

line, which was only discovered during the operation.) We were now able to make a full and detailed study of the operation, and the final selection of the beaches, the assault commanders dealing with these problems in great detail. Meanwhile the staff was able to complete the maintenance project, the detailed work on the final preparations to be carried out at Durban, and the study of the employment of 17 Infantry Brigade Group. By the time the convoy reached Freetown on 6th April, written draft instructions, both operational and administrative, had been prepared for the employment of that brigade group and for the final preparations that were to be made at Durban. These included the only re-stowage possible for 17 Infantry Brigade Group.

On arrival at Freetown I met for the first time Rear Admiral Syfret. During the short stay at Freetown from 6th to 9th April he examined the plans for the operation, discussed the naval plans with Captains Waller and Garnons-Williams; and the military plans with myself. He gave his approval for the military plans and made certain alterations to the naval plans which however did not affect the military side of the operations.

I was also able to meet and confer with Major General Berney-Ficklin and Brigadier Tarleton on the detailed arrangements for the withdrawal of 17 Infantry Brigade Group from 5 Division and its employment in operation "Ironclad". I would here like to express my appreciation of the assistance and the generous minded attitude of Major General Berney-Ficklin. The withdrawal of one-third of his division could not have been welcome, and there were many points of detail to be settled between us. In all discussions he gave me every possible assistance and encouragement, even to the extent of supplying a few non-commissioned officers and men from units of his division other than those in my order of battle.

During the passage from Freetown to Durban, commanders and staffs in the *Winchester Castle* were able to continue the study of the operation. On 17th April a signal was received from Rear Admiral Syfret in *H.M.S. Malaya* informing me that the War Office had placed 13 Infantry Brigade Group at my disposal for the operation, but it was not to be committed unless the degree of opposition justified it. By the time the convoy reached Durban the final plan for the assault had become firm to a considerable degree of detail, and the final operation and administrative orders and instructions were ready for issue.

Final Preparations at Durban.

9. It was clear that a large amount of work would be necessary at Durban in preparation for the operation. Naval and military representatives had flown to Durban from Freetown where they had reported to the Imperial Movement Control and harbour authorities in order to make all possible preparations for the reception of the convoy. All ships were thus able to come alongside and work started immediately on arrival. Although the convoy only arrived at about noon on the 22nd April, a tour of the dock area that evening showed that work was in full swing. In general terms the work to be carried out was as follows:—

(a) The final plans had to be discussed with Rear Admiral Syfret and his staff.

Many alterations had occurred in the composition of the naval force; these in practice made little difference to the military plan, but full discussion was of course necessary to ensure proper co-ordination.

(b) Vehicles, guns and equipment of the 29 Independent Brigade although embarked for an assault landing had now to be checked, serviced and waterproofed after a month in the holds of the ships.

(c) Vehicles, guns and equipment of the 17 Infantry Brigade Group had not been stowed for a combined operation and everything possible had to be done to make a limited amount of transport and guns available tactically stowed. These vehicles had to be serviced, waterproofed and examined. In particular the electrical batteries of the vehicles and wireless sets required re-charging and connecting up and the vehicles had to be filled with petrol, oil and water. Tank guns had to be fired, new tracks on tanks and carriers to be stretched. Mess Tin and Composite rations had to be got up from the bottoms of holds for 17 Infantry Brigade Group and ammunition and equipment loaded into vehicles. On top of this aircraft petrol and bombs had to be loaded for the South African Air Force (S.A.A.F.). It was only possible in the time available to make these arrangements for a limited scale of transport for this brigade group, and for two out of the three batteries of the 9 Field Regiment.

(d) Final orders and instructions had to be issued and discussed with the 17 and 13 Infantry Brigade Groups. It had been possible before leaving England to embark one G.S.O.2 with brigade H.Q. and one Assistant Military Landing Officer (A.M.L.O.) in each ship of 17 Infantry Brigade Group, all experienced in Combined Operations training. These officers had been able to do the valuable work in assisting this brigade group to prepare itself for the operation. In addition to this a few officers from 29 Independent Brigade were exchanged with officers of 17 Infantry Brigade for the voyage from Freetown to Durban and were thus able to pass on their experience gained in combined exercises. I was therefore by now assured that 17 Infantry Brigade Group could land over the beaches and play a valuable part in the operation, especially from D2 onwards, if enemy resistance made this necessary. 13 Infantry Brigade Group was a very different matter. Their personnel ships only arrived at Durban on 26th April when I met Brigadier V. C. Russell, the brigade commander for the first time. I was able to do little beyond issuing them with written operational and administrative orders and instructions, and discussing potential situations and problems with Brigadier Russell.

(e) *H.M.S. Royal Ulsterman* and *Bachaquero* joined the convoy at Durban and were loaded; the former with troops and the latter with vehicles and guns.

Meanwhile all units engaged in daily route marches to harden and get them fit after the voyage out.

An offer of the co-operation of a bomber and reconnaissance squadron of the South African Air Force was received while the force was at