

## On a Hill in Malta

An interesting glimpse into the leadership – and trust in God – of Dwight David (Ike) Eisenhower, a five-star general in the United States Army and the 34<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, from 1953 until 1961, is afforded during his wartime responsibilities.

During World War II, Eisenhower served as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe, with responsibility for planning and supervising the successful invasion of France and Germany in 1944-45 from the Western Front.

The incident providing a personal insight occurred during the Siege of Malta, a Southern European country consisting of an archipelago situated centrally in the Mediterranean, south of Sicily and east of Tunisia. The Siege of Malta was a fight for control of the strategically important island of Malta and pitted the air forces and navies of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany against the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy.

The opening of a new front in North Africa in mid-1940 increased Malta's already considerable value. British air and sea forces based on the island could attack Axis ships transporting vital supplies and reinforcements from Europe. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, in command of Axis forces in North Africa, recognized its importance quickly. In May 1941, he warned, "Without Malta the Axis will end by losing control of North Africa."

As the campaign got under way, Gen. Eisenhower, surrounded by his staff officers, stood on a high hill overlooking Malta harbor. In the light of a full moon shining down on the sea, he watched the troop-laden ships weigh anchor and sail out into the mists, while squadrons of planes roared into the sky.

Deeply moved, Eisenhower sprang to attention and saluted the heroic men. Then he bowed his head in silent prayer, his staff joining him in this brief act of devotion.

Turning to an officer beside him, Eisenhower said: "There comes a time when you've used your brains, your training, your technical skill, and the die is cast. The events are in the hands of God, and there you have to leave them."

The Axis resolved to bomb or starve Malta into submission by attacking its ports, towns, cities and Allied shipping supplying the island. Malta was one of the most intensively bombed areas during the war. The German and Italian air forces flew a total of 3,000 bombing raids over a period of two years in an effort to destroy Royal Air Force defenses and the ports. But by December 1942, Allied air and

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sea forces operating from Malta went over to the offensive, and by May 1943, they had sunk 230 Axis ships in 164 days, the highest Allied sinking rate of the war. The Allied victory played a major role in the eventual Allied success in North Africa.

For each of us, there come times in our lives when we face challenges of one kind or another. As we confront each difficulty, God stands ready to guide us in the application of our brains, the abilities He has given us, and then the smart thing to do is to leave the matter in His hands.

– Beecher Hunter