

5. The passage up the Mozambique Channel was made in excellent conditions, and favourable currents experienced necessitated adjustment of speed to ensure not being ahead of time at the rendezvous with the slow convoy on D minus 2.

6. On 1st May, the course of the convoy was altered to the Eastward to keep clear of shipping, a certain amount of which was sighted from time to time.

7. A report received on 2nd May that a submarine had arrived at Majunga together with reports of sightings of U-boats in mid-channel, suggested that our movements were being anticipated and caused me some apprehension. A/S air patrols maintained for the rest of the passage, however, sighted nothing.

8. During the passage a number of intelligence reports were received which, if accepted, required certain modifications to the orders for the assault. After discussion with the General, certain amendments to the plan were decided upon and subsequently distributed to the Assault Commanders and others concerned. In the event some of these intelligence reports proved to be most valuable.

9. In addition, complete sets of orders for the assaults on Tamatave and Majunga were produced and distributed to all ships concerned.

10. During the night 1st/2nd May definite orders were received from the Admiralty that Operation "Ironclad" was to proceed. On 2nd May instructions were received regarding the nature of an "Ultimatum" which was to be delivered by all possible means to the Governor as soon as the attack on Diego Suarez had started. This required the production of English and French versions for dropping by aircraft and delivery by hand as and when the opportunity should arise. These instructions were distributed to ILLUSTRIOUS, to the Military Assault Commander, and to Officers Commanding the Assault Battalions.

D minus 2.

11. At 0835 on 3rd May, INDOMITABLE, wearing the Flag of Rear-Admiral (Aircraft) (Rear-Admiral D. W. Boyd), and escorted by two destroyers, joined me as previously arranged, and a complete set of operation orders were flown across to Rear-Admiral (Aircraft).

12. Less than forty-eight hours were thus available for the Rear-Admiral and INDOMITABLE to study and absorb and arrange for compliance with the many and complicated air commitments.

Certain alterations in the number and nature of the tasks allotted to the aircraft were considered desirable by Rear-Admiral (A), and as a result of discussion of the points by signal, I approved certain modifications, which, while retaining the essential requirements, made the operation of the aircraft and the co-operation between the carriers more satisfactory for them.

13. Aircraft sent ahead in the morning facilitated contact with the slow convoy located some 60 miles ahead of me.

14. DEVONSHIRE reported that practically all the destroyers, corvettes, and sloops escorting the convoy had been refuelled during the

passage from EASEDALE, whose work in this respect had been magnificent, and from DEVONSHIRE herself.

15. During D minus 2 and the following night, the destroyers escorting the fast convoy, and HERMIONE, completed with oil from EASEDALE. DERWENTDALE, also intended for oiling at sea, had proved unsatisfactory for this purpose.

16. By dusk the fast convoy had closed to about four miles from the slow convoy, and remained in that position until the time came to form up for the final approach the following afternoon.

An unexpected North-Easterly set showed that the convoys were ahead of schedule, and time had to be "wasted" by large alterations of course.

17. Weather conditions were excellent and visibility extreme. The convoys were in sight of Mayotta Island 40 miles distant, for most of the day, but were probably too far off to be observed.

D minus 1.

18. At 1430 Group I, comprising RAMILLIES, carriers and destroyer screen, disengaged and at 1500 Groups II to V, comprising DEVONSHIRE, transports and escort, proceeded under the orders of the Commanding Officer, DEVONSHIRE, in execution of previous orders.

At 1700 HERMIONE was detached to proceed with her diversionary operation to the Eastward of Diego Suarez.

SECTION II

FINAL APPROACH UP TO AND INCLUDING THE ASSAULT LANDING.

19. Whilst Groups II to V inclusive were making their final approach RAMILLIES and the carriers proceeded to a position to the West of Cape Amber some 30 miles from the land.

At 0300 the carriers and four destroyers were detached under the orders of Rear-Admiral (A), to operate independently as requisite for flying operations, RAMILLIES with her screen remaining in the vicinity.

20. ANTHONY, who had been sent in with LAFOREY and LIGHTNING to accompany them during the buoying of the channel and thence to come out and report progress made, to me, rejoined my Flag at 0255.

She reported conditions for landing were very good, that the channel had been buoyed without difficulty, and that at 0115 WINCHESTER CASTLE was approaching the final turning point before the anchorage, with the remainder of the ships closed up.

This was a great relief to me, and everything up to that moment seemed set fair.

21. Groups II to V made the passage to their anchorages as planned. This was greatly to the credit of all, but particularly so to the Commanding Officer, DEVONSHIRE, on whom lay the main responsibility.

22. It had been anticipated that unpredictable, varying and possibly strong currents would be experienced and, in the event, the unpredictable nature of these currents was confirmed.