

ENCLOSURE 3.

H.M.S. KEREN.

15th May, 1942.

I have the honour to submit the following report of proceedings, covering the period from the time of assembly of the Force for Operation "Ironclad" at Durban until the arrival at Diego Suarez harbour.

Assembly of Ships at Durban.

2. M/V WINCHESTER CASTLE, having on board my Staff, H.Q. Staff of 121 Force and 29th Independent Brigade, arrived at Durban on 22nd April in convoy accompanied by H.M.S. KEREN, H.M.S. KARANJA, M/V SOBIESKI, S.S. ORONSAY and S.S. DUCHESS OF ATHOLL. This force carried the personnel of 29th and 17th Brigades.

3. The following ships connected with Operation "Ironclad" were already at Durban or arrived during the next 3 days:—

H.M.S. BACHAQUERO, H.M.S. ROYAL ULSTERMAN, R.F.A. DERWENTDALE, R.F.A. EASEDALE, M/V THALATTA, S.S. MAHOUT, S.S. EMPIRE KINGSLEY, S.S. CITY OF HONG KONG, S.S. FRANCONIA, M/V NAIRNBANK and S.S. MARTAND, besides H.M. Ships composing escort, minesweeping and covering forces for the operation.

Preparations at Durban.

4. In view of the short time available, arrangements had been made with C.-in-C., South Atlantic, for as many ships as possible connected with the operation, particularly personnel ships and certain M.T. ships requiring to restow cargo, to berth alongside. These arrangements were made very satisfactorily.

5. During the stay at Durban the following preparations were made:—

(a) Cargo of M.T. ships not assault stowed was restowed as far as possible, M.T. being serviced and water-proofed.

(b) Landing craft brought out by ships not connected with the operation were allocated to their respective ships for the operation.

(c) All landing craft were fuelled, engines tried and compasses adjusted.

(d) Chart folios brought from the U.K., orders, photographs, maps, propaganda leaflets and intelligence data were distributed to all ships concerned.

(e) Dan buoys, taut wire measuring gear and other special stores brought from the U.K. were distributed to destroyers and minesweepers concerned.

(f) Conferences were held on board H.M.S. RAMILLIES, Flagship of S.O.F. and on board M/V WINCHESTER CASTLE, (H.Q. Ship until 23rd April), and final planning was made.

Two demonstrations were held on board M/V WINCHESTER CASTLE in which the operation was fully explained with the aid of models, for the benefit of Commanding Officers of ships, Masters and Naval Liaison Officers concerned, with all Military and South African liaison personnel present.

(g) Military personnel carried out route marches ashore and, where possible, Naval personnel required to land during the operation did likewise.

(h) Special security measures were taken which included the sailing and routing of the force for Mombasa by N.C.S.O.* Durban in two separate convoys by the ordinary routine procedure. The real orders were issued quite separately and only opened after proceeding to sea.

(i) W/T and R/T sets in all ships of the force were netted and tuned. Communication stores and personnel were allocated to ships as necessary.

(j) Special communication arrangements were made for S.A.A.F., and arrangements were made for the introduction of special broadcast services to cover the area of operations.

*Passage from Durban to Wilham Pitt Bay.**Slow Convoy: Convoy Y.*

6. Convoy Y, consisting of DERWENTDALE, BACHAQUERO, MAHOUT, EMPIRE KINGSLEY, THALATTA, EASEDALE, NAIRNBANK and MARTAND sailed on 25th April escorted by DEVONSHIRE, 3 destroyers, the 14th M/S Flotilla and 4 corvettes.

7. S.S. CITY OF HONG KONG, which arrived at Durban a.m. 26th April was sailed p.m. that day after unloading a deck cargo of aircraft, and proceeded with escort of 2 corvettes to overtake and join the slow convoy.

8. This convoy followed the route ordered by S.O.F. which conformed to the normal shipping route Northwards along the coast to approximately 15 degrees South, then East North Eastwards as if to pass North of Madagascar.

9. The speed of this convoy was 9 knots (through the water) and arrangements were made to fuel destroyers and minesweepers from the two oilers on passage. The weather proved sufficiently favourable to allow this speed to be maintained and for fuelling to be carried out. The principal anxiety was that a head sea might stop BACHAQUERO owing to her bow door, but this fortunately did not eventuate.

Fast Convoy: Convoy Z.

10. The Military Commander, Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., R.M., transferred a part of his H.Q. to H.M.S. RAMILLIES, Flagship of the Combined C.-in-C., Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, C.B., on 23rd April. On the 28th April, S.N.O.(L), Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams and Staff, with Brigadier F. W. Festing, Commanding 29th Brigade and Staff, and a proportion of General Sturges' Staff transferred from WINCHESTER CASTLE to H.M.S. KEREN, the latter becoming Headquarters Ship of the Assault.

11. Convoy Z, consisting of KEREN, KARANJA, WINCHESTER CASTLE, SOBIESKI, ROYAL ULSTERMAN, DUCHESS OF ATHOLL, ORONSAY and FRANCONIA sailed from Durban on 28th April, escorted by RAMILLIES, ILLUSTRIOUS, HERMIONE and destroyers.

12. The route planned was similar to that of Convoy Y. On 30th April, however, reports were received of a hostile submarine off the Mozambique coast and S.O.F. ordered a change of route, the new route passing some 60 miles to the Eastward of the original track.

Admiralty footnote:—

* N C S O = Naval Control Service Officer