

5 Commando to capture the beaches, embarking them with minimum transport in the four assault ships semi-permanently allotted to the Expeditionary Force for training and operational purposes; secondly, by the use of 17 Infantry Brigade Group, already embarked close stowed in convoy WS 17, as the second brigade; thirdly by the immediate acceptance by 29 Independent Brigade of the modified "Bonus" plan for the assault forces. If the operation was postponed after sailing, a brigade group from 2 Division in WS 18 would take the place of 17 Infantry Brigade Group.

This plan had certain serious disadvantages. The first was that Force H.Q., 29 Independent Brigade, 5 Commando, and Force troops were reduced to what could be put in the four assault ships. Examination of the problem showed that this was only possible by making severe reductions in the personnel and even severer reductions in vehicles previously considered essential. The second disadvantage was that 17 Infantry Brigade Group had no experience or training in combined operations, and its personnel and vehicles had been embarked as for a normal WS convoy and not for an assault landing. Neither time nor shipping was available to rectify this.

5. Embarkation of vehicles and stores in the four assault ships was to commence on 18th March, and all planning had to be completed to this schedule. After examination of the new intelligence available, which did not as yet include the air photographs, we decided that our previous plans were sound and could be carried out with the reduced forces available. On the military side, new topographical information suggested that the beaches were far better than was originally reported. The postponement of the operation from April to May placed it at the beginning of the dry season, which considerably reduced anticipated difficulties of advance along the only, very doubtful, road which was available. Thanks to this and "Bonus" Captain Garnons-Williams and myself were able to meet Brigadier Festing and Brigadier G. W. B. Tarleton, commanding 29 Independent Brigade and 17 Infantry Brigade respectively, and my advisers and heads of services, all of whom arrived in London on the morning of 15th March, with a completed outline-plan and an outline draft of the Force operation order.

From the 15th March to 19th March, Captain Garnons-Williams, Brigadier Festing and myself with our staffs were engaged in close co-operation in preparing the necessary plans for loading the ships and completing necessary preparations for the Force to leave the United Kingdom.

6. A difficult combined problem was to decide in detail the composition of the naval and military forces to be embarked in the four assault ships; *H.M.S. Keren* and *Karanja*, *M.Vs. Winchester Castle* and *Sobieski*. To these were to be added *H.M.S. Royal Ulsterman* and *Bachaquero*. These two ships could not meet the convoy until arrival at Durban, and any troops and vehicles required to make the assault from them had either to be embarked in the four assault ships or be taken from those units already embarked with 17 Infantry Brigade Group. The four assault ships could take an approximate total of 323 officers, 4,753 O.Rs. and 115 vehicles. Of these 76 officers,

499 O.Rs., were finally allotted to Force H.Q. and Force troops including the Docks Operating Company: 38 officers, 328 O.Rs. to Royal Navy: leaving 209 officers, 3,926 O.Rs. for the fighting troops of the assault force. It must be realised that this small allotment of H.Q. and Force troops had to command and administer not only the assault force, but also 17 Infantry Brigade Group, and later the 13 Infantry Brigade Group which was to be added to the Force. In addition they were to be faced with the problems of the control and consolidation of the captured base.

I had also, in this short planning period, to hand over the command of the Royal Marine Division. It was a great disappointment to the two Royal Marine Brigades that they were not employed on this operation, from which they were excluded by the need for extreme speed in embarkation and by the chance disposition of the brigades when the operation was ordered. 29th Brigade were quite fortuitously embarked in the assault ships for exercises and these assault ships were then actually detailed for the operation.

7. On 17th March I met Major-General H. P. M. Berney-Ficklin, commanding 5 Division from which 17 Infantry Brigade Group was to be taken. On the 18th March, I was interviewed by the Chiefs of Staff on my plans for the operation and on 19th March I met the Prime Minister. On the evening of the same day I left for my H.Q. at Melrose, and on 21st March embarked in *M.V. Winchester Castle* which sailed on the 23rd March. On the 22nd March I saw Lieutenant-General E. C. A. Schreiber, commanding the Expeditionary Force which I was now leaving. I thanked him for the great assistance that his staff had given to Force 121, and handed over 101 and 102 R.M. Brigades to his direct command.

During this brief and very fully occupied planning and embarkation period, very great assistance was given to us all by HQ Expeditionary Force. Without it the expedition could not have sailed, in the time and the state of preparation it did. I was also assisted by those branches of the War Office concerned and by the Adviser of Combined Operations and his staff.

The speed with which the revised operation was mounted was only possible because of the experience that all the staffs, advisers and services concerned had gained in planning previous projects, and carrying out exercises based on them.

THE PASSAGE TO THE THEATRE OF OPERATIONS.

The Completion of the Plan for the Assault.

8. Captain Garnons-Williams, Brigadier Festing and myself with limited staffs had embarked in *M.V. Winchester Castle*. We were therefore able to continue our study of the operation in constant consultation. Owing to the short planning period, detailed study of the operation, other than that required for embarkation and loading, had not been possible for Brigadier Festing and his staff. Immediately before sailing the air photographs of the beach area had been received on board *M.V. Winchester Castle* (Unfortunately the photographs stopped a few miles short of Antsirane and thus missed the final prepared defence