

Protection of the Cross-Channel movement.

199. The task of assisting the naval forces to protect the passage of the assault armies from surface and U-boat attack, was undertaken chiefly by R.A.F. Coastal Command though aircraft of A.E.A.F. assisted in this task. I deal with these operations in more detail in paragraph 387 et seq. Here I need only mention that on D-Day and D + 1, aircraft of R.A.F. Coastal Command flew 353 sorties or anti-shipping and anti-U-boat patrols. A line of patrols was provided at either end of the Channel. The air protection thus afforded contributed much to the safety of the Allied shipping from both surface and underwater attack by enemy naval forces.

200. Fifteen squadrons of fighters were allotted the task of protecting the shipping lanes. These squadrons flew 2,015 sorties during the course of D-Day and D + 1, the cover being maintained at six squadron strength

throughout this period. Owing to the lack of enemy reaction, I was able later to reduce this cover to a two squadron force.

201. For convenience of presentation, I have set out the full plan for the employment of fighter forces during the assault and post-assault phase in the next section. (See paragraph 308 et seq.)

Neutralisation of Coastal and Beach Defences.

202. The task of neutralising as many of the coastal defence positions as possible during the crucial period of the assault was shared by naval and air bombardment. The air bombardment plan called for attacks to commence just before dawn on D-Day.

203. R.A.F. Bomber Command commenced the bombardment with attacks on the following ten selected heavy coastal batteries in the assault area:—

<i>Coastal Batteries</i>				<i>Sorties</i>	<i>Tons of Bombs</i>
Crisbecq	...	...	...	101	598
St. Martin de Varreville	...	...	...	100	613
Ouistreham	...	...	...	116	645
Maisy	...	...	...	116	592
Mont Fleury	...	...	...	124	585
La Parnelle	...	...	...	131	668
St. Pierre du Mont	...	...	...	124	698
Merville/Franceville	...	...	...	109	382
Houlgate	...	...	...	116	468
Longues...	...	...	...	99	604
				<hr/> 1,136	<hr/> 5,853 tons

204. As R.A.F. Bomber Command left the assault area, United States Eighth Air Force heavy bombers took over the bombardment role. In the thirty minutes immediately preceding the touch-down hour, 1,365 heavy bombers attacked selected areas in the coastal defences, dropping 2,796 tons of bombs. The result of these operations added to the previous air bombardment and combined with the naval shelling, neutralised wholly or in large part almost all of the shore batteries and the opposition to the landings was very much less than was expected.

205. Medium, light and fighter bombers then took a hand in the attacks on the enemy defensive system by attacking artillery positions further inland and other targets in the coastal defences. The immense scale of this effort may be gauged from the statistics which appear after para. 233.

206. The heavy bombers of the United States Eighth Air Force operated again later in the day, and although cloud interfered with bombing about midday, necessitating the recall of some missions, a further 1,746 tons of bombs were dropped. In all, the Eighth Air Force flew 2,627 heavy bombers and 1,347 escort and offensive fighter sorties during the day.

207. *Spotting for Naval Gunfire.* The naval bombardment took place according to plan. In this bombardment, aircraft of A.E.A.F. played an important role. The Fleet Air Arm had stated early on in the planning that it would be unable to find from its own resources enough aircraft to provide for spotting for the gunfire of all the capital ships it was planned

to use. Accordingly, despite the unfortunate diversion of effort from air resources that were far from inexhaustible, I had agreed that two squadrons of Spitfires from A.D.G.B. and two wings (each of three squadrons) of Mustangs from R.A.F. Second Tactical Air Force should be trained for this task. At various times, therefore, well before D-Day, these squadrons had been trained with No. 3 Naval Fighter Wing.

208. The result was that on D-Day and subsequently, we were just able to meet the heavy calls for spotting for naval gunfire that were made on us. On D-Day, no less than 394 sorties were flown on this task, of which 236 were flown by five squadrons of A.E.A.F. Each of the two Spitfire squadrons, No. 26 Squadron and No. 33 Squadron made 76 sorties in the course of the day. In all, during the period of consolidation in the beach-head, that is from 6th June to 19th June, a total of 1,318 sorties on naval gunnery spotting were flown. Of this total, aircraft of A.E.A.F. flew 940. Five aircraft of A.E.A.F. were destroyed on these operations during this period.

209. It may be pointed out here that further calls were made on these same A.E.A.F. squadrons at later stages in the campaign. The gunfire of the capital ships bombarding the isolated German garrisons in the fortresses of Cherbourg in late June, and of St. Malo and Brest in late August, was spotted for by these squadrons. On these duties a further 124 sorties were flown apart from those flown by aircraft of Fleet Air Arm.