

with postponement acceptable to 6th and 7th June.

Weather immediately before D Day. 24-hour Postponement.

29. You held the first meeting to discuss the weather forecast for D day a.m. on 1st June. The outlook was not very good and it deteriorated further during the next three days. At the meeting held p.m. 3rd June you decided to allow the movements of the Forces to commence, despite the unfavourable outlook, in view of the many advantages in launching the operation on the first possible day. But at the next meeting at 0415 on 4th June it was clear that conditions the next day would not be acceptable and a postponement of 24 hours was ordered. By this time all of Force U from Devonshire and a proportion of Force O from Portland were at sea, and ships and craft had to reverse their course and return to harbour. Instructions for this eventuality were included in the Operation Orders and worked smoothly, except in the case of Force U2A,* who failed to receive the signal ordering the postponement. By 0900 this Force was about 25 miles south of St. Catherine's Point and still steering south. Two destroyers and a Walrus aircraft had to be sent at full speed to turn it round. Had this not been done it is possible that the Force would shortly have been detected by the enemy's radar and this would undoubtedly have resulted in his increased vigilance for the next few days.

30. The craft of Force U had a bad time punching into a head sea on their return westwards and, although the whole Force was ordered into Weymouth Bay, a number of craft never managed to enter it. Considerable anxiety was felt throughout 4th June both as to the need of a further postponement with all its resulting loss of efficiency of craft and assault troops, and whether Force U would be in a fit state to go forward again early the next morning should the decision be made to go on with the operation. At one time it was thought that Force U would have to return to Devonshire to re-form, but, when it was pointed out that this would almost certainly result in the postponement of the operation to the next moon period, Rear-Admiral Kirk, with characteristic verve, announced his readiness to proceed.

The Passage.

31. When the assault forces again sailed early on 5th June the weather was still largely unfavourable for landing craft, but more suitable conditions had been forecast for the early hours of 6th June. Wind was W.S.W.† Force 5 veering to W.N.W. decreasing in force at times but with strong gusts; waves were five to six feet in mid-Channel. These conditions made the passage difficult, and considerable discomfort was experienced by the troops embarked in L.C.T.‡ and L.C.I.(L). Although some of the minor landing craft which were due to arrive p.m. on D day had to put back to harbour and others were delayed, the assault forces all drove on and almost without excep-

tion arrived off their beaches to time. The performance of the leading groups of Force U was particularly praiseworthy, since, as has been stated, some of these failed to enter harbour on the postponement, and by H hour their Commanding Officers had been on their bridges continuously for about 70 hours. Out of the 128 L.C.T. in Group U2A only seven failed to take part in the assault, and this figure took account of engine failures as well as the stress of the weather.

32. To ensure the correct positioning of the northern ends of the 10 approach channels that were to be swept across the known enemy minefields 10 F.H. 830 buoys had been laid by three H.D.M.L. of Force J during the night 31st May/1st June. The buoys were timed to transmit between the hours of 1400 and 2200 on six successive days, commencing on 4th June. At 1800 on 5th June, 10 H.D.M.L. took up position to point these buoys for the Assault Forces, and all reports show that this method was wholly satisfactory. A large number of ships was fitted with receivers to obtain positions from the Gee (Q.H.) and Decca (Q.M.) radio navigational systems, both of which worked fully according to expectations, and navigation was never regarded as a serious problem. The above additional measures were taken to guard against effective jamming by the enemy p.m. on D-1 should surprise have been lost.

Achievement of surprise.

33. There was an air of unreality during the passage of the assault forces across the Channel curiously similar to that on D-1 in "Husky" as our forces approached Sicily. The achievement of strategical surprise was always hoped for in "Neptune" but was by no means certain, whereas that of tactical surprise had always seemed extremely unlikely. As our forces approached the French coast without a murmur from the enemy or from their own radio, the realisation that once again almost complete tactical surprise had been achieved slowly dawned. This astonishing feat cannot be explained by any single factor and must be attributed in part to all of the following: the miscalculations of the enemy; the high degree of air superiority attained by our Air Forces, which drastically reduced the enemy's air reconnaissance; the bad weather which caused the enemy to withdraw his E-Boat patrols to Cherbourg; and finally the radio counter-measures employed by our forces, which, coupled with the diversions against the Pas de Calais and Cap d'Antifer, left the enemy in doubt as to the points at which we would land even when he had become aware that the invasion was in progress. Although the unfavourable weather caused difficulties and damage to craft off the beaches later, the advantages gained by surprise were so striking that your decision to go on despite the weather was amply justified. A postponement of one more day, e.g. till 7th June, would, in the event, have proved disastrous owing to the conditions of sea off the beaches. The problems arising out of a postponement of 12 to 14 days to the next suitable period are too appalling even to contemplate.

Minesweeping during the Approach.

34. The sweeping of 10 approach channels for the assault forces represented the largest single

Admiralty footnotes:

* Force U2A, which was a large and slow assault convoy of Force U, was composed of 128 L.C.T. with their escort.

† Force 5—Fresh breeze (16-20 m.p.h. at sea level).

‡ L.C.T.—Landing Craft, Tanks.