

14. The landing of the Rangers* at Maiori was without opposition, but the Commando landing on Vietri was opposed by the gunfire of the shore batteries. Both these landings, however, were able to make considerable progress and to secure the left flank with the X Corps landing.

15. The organisation for clearing Landing Craft and Boats of Military stores on arrival at the beaches left much to be desired. In a large number of cases boats' crews had to clear their boats themselves, with consequent delay in returning for further loads. Further, in the stress of events in the early stages after the assault, arrangements for the transfer of stores from the beaches to disposal areas further inland were inadequate. Consequently there was much congestion on the foreshore: but, by D+2 and onwards, 3,000 tons per day were being discharged over the British beaches.

Naval Forces other than Assault Forces.

16. The existence of the main cover force, Force "H", was rendered unnecessary by the Italian Armistice, and two Divisions of the Battle Squadron were employed to cover the passage to Malta of such units of the Italian Fleet as succeeded in making good their escape (Operation "Gibbon"). In addition, four Cruisers were diverted to Bizerta on D-2 to load elements of the First British Airborne Division for discharge at Taranto (Operation "Slapstick"), a course of action rendered possible by the Italian Armistice.

17. The chief object of Force "H", therefore, became to provide fighter cover over the Escort Carrier force (Force "V").

Air Activities.

18. Fighter cover over the beaches was provided by Naval fighters from Force "V", and by land based fighter aircraft of the 12th Air Support Command. Fighter cover over Force "V" was provided by the Fleet Carriers of Force "H".

19. The high accident rate suffered by the Escort Carriers, which was at the time attributed almost entirely to the lack of natural wind, must, in the light of more recent experience in Operation "Dragoon"†, be considered largely due to insufficient deck landing practice immediately prior to the operation. Wind speeds experienced during Operation "Dragoon" were very similar to those prevailing throughout Operation "Avalanche", but in spite of the fact that during the former operation the Carrier forces operated for six days and the fatigue of the pilots thereby increased considerably in the later stages, the number of deck accidents was relatively smaller.

20. The plan assumed that Monte Corvino airfield would be captured on D-Day and put into operation for shore based fighters on D+1. The Escort Carriers were, therefore, only intended to operate for two days. There was, however, considerable delay in capturing Monte Corvino airfield and even after capture

it was under constant artillery fire from the neighbouring hills. It was, therefore, necessary to construct an air strip near Paestum nearer to the coast, and for Force "V" to operate at sea for 3½ days after which it was withdrawn to Palermo. Before doing so 26 aircraft were flown ashore to operate at Paestum.

21. Had the Military progress proceeded according to plan considerable embarrassment would have been caused by the late arrival of Air Force material for the preparation of Monte Corvino airfield. This was caused by the non-arrival at Milazzo of six L.S.T.s destined to ferry these stores to the assault area.

Enemy Air Activity.

22. Enemy air activity was not on a heavy scale and on the average only ten red alerts per day were experienced. Indeed, so light was the scale of attack that the fighters of Force "V" had few combat opportunities. This operation was notable, however, as being the first occasion on which several new types of missiles were used by the German Air Force. These new bombs caused considerable losses and damage.

Events Subsequent to the Assault.

23. On the whole, the Fifth Army was unable to establish itself ashore as quickly as had been planned. This was due in part to the fact that it had been anticipated that the coast defences would be manned by Italians, whereas in fact the Germans had taken over these defences a few days prior to the assault.

24. The port of Salerno was opened early on D+2 but by 1900 the following day the port was again under enemy gunfire and at 1500 on D+4 it was necessary to withdraw the port party for the time being.

25. Thus, despite the initial successes which attended the landings, by D+4 the Military situation had become unfavourable. The German Command had rallied quickly from the disorganisation caused by the liquidation of their erstwhile brothers-in-arms and had concentrated sufficient armoured forces with supporting infantry to drive a wedge into the Fifth Army defences and at one point had almost penetrated to the beaches.

26. By the following day, the situation had further deteriorated, all unloading ceased, and the Naval Commander Western Task Force requested me to provide heavier Naval support fire. Accordingly, H.M.S. VALIANT and H.M.S. WARSPITE were ordered to proceed to the "Avalanche" area, so as to arrive as soon as possible after first light on D+6. In addition, three cruisers from Force "V", EURYALUS, SCYLLA and CHARYBDIS, were ordered to proceed at their utmost speed to Tripoli to embark further Military reinforcements. Throughout D+7 Naval gunfire of all calibres shelled enemy formations and strongpoints and by 1400 on D+8 the situation was restored. It was while returning from these gun support duties that H.M.S. WARSPITE received two direct hits and one near miss from radio-controlled glider bombs. H.M.S. WARSPITE subsequently reached Malta in tow without further damage.

Admiralty footnotes:

* Rangers—the American counterpart of British Commandos.

† Operation "Dragoon"—the landing on the South coast of France in August, 1944.