The possibility of a landing in Europe had been mooted but it was too early for such an undertaking and the Americans favoured the British suggestion of an invasion of North Africa. This was justified on a number of counts. The war had been waged there for nearly three years, the British had gathered a substantial force there, opposed by the German Afrika Corps. The Italians too had a large army there. The control of North Africa was an ideal starting-point for an invasion of the European Continent. Thus in July 1942 the decision was taken to plan the operation, which was given the code name \textit{Torch}.\footnote{J. Garliński, \textit{Poland in the Second World War} © Józef Garliński 1985}

Erwin Rommel tried to turn back the fortunes of war and in June 1942 he launched a new offensive in which he captured Tobruk and again reached the gates of Egypt, where however he was halted. On the last day of August the Germans attacked again and again were held. The balance of forces tipped in favour of the British. Despite his victory General Auchinleck was transferred to India and his place...
as Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East was taken over by General Harold Alexander. He had previously commanded the Eighth Army whose command was now taken over by General Bernard Montgomery. There were no Polish units in the Eighth Army as the forces evacuated from the USSR and the Carpathian Brigade were undergoing a reorganisation in Iraq.2

Knowing that Churchill expected from him a total victory and the destruction of the enemy, Montgomery was in no hurry to launch his counter-offensive. He gathered his strength and only on 23 October 1942 did he attack the German positions at El Alamein. After ten days of fighting, the German retreat began, through Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. However Field Marshal Rommel’s army was not destroyed and was to play an important role in the further battles. Among other factors Montgomery’s victory was so quick because he received copies of the Germans most secret orders, sent by radio, thanks to the cracking of the Enigma secret.

Montgomery’s offensive was synchronised with the landings of the Western Allies in Morocco and Algieria which took place on 8 November. The American General Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) was in overall command of the operation.3

THE CONFERENCE IN CASABLANCA AND ‘UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER’

Not long after the successful landings Roosevelt and Churchill met in Casablanca, on 14–24 January 1943, to discuss future strategy with their military commanders and political advisers. It was decided that after establishing total control in North Africa, the invasion of Sicily and then the Italian peninsula should be undertaken. It was expected that victory there would come quickly, that Mussolini would fall and in that way the ‘Berlin–Rome Axis’ would be broken. At that time the British and Americans had not decided on any future plans on how to take advantage of the expected victory in the Mediterranean basin. However the first difference of opinion arose between Roosevelt and Churchill, as the latter attached a basic importance to an attack on the continent through the Balkans.4

An event occurred at the end of the conference with was to play an important role in the further prosecution of the war and in future political decisions. During the press conference, Roosevelt, without prior consultation with Churchill, declared that the only logical