

7. It was upon this point that the initial planning of "Husky" broke down. It may be that the earlier plans would have succeeded equally well; but the fact remains that these plans in the end proved unacceptable to the army leaders called upon to fight the tactical battle for the object, and that, had it been possible for those leaders fully to study the tactical aspect at the outset, the undesirable last minute changes would have been saved.

8. A further point is that in the initial planning great weight was lent to the value of airborne troops for the softening of beach defences. The conditions of light required for the employment of paratroops were inimical to the secure and undetected approach of naval forces. As the result of much discussion and in view of the importance attached to the airborne attack, the date selected for the assault was one which was not favourable from the naval point of view. In fact the airborne troops were never used in the manner projected, but that they were not to be so used did not emerge until it was too late to change the date. In consequence, the navies, for no advantage, had to accept a disadvantageous light for approach, and a subsequent period of moonlit nights off the beaches which could have been avoided.

9. The Naval Commander Western Task Force comments at length and stringently on this subject in his report.* While I do not in all respects agree with his estimate of the effectiveness of naval gunfire, I concur generally in his remarks, and, in particular, in questioning the wisdom of attaching a high degree of importance in the plan to the employment of airborne troops. A seaborne assault is unalterably committed to a date for some days in advance of D day. In tidal waters it is even more inflexibly bound by time and tide. It may well be that, on the selected date, airborne troops are weatherbound and cannot operate. It does, therefore, appear most necessary that airborne troops should be considered as a useful auxiliary rather than as a governing factor which may react to the disadvantage of other services involved.

10. Apart from the use of airborne troops, many other factors affect the selection of D day and H hour†: but a dominating factor must always be the high casualty rate inflicted by aimed machine-gun fire. Unless it can be guaranteed to the army that the enemy beach defences can be neutralised by naval gunfire or air attack or both—or by smoke—it is felt that darkness will always be chosen for the first waves to reach the beach. "Husky" gave but poor opportunity for judging the soundness of our choice since surprise was unexpectedly attained; but it is felt that, had the enemy been resolute and alert, it would have required more than the gun support actually available if the soldiers were to be landed in daylight without heavy casualties. Bomber forces were not available since they were occupied in neutralising the enemy air forces.

Admiralty footnotes:

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

† H hour—the time at which it is planned that the first wave of landing craft should "touch down" on the beach for the assault.

Preparation, Training and Mounting.

11. The training and mounting of "Husky" proceeded under difficulties, particularly in the case of Force "B"* of the Eastern Task Force, and to a lesser extent of the Western Task Force. Both these forces had to establish their base facilities in captured ports which had been considerably demolished, namely Sfax and Sousse for Force "B", and Bizerta and Tunis for the Western Task Force. Great credit is due to all concerned that these difficulties were ably surmounted in the time available. Force "B", in addition to other difficulties, was faced at short notice with the task of capturing Pantellaria but the task was taken in its stride and successfully accomplished without prejudice to "Husky", of which operation indeed it was an essential preliminary.

12. The reception and absorption in the station of the great number of landing ships and craft, and the establishment of their bases, presented a heavy problem to both navies. The probable performance of these craft, manned as they were by new and inexperienced officers and men but recently enrolled in their respective services, gave cause for some anxiety, and in the early stages of training they caused some slight wavering of confidence among the troops they were to land. The manner in which they buckled to and met and overcame their inexperience can best be measured by what they achieved, and deserves the highest praise.

13. Another cause of anxiety at this stage was the large demand for movement of troops, airmen and vehicles to their staging points or bases for the attack. This involved heavy and continuous running by the landing craft at times when they should have been training, and fear was felt, not only that their training would be inadequate, but that their engines would not stand the strain. These fears were happily disproved, and in fact the sea training provided by these voyages must have stood them in good stead. That the craft themselves withstood the extra wear and tear is a tribute to those who designed and built them.

14. Additional difficulties in the way of training and mounting arose from late arrival of craft and material. This was particularly so in the case of Force "A"† of the Eastern Task Force which received its L.S.T.s‡ extremely late and had little or no opportunity of trying and practising with pontoons. This portion of the force was also separated by 900 miles from the L.C.T.s§ which were to form a part of its assault. A high standard of staff work was required to knit these scattered components into an operational whole.

15. The Western Task Force was more fortunate in that opportunities for training and mounting were undisturbed, and all ships were concentrated. Although this force also suffered to some extent from late arrivals and rushed planning, as compared with the Eastern Task Force the Western Task Force was much better placed since the U.S. warships came into the Mediterranean for the specific purpose of the operation, and only very slight calls were

Admiralty footnotes:

* Force "B"—a British Task Force under the command of Rear-Admiral R. R. McGrigor, C.B.

† Force "A"—a British Task Force under the command of Rear-Admiral T. H. Troubridge, D.S.O.

‡ L.S.T.—Landing Ship, Tank.

§ L.C.T.—Landing Craft, Tank.