

However, the night being clear, star sights and the use of R.D.F.* echoes from islets and prominent land, together with good visibility, made it possible to allow for these variations.

23. Meanwhile, LAFOREY and LIGHTNING had gone inshore, LAFOREY's task being to buoy the channel roughly, and ascertain the conditions for landing craft, LIGHTNING'S initial task being to act as a navigational fixed light to mark Nosi Fati shoal—the starting point for the approaching ships.

In due course, LAFOREY laid her first lighted dan, and thereafter buoyed the approach channel as planned.

D.r.

24. Unfortunately, the first Main Channel buoy was either laid by LAFOREY in the incorrect position or dragged, with the result that the sweepers went too close to Nosi Fati shoal and all four of them parted their sweeps.

M/S 14 was unaware at the time that the sweeps of all had parted, and believed that the channel was being swept according to plan.

In fact, this was not the case, and the channel so far as the initial anchor berth of the leading ships of the Assault Force, was not swept.

25. At 0124 DEVONSHIRE rounded Nosi Hara and anchored as arranged, the transports and M.T. ships anchoring to seaward in their allotted berths.

26. At 0154 WINCHESTER CASTLE anchored silently in her pre-arranged position, assault landing craft were lowered and by 0214 FREESIA, followed by ROMNEY and CROMARTY, assault landing craft, and LAFOREY, were proceeding up Courrier Bay for the point where the assault craft would be unleashed to attack Red Beach.

27. At 0303 a mine detonated in ROMNEY's sweep and others were seen to have been cut by her. A second mine detonated and parted ROMNEY's sweep at 0315.

The setting off point for the assault craft was reached at 0308 by which time it was estimated that at least 17 mines had been cut or detonated.

The skill, coolness, and accuracy with which these ships and craft were brought safely through a most difficult channel bristling with mines, is above all praise, and is a shining example of devotion to duty.

28. At 0230 the assault craft containing troops of No. 5 Commando and B Company of 2 East Lancashire Regiment, which was under command, set off for Red Beach, in the North part of Courrier Bay. LAFOREY and FREESIA stood by as ordered, to give support.

LIGHTNING and ROYAL ULSTERMAN who had followed up the channel arrived at 0415, and on the return of A.L.C.s† from Red Beach at 0515, troops from ROYAL ULSTERMAN embarked in them and set off at 0611 for Blue Beach, at Basse Point.

29. Meanwhile, assault craft containing 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers from KEREN‡ and KARANJA

respectively had left their ships at 0227 and 0319 for Green and White Beaches in Ambararata Bay. These beaches were located successfully without the use of the Lorenz beam which was ineffective owing to the line of the ships at anchor coinciding with the approach to White Beach.

Complete surprise was achieved at Red, Green and White Beaches, and only at Blue Beach was opposition experienced. This was successfully overcome by troops which had landed at White Beach, crossed the peninsula, and taken the defenders in the rear.

By 0620 about 2,300 of our troops had been landed.

30. The situation in the main anchorage was that mines were likely to be encountered to the North and East of a line joining Nosi Famaho to Mangoaka Point and the move to Ambararata Bay anchorage could not be made until a clearance sweep had been carried out. This was completed without any mines being cut by 0750, and ships were then ordered to shift billet. This anchorage had been laid out when it was considered that White would be developed as the main beach, and in consequence the turn round to Blue Beach was long and it was obviously desirable to move the anchorage opposite Blue Beach. Sweepers were instructed to clear a new anchorage, but before it could be completed, 24 mines had been cut, AURICULA mined, and so much gear destroyed as to prejudice subsequent sweeping operations in the main harbour. It was therefore decided to abandon further sweeping and accept the longer turn round and bad loading conditions caused by wind and sea. Difficulty was experienced in finding a suitable beach for BACHAQUERO* and she was finally beached on Red centre in the afternoon after being swept in by CROMARTY.

31. To turn to the picture of the situation as seen by the G.O.C., and me in the Flagship to seaward.

At 0314, having then received ANTHONY's report, I informed the Admiralty that the operation had begun, this message being cleared at 0351.

My first intimation of any occurrence inshore was LAFOREY's report at 0318 that mines had been cut off Red Beach.

At about 0440 sighting of starshell showed that HERMIONE was carrying out the pre-arranged diversion on the East coast.

But communication with ships inshore was poor, and undependable, and indeed so they remained for much of D.r.

The first and positive report of progress was LAFOREY's message received at 0540 stating that there was no sign of opposition ashore and an optimistic suggestion that the Fleet could now enter Courrier Bay.

Messages, some of them very much delayed, showed that the vital No. 7 Battery had been captured, and that our troops everywhere seemed to be advancing, taking prisoners and incurring negligible casualties themselves.

32. I knew that air operations had proceeded according to plan and by 0720 I felt that the assault had made a very good start. Troops

Admiralty footnotes

* R D F = radar.

† A L C = Assault Landing Craft

‡ KEREN was the Headquarters Ship of the Senior Naval Officer Landing, Captain G A Garnons-Williams.

Admiralty footnote —

* BACHAQUERO was an early type of tank landing ship, not constructed but converted for this purpose.