

*The Approach of the Convoy and the Despatch of Landing Craft.*

15. The convoy approached Courier and Ambararata Bays from the West. The leading assault ship, *M.V. Winchester Castle* anchored outside the range of the coast defence guns in case these were not silenced by daylight. Assault Landing Craft and Motor Landing Craft were lowered from the *Winchester Castle* the *Keren* and *Karanja*, and Motor Landing Craft from the motor transport ships. The assault flotillas left for Red, Green and White beaches at 0230, 0227 and 0319 hours respectively, being led in for some of the way by corvettes and mine-sweepers; and, in the case of Green and White beaches where the low lying ground offered no good landmarks in the moonlight, using Lorenz beam apparatus.

The approach of the transports and the mine-sweeping, escorting, and covering warships was a difficult and dangerous operation. It was subsequently discovered that, in the defence appreciation, approach from this direction by night was discounted. There is no doubt that the success of the whole operation and the comparatively low casualties sustained by the Army, were largely due to the acceptance of this risk by the Naval Commanders concerned, and by the skill and seamanship displayed by the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy in executing this part of the plan.

*The Landing at Courrier Bay and the Action of 5 Commando*

16. 5 Commando with B Company and two carriers of 2 East Lancashire Regiment landed at the Red beaches at 0435 hours unopposed. Commando HQ and three troops, landing at Red North beach, captured No. 7 Coast Defence battery, consisting of four modern 6.1 in. guns, at 0500 hours. The garrison was surprised and offered no resistance. The remaining two troops landed unopposed at Red South beach, but were unable to find the reported No. 8 Battery, which in fact did not exist. The two Commando columns, less one troop left at No. 7 Battery, then advanced inland; meeting at the Col du Courier at 0945 hours. By 1130 hours the Commando, which now included B Company 2 East Lancashire Regiment commenced its advance over the Andrakaka Peninsula, and at 1430 hours it had reached the village of Diego Suarez on the Eastern-most end of the peninsula. They met slight opposition on the initial advance but rapidly dispersed it. Attempts were made without success to find boats to cross to Antsirane.

In the Red beach area, a machine gun and some snipers came to life at daylight. The troop holding No. 7 Battery spent a large part of the day stalking these enemy parties, but in the difficult and precipitous country, they continued to give trouble until D2, when they were finally mopped up by B Company 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers which had taken over the Red beach area.

*The Main Landings—29 Independent Brigade.*

17. 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers at Green Beach and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers at White beach were landed punctually and accurately and met no opposition. Green beach was found unsuitable for vehicles and White difficult even for tracked vehicles. Blue beach was now approached from the rear by C Company 2

Royal Welsh Fusiliers which had landed at White beach. Although an infantry post had been reported on this beach, in the half light it appeared to be unoccupied. A and C Companies 2 East Lancashire Regiment were therefore signalled in, using the landing craft which had returned to the *Royal Ulsterman* from the Red beaches. On the approach of these landing craft, a machine gun post manned by Senegalese opened fire but caused no casualties, but when fired on from the rear and from the landing craft, withdrew and left the beach unguarded. Thus by 0630 hours all beaches were in our hands. Meanwhile at 0615 hours Brigadier Festing had issued the order for the assault floating reserve, 2 South Lancashire Regiment less B Company in unarmoured landing craft, to land at White beach.

*Air Action and the Diversion by H.M.S. Hermone.*

18. At first light, about 0530 hours, aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm bombed the enemy aerodrome about six miles South of Antsirane, and the shipping in the harbour. This was most successful and appears to have deprived the enemy of any means of air reconnaissance or support, except for a few isolated machine gun attacks by aircraft from the South, which were promptly dealt with by the Fleet Air Arm.

At 0440 hours *H.M.S. Hermone* opened fire with star shells and made smoke in the vicinity of Ambodivahibe Bay, the most probable landing place on the East coast South-East of Antsirane. At first light, Fleet Air Arm aircraft dropped parachutes with dummies in the inaccessible country about Mahagaga, which was on the route from Ambodivahibe Bay. It was subsequently learned that this diversion combined with the lack of air reconnaissance, caused the enemy to despatch troops to Mahagaga some time before other troops were despatched towards Ambararata. It did however awaken the French and it is difficult to assess the real value of this diversion.

*The Advance of 29 Independent Brigade.*

19. 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers followed by 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers now commenced the advance to Antsirane, at first with marching infantry and a few cyclists and motor cyclists only. The carriers overtook the leading elements of the 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers about 0730 hours at Mangoky, five miles East of the beaches. They had not yet met the enemy but about 0815 hours a French naval officer and three ratings were captured a short distance East of the Ansahapano River. In accordance with instructions, the officer was given a letter demanding the surrender of the base, and sent back to Antsirane in his own car.

About 1100 hours the leading carriers came under fire from the high ground about one mile East of Anamakia. The enemy were holding a well-defined spur which commands the flat area between it and the Anamakia Woods and which the road crosses by a rocky and tortuous col, known as the Col De Bonne Nouvelle. By 1115 hours there were in the Anamakia area, about 15 miles from the beaches, two companies 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, two 3.7 howitzers of 455 Light Battery, as well as carriers and motor cycles. The Brigadier, who had also reached Anamakia, ordered the infantry to attack supported by the guns. While they were deploying, two Valentines and one Tetrarch, the