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LIBERATION OF EUROPE (OPERATION "OVERLORD") OPERATIONS OF COASTAL COMMAND, ROYAL AIR FORCE, FROM MAY TO AUGUST, 1944.

The following despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for Air on November 1st, 1944, by Air Chief Marshal Sir Sholto Douglas, K.C.B., M.C., D.F.C., Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command, Royal Air Force.

I have the honour to submit a despatch on the preparations for and results of operations by my Command for the period May to the end of August, 1944. By September the successful progress of our Armies during the three months that they had been established on the Continent had denied the enemy the effective use of the Bay of Biscay ports as submarine bases from which to conduct his war against our shipping. This marked the end of an important phase in the U-Boat war.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION.

Preparations by the Enemy and Ourselves.

2. At the end of March, 1944, there were signs that the enemy was reducing the number of U-Boats operating in the Atlantic, presumably with the intention of conserving his forces for the forthcoming assault. This was confirmed in April, when the number operating in this area was very small. The lull continued during May, with large concentrations of U-Boats in the Bay of Biscay ports. This policy of the enemy's, while it reduced our opportunities for killing U-Boats, permitted an intensive training programme for the Leigh Light squadrons in the United Kingdom—which I had started at the end of March—to proceed without hindrance. The urgent need for Leigh Light aircraft over the past two years had meant that aircrews turned over to this role had had insufficient time to devote to training, and the standard of homing and Leigh Light manipulation was not as high as it might have been. Ten weeks' intensive

training was carried out by the U.K.-based Liberator and Wellington searchlight squadrons, and when D-day came the standard was much improved.

Directive for "Overlord".

3. In April, 1944, I issued to my Groups a directive which set out the tasks of each Group for the OVERLORD operation that was shortly to take place, and outlined the action that the Admiralty anticipated would be taken by the enemy.

ANTI-U-BOAT.

Appreciation of Enemy Intentions.

4. On the assumption that the enemy would direct his U-Boat offensive principally against our cross-channel convoys, the Admiralty appreciated that the bulk of his U-Boats would operate from the Bay ports and endeavour to penetrate the S.W. Approaches to the Bristol, St. George's and English Channels, and that he would maintain only comparatively small forces in the Atlantic to hamper the passage of our convoys. The main focus of our anti-U-Boat operations was therefore to be in the S.W. Approaches, and the effort directed to protecting Atlantic convoys would be drastically reduced. It was also necessary to provide to some extent against the passage of U-Boats through the Northern Transit Area and also against the possibility of the movement of U-Boats through the North Sea. These areas had however to be regarded as of secondary importance when compared with the S.W. Approaches, and it was not intended to provide permanently for more than thin cover in the Northern Transit Area. The North Sea area would be covered only if the situation demanded it, and my plans allowed for four anti-U-Boat squadrons to be drawn from those