

48. With regard to the remarks on H.M. Ships, I understand that their reports are all sent to DEVONSHIRE and so presumably none are called for from me, but this report would be incomplete without them.

Very great responsibility lay in the hands of FREESIA (Acting Commander T.C.P. Crick) who led in through the minefield in unswept water, drawing 16 feet, accurately and steadfastly. The navigational responsibility for the whole force rested largely on DEVONSHIRE (Captain R. D. Oliver) although the initial anxiety was LAFOREY's (Captain R. M. J. Hutton).

The offensive spirit shown by PAKENHAM (Captain E. B. K. Stevens) and LAFOREY ably supported by LIGHTNING (Commander H. G. Walters) was a pleasure to watch although I had many moments of anxiety when they were passing through swept channels. However, I realised they knew more of that immediate local situation than I.

All three post captains mentioned are senior to me and I deeply appreciate their full and generous acceptance of being placed under my orders.

CROMER (Commander R. H. Stephenson) ably supported by CROMARTY (Lieutenant Commander C. G. Palmer, R.N.V.R.) were the outstanding ships in the gallant 14th M/S Flotilla.

The A/S corvettes performed their task in guarding the anchorage from submarine attack, and GENISTA (Lt.-Cdr. R. Pattinson, D.S.C., R.N.R.) may have had a contributory share in the sinking of LE HEROS.

49. The task assigned to the cutter LINDI was carried out successfully and provided that one crucial aid to navigation which Captain D.19, from his report, was very glad to get at 2040/D-1. Great credit is due to Lieutenant A. G. Booker, R.N.V.R., her Commanding Officer, for his very successful navigation.

50. Of the masters and crews of ships of the Merchant Navy taking part, it is impossible to speak too highly. In every way they gave of their best. Their ship handling was superb: groups were composed of ships varying from 20,000 to 5,000 tons and they anchored in station in the swept channel as if they had done it all their lives.

Unstinted help came from all concerned. Docks Operating Groups were backed up by ships' companies; ships' motor boats were run as landing craft; stewards, cooks and boat-swains' parties and all took their full share. When volunteers were called for for special engineering parties, the entire engine room staffs volunteered including one old greaser who fought as a cavalryman in the South African war.

51. There is one lesson, however, which is so important and at the same time so commonplace to us all, that it nearly became overlooked. That is the perfect co-operation and friendship that exists between General Sturges and his Headquarters, Brigadier Festing and the 29th Independent Brigade Group Staff and my own Staff. This was not confined to the Commands and Senior Officers; but went right down through to stewards and batmen, all of whom

learnt to forget the word "my" and referred to the Force as "our". This state of affairs became crystallised when we joined the Flag of the Commander-in-Chief who turned the Force into a formidable fighting unit.

(Signed) G. A. GARNONS-WILLIAMS,

Captain, Royal Navy.

Senior Naval Officer, Landing.

APPENDIX.

THE CAPTURE OF DIEGO SUAREZ

The following Report was submitted on 15th June, 1942, to the Secretary of State for War by LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR ROBERT G. STURGES, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., General Officer Commanding 121 Force.

Sir,

I have the honour to forward herewith an account of Operation "Ironclad" for the capture of Diego Suarez.

PLANNING AND EMBARKATION

Operation "Bonus"

1. I first received information on 23rd December, of the project to capture Diego Suarez, when I was informed that I had been nominated as Joint Commander, with Rear-Admiral T. B. Drew, R.N., for this operation, which was to be known by the code word "Bonus". The military forces allotted were H.Q. R.M. Division, 102 R.M. Brigade, 36 Infantry Brigade, two commandos, and a normal combined operational allotment of supporting and ancillary units. These included a detachment of the M.N.B.D.O.* to erect coast defence and A.A. guns for the consolidation of the naval and air base. Sufficient assault, personnel, and motor transport shipping was allotted to carry the formations and units with their vehicles on a reduced scale, similar to that used on various exercises carried out in the previous year. This Force was reasonably well found. The infantry brigades, 102 R.M. Brigade and 36 Infantry Brigade, had been water trained and had exercised on shore over long distances and with little or no transport. Signals were just adequate. All units were tactically stowed and a minimum of personnel was allowed to enable signals to function after capture of objective. The provision of one squadron of aircraft only, fifteen Lysanders, subsequently reduced to six, appeared to me a little peculiar, but the decision by the Chief of the Air Staff was that this was perfectly adequate for the occupation of the objective.

Planning at once commenced, and, by 31st December, the draft operation order, the maintenance project, the detailed order of battle, the allotment of personnel and vehicles to ships, and the landing tables were complete and had been handed to the Q.M.G. Movements Branch at the War Office for the preparation of loading tables and the issue of movement orders for embarkation. Subject to the final decision of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the expedition was planned to embark at the end of January, to carry out a rehearsal exercise in Loch Fyne in early February, and sail on 20th February.

* M.N.B.D.O.—Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation.