

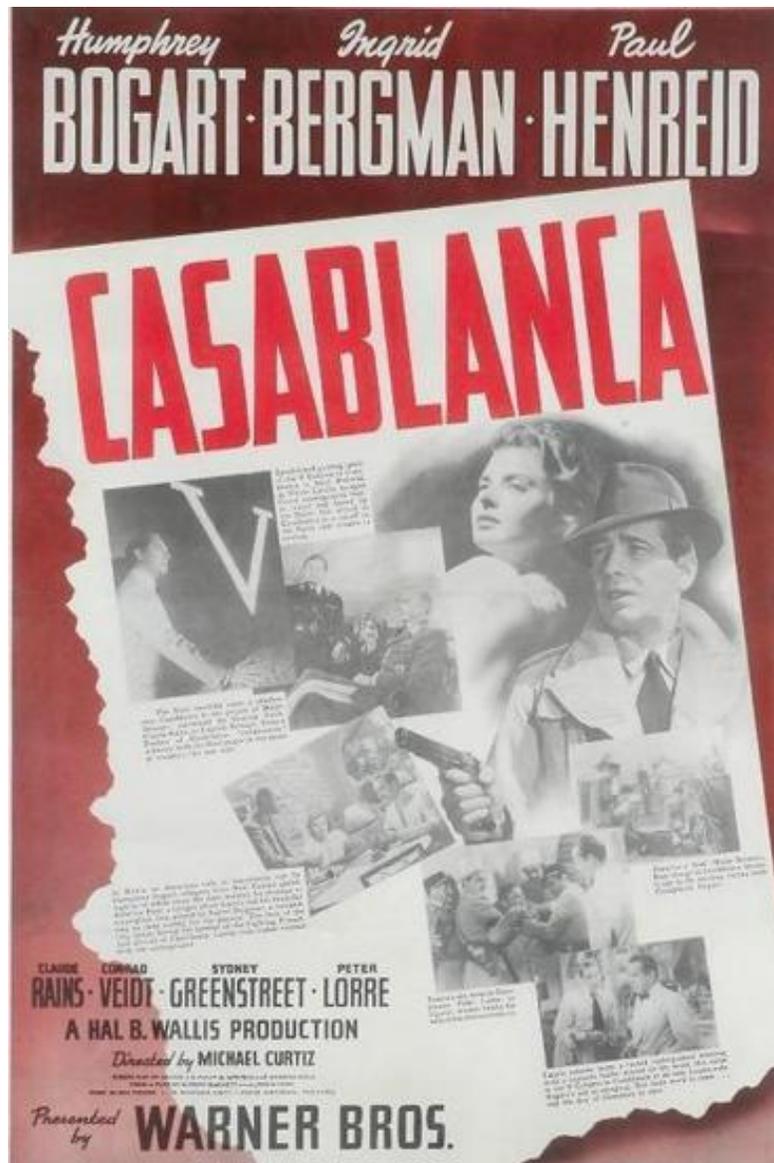
THE BOSTON GLOBE

THE METRO MINUTE

Here's looking at you, Casablanca

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THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF WORLD WAR II

A movie poster for "Casablanca," which premiered 75 years ago this month.

"Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine."

That town was Casablanca, and not only was it the scene of the most oft-quoted movie in Hollywood history, it was America's point of entry into the war against Hitler.

"Casablanca," a cinematic tale of love and moral ambiguity set in the Vichy-controlled Moroccan port (and filmed on a studio lot in Burbank, Calif.), premiered less than three weeks after US and British forces launched the Allied invasion of French North Africa on Nov. 8, 1942.

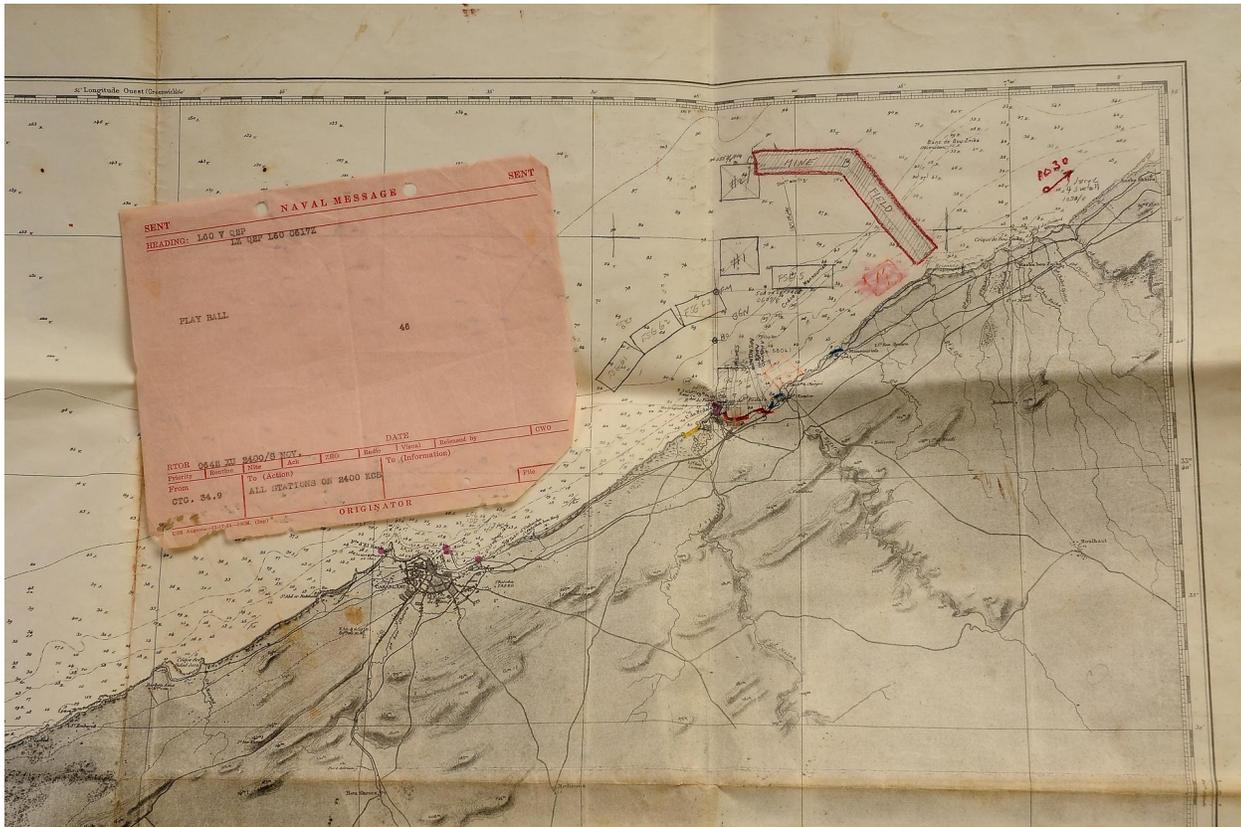
On **Wednesday** — 75 years to the day after "Operation Torch" — The International Museum of World War II in **Natick** will open a special exhibition called "The Real and Reel Casablanca; American troops enter World War II, Landing in North Africa."

And yes, there are memorabilia from the film starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Original movie posters. A chair from Rick's cafe. Bogie's hand-written chess moves for the game he plays on screen. Round up the usual suspects!

But the "real" artifacts are pretty fascinating, too. Did you know that the orders to attack came in a decoded message from General Dwight D. Eisenhower to Major General George S. Patton, who was waiting on a command ship off the coast of Casablanca? "PLAY BALL," it said, and there was no turning back.



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Major General George S. Patton's annotated invasion map of Casablanca, with General Dwight D. Eisenhower's decoded message to attack: "PLAY BALL."

In our present era of Internet espionage and cyberattacks, it's startling to see such a world-changing message typed on a dog-eared slip of pink paper. Or a map of Casablanca's coast marked up by Patton, who in turn was immortalized in a 1972 movie while the Vietnam War raged.

But isn't that how Hollywood works? Spinning a complex reality into a tale that resonates with audiences, who in turn reshape reality influenced by the story they just heard? How many Americans struggled with their own Bogie-like cynicism before finally deciding that they, too, were ready to fight the Nazis?

After all, even months after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, it was unclear how and when American soldiers would join the battle against Hitler.

“Operation Torch was one of only two direct orders given by President Roosevelt, overriding his military commanders,” the museum’s website notes. “After Pearl Harbor, the President, at the urging of Churchill, decided that American forces would focus on defeating Nazi Germany first, and Japan later. How to do this, and in what order, was a matter of great controversy at the time.”

Coincidentally, the filming of “Casablanca” wrapped up just a few months before there were news reels about Operation Torch.

“Where in the world was Casablanca? wondered many anxious Americans,” says the museum’s website. “They were about to find out, both the real and the Hollywood versions.”

The International Museum of World War II is located at 8 Mercer Road, Natick. For museum hours and admission, call 508-651-1944 or [visit imwwii.org](http://imwwii.org).

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