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THE LANDINGS IN NORTH AFRICA

The following Despatch was submitted to the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces on the 30th March, 1943, by Admiral of the Fleet Sir ANDREW B. CUNNINGHAM, G.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

*Office of the Commander-in-Chief,
Mediterranean,
Algiers.*

30th March, 1943.

OPERATION "TORCH"—REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS.

I have the honour to render the following report on Operation "Torch" covering the period 22nd October to 17th November, 1942, from the sailings of the assault convoy from the United Kingdom until the occupation of Bone. This report deals mainly with the British naval assaults, since the naval operations of the Western Naval Task Force have already been reported in the Commander, Task Force 34's letter of 28th November, 1942 to the Commander-in-Chief, United States Atlantic Fleet.*

2. The early stages of the operation prior to D day were remarkable for lack of incident. This was indeed fortunate since, in the course of this vast and complex movement, delays caused by casualties or stress of weather would have rendered the timely delivery of the assaults improbable.

3. The movement of the assault convoys and Force "H"† through the Straits of Gibraltar

on the 5th/6th November and the continuous entry and departure of all classes of ships for fuelling placed a heavy strain on the resources and organisation of Gibraltar. The manner in which this strain was withstood reflects credit on the Vice-Admiral, Gibraltar and Commodore Superintendent, Gibraltar and their staffs.

4. It is also a tribute to the skill and seamanship of individual Commanding Officers that this continuous flow of movements and berthing in a congested harbour and anchorage in the dark was accomplished with but a single minor collision.

5. The only major incident inside the Mediterranean before the assaults was the torpedoing of United States Ship THOMAS STONE at 0535 on 7th November. A notably courageous decision was taken by Captain O. R. Bennehoff, United States Navy to send on his escort and boats to the assault, leaving his ship defenceless; tenacity and seamanship was displayed by His Majesty's Ship WISHART (Commander H. G. Scott, Royal Navy) in towing United States Ship THOMAS STONE to Algiers.

6. Reconnaissance by submarine and Folbot* parties prior to the assaults was in the main successfully carried out. Inshore reconnaissance by Folbot teams had always been viewed with misgiving as endangering security. That these fears were well grounded was proved at A Beach when two officers were captured. Fortunately they kept their heads and imparted no information concerning the projected operation. The work of Lieutenant-Commander Willmott, Royal Navy, both in

Admiralty footnotes:—

* The Naval Commander Western Task Force was Vice-Admiral H. K. Hewitt, U.S.N. The publication of the report of this Task Force is a matter for the United States Navy Department, and it is therefore not included with these reports.

† Force "H"—a surface force covering the landings and providing fighter support.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Folbot—a collapsible rubber boat.