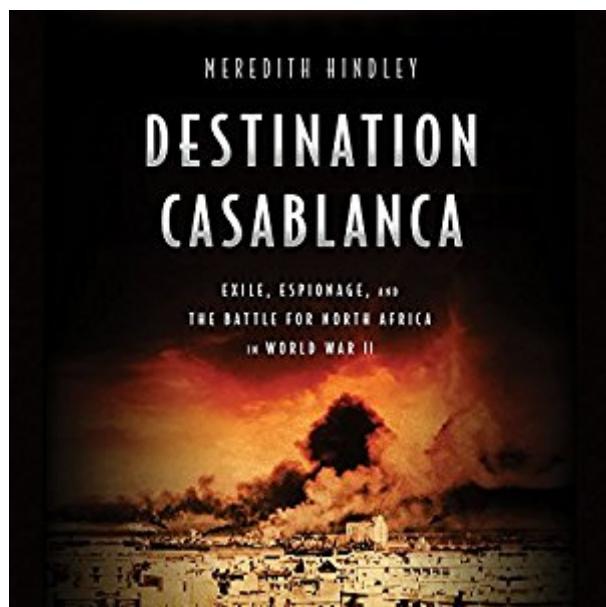


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Destination Casablanca: Exile, Espionage, And The Battle For North Africa In World War II



Synopsis

In November 1942, as a part of Operation Torch, 33,000 American soldiers sailed undetected across the Atlantic and stormed the beaches of French Morocco. Seventy-four hours later, the Americans controlled the country and one of the most valuable wartime ports: Casablanca. In the years preceding, Casablanca had evolved from an exotic travel destination to a key military target after France's surrender to Germany. Jewish refugees from Europe poured in, hoping to obtain visas and passage to the United States and beyond. Nazi agents and collaborators infiltrated the city in search of power and loyalty. The resistance was not far behind, as shopkeepers, celebrities, former French Foreign Legionnaires, and disgruntled bureaucrats formed a network of Allied spies. But once in American hands, Casablanca became a crucial logistical hub in the fight against Germany - and the site of Roosevelt and Churchill's demand for "unconditional surrender". Rife with rogue soldiers, power grabs, and diplomatic intrigue, Destination Casablanca is the riveting and untold story of this glamorous city - memorialized in the classic film - at the heart of World War II.

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Customer Reviews

"Destination Casablanca" explores the Moroccan theater of World War II, especially Casablanca, colonial French Morocco's major port, which was taken by Allied forces in Operation Torch in November 1942. Meredith Hindley is a historian and senior writer for "Humanities", the quarterly review of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and she has written a history of French Morocco's role in World War II for the general reader. She tackles the topic in three parts. Part 1, "Collaboration and Resistance", the first half of the book, covers events and circumstances leading

up to the American invasion. Part 2, "Torching Morocco", takes place mostly in November 1942 and provides blow-by-blow details of the military operation and subsequent cease-fire negotiations with the French military. Part 3, "Men Pass, France and Morocco Remain", addresses the challenges of the American occupation and debates over the provisional French government. Hindley provides some history of Casablanca, including what the city was like in the 1930s, in her prologue. It was a city of 350,000 residents in 1939, one-third of them European. As there does not seem to be enough World War II intrigue in Casablanca to fill a book this size, the author pads it out with stories of people who passed through: American performer Josephine Baker was convalescing in Casablanca during the invasion and later performed at the opening of the Liberty Club, a social club for both black and white GIs. Author Arthur Koestler passed through Casablanca en route to Lisbon after joining the French Foreign Legion to escape France. Capt. Antoine de Saint, a French pilot who flew reconnaissance, wrote a popular memoir about his time flying for Aeropostale in North Africa and South America. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's daughter-in-law and granddaughter spent time as refugees in Casablanca while they tried to get permission to enter the United States. Hindley tries not to miss a colorful character, but the story of Casablanca's involvement in the war is primarily a story of the complex politics of Vichy and Free France, delicate negotiations with the revolving French High Commissioner for North Africa, the obstinate Resident General of French Morocco, Charles Nogues, the adventures of indefatigable Robert Murphy, FDR's special envoy to North Africa, and the American intelligence networks in Morocco, established by David King, Stafford Reid, and Arabic-speaking Lt. Col. William Eddy, who were subsumed into the OSS in June 1942. Hindley periodically cuts to war planning between American President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and their Combined Chiefs of Staff, which planned and coordinated the war. The author returns repeatedly to the plight of refugees in Casablanca and French Morocco, emphasizing the charitable work of Jewish organizer Helene Benatar. In several passages toward the end of the book, as well as in a postscript, the author addresses what is and is not realistic about the popular 1942 film "Casablanca", released before the American invasion. This is a nice addition, and Hindley is a good writer. She's writing for a popular audience, hence the emphasis on personalities and saying in 426 pages what could be said in 250. But Hindley is a historian as well as raconteur, so there is a lot of good information here. "Destination Casablanca" is a little slice in the history of Morocco as well as a piece of the World War II puzzle, so the book has two audiences. It is a little disconcerting to read about FDR and Churchill plotting an invasion of French Morocco in defiance of the advice of their militaries, but that is politics. Readers might have benefitted from more discussion of the impossible situation of French military brass were, caught

between two opposing French patriotisms, but generally a good book.

Meredith Hindley has written an entertaining, eminently readable history of Casablanca's role in World War II. Most of us know our "history" from Humphrey Bogart's classic film, "Casablanca." In *DESTINATION CASABLANCA*, Hindley reaches a level of detail that makes the reader feel that she was there. It is not a simple tale. The French were fractured between Petain and Vichy, De Gaulle and the Free French, Occupied France, and a number of other groups, many supportive of the Allies. The United States, new to the war following the attack on Pearl Harbor and Germany's unilateral declaration, were seeking a victory on the world stage. *DESTINATION CASABLANCA* is a book that outlines the balancing act between the Allies, the battle of ego between generals, honorable soldiers torn between country and conscience. The détente between Jew and Muslim in Casablanca frays during the war as Vichy anti-Semitic laws are enforced as the behest (though willingly supported by Vichy) of the Nazis. The history reads like a novel. Josephine Baker makes an appearance, with her role as a "spy" well documented. Maurice Chevalier comes off as a collaborator. In the game of power politics, Charles De Gaulle proves to be the uncanny winner, brushing aside his peers with a haughty disdain. General Mark Clark and General George Patton are sharply drawn, warts and all. Patton comes off the better, and in truth he was the superior battlefield commander. Hindley makes a reference or two to the movie. One of the best scenes of the book is the Roosevelt White House viewing of the film on New Year's Eve 1943. Be prepared to learn a lot about French North Africa, Morocco, Casablanca, the nearly two week conference in Casablanca between Churchill and Roosevelt. The port of Casablanca was also the scene of a massive naval battle, pitting the Vichy fleet against the American force sent for the invasion. There was certainly not home field advantage as nearly the entire French fleet and hundreds of sailors met their collective ends. A masterful work of scholarship.

A very engaging and thoroughly researched account of how Casablanca came to be one of the most important ports and shipping supply centers during World War 2. The book is so full of information that sometimes it bogs down, but military history buffs and anyone with even a small interest in Morocco and its surrounding area will be pleased reading it. The section on resistance fighters is one of the best, and I'd venture to say most readers wouldn't make the connection to Josephine Baker. A bit long but well worth the read.

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