

15. At 0100, seven M.T. ships from the convoy led by DEPTFORD and under the orders of Commodore Elliott in S.S. ALPHARD arrived at Arzeu Bay and anchored close to seaward of the assault ships. They began at once to unload.

16. An hour and a half after the landing there was still no sign of fighting ashore and although all along we had been sceptical, the Commanding General and myself were beginning to wonder whether the persistent claim of Mr. Rounds, the U.S. Vice-Consul at Oran (a passenger in LARGS), that there would be no resistance was justified. It seemed unbelievable that the French lookouts could be so indifferent. Shortly after 0230 tracer bullets were seen inshore by Arzeu.

17. At 0300, searchlights and gun flashes from the direction of Oran were seen in the sky over the hills above Cape Carbon. This, as it later transpired and was at the time suspected, was the French reception of H.M. Ships WALNEY and HARTLAND, which were due to enter Oran harbour at that hour. Their mission,* though gallantly undertaken, failed, and both ships were sunk in the harbour.

18. It being now evident that the French were resisting, orders were sent to the carriers to attack the enemy aerodromes, with the main weight on Tafaraoui, the naval aerodrome, at dawn. The reception of this signal was much delayed and the aircraft were airborne before it arrived. The Senior Officer of the Carriers, Captain T. O. Bulteel, R.N. in H.M.S. FURIOUS, having received no orders by 0430, had correctly used his judgment to carry out tasks laid down in the operation orders and concentrated the main weight of the attack on La Senia aerodrome where the bulk of the enemy fighters were located.

The attack was devastating in its thoroughness, eighty per cent. of the enemy aircraft being put out of action. The fact that most of the French fighters were destroyed either in the air or in the hangars at La Senia in all probability deterred such few bombers as remained serviceable from later taking off and interfering with the landings.

Later inspection of the aerodromes revealed the preparedness of the French; bombers were bombed up and fuelled, fighters were complete with ammunition and petrol, and at the seaplane station at Arzeu the aircraft had their torpedoes in place complete with pistols and ready in every respect for immediate action.

19. At 0456, the success signal indicating that the batteries covering Arzeu were in our hands was observed, and there being at the time no further use for the two destroyers detailed to support the landing with gunfire, they were sent to reinforce the Oran Bay patrol under AURORA.

The latter ship was soon busy in intercepting French destroyers which started to come out of Oran as soon as the alarm was raised. Aided by the destroyers she either sank or seriously damaged three of them soon after daylight but was obliged to keep her distance

from the shore batteries, whose accurate fire at long ranges was one of the noticeable features of the operation. The French ships fought well against odds, their gallantry being worthy of a better cause.

20. Although unobserved by the patrols which were well inshore during the darkness, the submarines in Oran also came out and both AURORA and later RODNEY were attacked, happily without result.

21. At first light (0600), orders were given by the Senior Naval Officer Landing for ships to proceed to the inshore anchorage. REINA DEL PACIFICO was the first to anchor off Arzeu and shortly afterwards was fired at by a field gun battery behind the town. It scored three hits which luckily caused neither material damage nor casualties.

Landing craft in the vicinity put up an effective smoke screen round the ship, whereupon the battery shifted fire on to the two Maracaibos* which were in process of unloading their M.T. on the beach. No hits were scored and on the arrival shortly afterwards of VANSITTART the battery prudently ceased fire and withdrew.

22. The Maracaibos had beached themselves in accordance with plan at 0400. Owing to the gradual slope of the beach it was necessary to make use of a floating roadway to get the vehicles ashore. This had been brought in the ships and proved an outstanding success, the ships being cleared by 0800. The Maracaibos then backed off and later, when the weather became bad, were used for unloading the M.T. ships, the Maracaibos discharging on to the seaplane ramp in Arzeu harbour.

23. The remainder of the convoy consisting of low priority store and personnel ships arrived at daylight and all ships were anchored inshore by 0640. Unloading then proceeded in earnest.

24. The minesweepers which had swept a channel into Arzeu Bay ahead of the ships, and later swept the anchorage, now formed together with available sloops and destroyers an endless chain patrol off the anchorage. This was maintained day and night for the remainder of the week.

25. At X and Y Beaches the landing of troops and unloading of stores proceeded well, though at Y Beach a sandbar off the beach, a common feature in the Mediterranean, made things very difficult for the big L.C.M.s conveying heavy vehicles. At all beaches there was much grief among the propellers, rudders and "A" brackets of these craft and the need for a large number of spares was apparent.

26. At 0900, the Du Santon battery above Mers el Kebir opened fire on the ships off Y Beach and scored hits on MONARCH OF BERMUDA and LLANGIBBY CASTLE. The former was ordered out of range and would have been followed by LLANGIBBY CASTLE but for a call for fire on the battery from RODNEY being promptly and accurately answered; it ceased fire. Thereafter RODNEY was frequently engaged with Du Santon from extreme ranges and her fire, though it did

Admiralty footnote :—

* Their mission was to capture the port by a *coup de main* before harbour works could be put out of action or ships scuttled.

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† Maracaibos—the earliest and at that time the only existing "Landing Ships, Tank."