

27. There can be little doubt that the psychological effect upon our troops of seeing these heavy ships bombarding close inshore played a large part in relieving a situation which at one time showed every indication of becoming extremely grave.

The End of the Operation.

28. The Military situation, stabilised on D+6, 15th September, gradually improved; indications of a general German withdrawal were seen on D+7. On 19th September, Eboli and, on 20th, Campagna and several other towns in the vicinity were captured. Five days later the port of Salerno was re-opened, followed quickly by the capture of Castellammare on 28th and of Torre Annunziata the next day. Naples was entered on 1st October and with its capture, Operation "Avalanche" drew to a close. The port of Naples had been carefully and methodically wrecked by the withdrawing enemy, but even so, two days later five Liberty ship berths, six coaster berths and eight holding berths were cleared. By the 6th October discharge over the Salerno beaches was almost completed, the port of Naples was functioning slowly, and on that day Operation "Avalanche" was officially deemed to have been completed.

Lessons Learnt.

29. Owing to the considerable period which has elapsed since Operation "Avalanche" was carried out and the fact that the experience gained therein has been embodied in other operations, it is redundant to remark at length upon the lessons learnt. Owing to the short period which had elapsed between Operations "Husky" and "Avalanche", but few of the difficulties brought to light in the first operation were remedied in time for the second. My remarks on Operation "Husky" still hold good, but to some extent these mistakes have now been rectified and it is not intended to elaborate upon them further.

Conclusions.

30. Operation "Avalanche" was the most ambitious amphibious operation so far launched. That it succeeded after many vicissitudes reflects great credit on Vice-Admiral Hewitt, U.S.N., his subordinate Commanders, and all those who served under them. That there were extremely anxious moments cannot be denied. The enemy employed new types of weapons and defended his positions with a ferocity which we have now come to regard as normal, but at the time it provided a severe test to our Military Commanders. I am proud to say that throughout the operation, the Navies never faltered and carried out their tasks in accordance with the highest traditions of their Services. Whilst full acknowledgment must be made of the devastating though necessarily intermittent bombing by the Allied Air Forces, it was Naval gunfire, incessant in effect, that held the ring when there was danger of the enemy breaking through to the beaches and when the overall position looked so gloomy. More cannot be said.

(Signed) ANDREW CUNNINGHAM,
Admiral of the Fleet,
Late Commander-in-Chief,
Mediterranean.

APPENDIX I.

PLANNING.

On completion of the Sicilian Campaign there were many and changing factors involved in the decision as to the location of the main assault on the Italian coast. Not until August 19th was it decided that the planning and mounting of Operation "Avalanche" should be given first priority. Plans involving landings in the Gulf of Gioia* (Operation "Buttress"), in the Gulf of Taranto and on the Italian coast North of Brindisi (Operations "Musket" and "Goblet"), were all examined and progressed to a certain extent. Operation "Buttress" was in fact fully planned and detailed orders were issued to the ships concerned. This uncertainty led to an immense amount of work for my planning staff and for the British Naval Commanders involved, all of whom had two or more problems to examine.

2. It was the intention that the "Buttress" Force would become the Northern Assault Force for "Avalanche" and that an American force would provide the "Avalanche" Southern Assault Force. By this means it was hoped that it would be practicable to switch from Operation "Buttress" to Operation "Avalanche" without upsetting the detailed planning to any marked extent. For a variety of reasons this combination proved not to be so simple as had been imagined, the chief difficulty being that "Buttress" involved the use of only one port, namely Vibo Valencia, whereas in "Avalanche" the plan had to allow for the eventual capture and development of Salerno, Castellammare, Torre Annunziata and Naples.

3. As a result of the several plans under consideration, planning for Operation "Avalanche" was conducted almost simultaneously on the levels of the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, the Western Task Force Commander, who had no other operation to plan, and the subordinate Task Force Commanders, one of whom, Commodore G. N. Oliver, R.N. (the Northern Assault Force Commander), was planning in detail for both "Buttress" and "Avalanche" concurrently.

4. Naval planning memoranda were issued as for previous operations in this theatre to disseminate the building of the plan to the subordinate Commanders. It is no exaggeration to say that without this system these subordinate Commanders could never have produced their own orders in time for the operation, as planning was taking place on all levels simultaneously, as stated in the preceding paragraph.

5. Further difficulty was experienced through the frequent changes of plan introduced by the Fifth Army, many of which took place at a very late date. The Commander Western Naval Task Force comments strongly on this point in his report.

6. The sailing and routing of the assault convoys called for careful timing and accurate

Admiralty footnote:

* Gulf of Gioia—on the North-West coast of Calabria.