

20. Despite this serious accident it is considered that these bombs were of great value, for they enabled the troops to be put ashore with few casualties from the automatic weapons which were bringing fire to bear on the landing place, and which might have inflicted even heavier losses had they been given a clear and unimpeded view of their targets.

21. It must here be noted that the aircraft which dropped the bombs at South Vaagso appeared to be on fire and not properly under control. It was almost certainly the Hampden bomber which later fell into the sea near the entrance to Vaagsfiord. If this was so, then the degree of accuracy achieved in placing of the bombs must have been the result of a very gallant attempt on the part of the crew of the aircraft to carry out in full their allotted tasks. PRINCE LEOPOLD proceeded to the rescue, but unfortunately only one of the three members of the crew picked up, survived.

22. One Hampden bomber which overshot the target attacked and silenced positions in the area with machine gun fire.

23. It is regretted that one other Hampden failed to return from this operation.

24. Of the three Hampden bombers detailed to attack the Rugsundo battery, one had to return with engine trouble, but the other two carried out an attack, the results of which could not be observed from KENYA but which were apparently very successful.

Military Operations.

25. For the purpose of the operation, the Military Forces set out in paragraph 5(b) were organised into the Operational Headquarters which remained throughout in the Flagship KENYA, with the Brigade Commander in close touch with the Naval Commander on the bridge, and the troops who were put ashore in Assault Landing Craft from KENYA, PRINCE CHARLES and PRINCE LEOPOLD and in the ship's boats from ORIBI.

The Forces ashore were divided into five Groups for purposes which will become clear in the course of this report.

General Tasks of each Group (see sketch map attached).

26. The purpose of Group 1 was to land near Hollevik and clear the Halnoesvik area where a German gun had been reported. Having accomplished this task Group 1 was to move along the coastal road to South Vaagso and form a reserve for Group 2 unless given other orders.

Group 2, which was to be put ashore immediately south west of South Vaagso, was to attack the town itself and carry out a number of Military and industrial tasks.

Group 3 was to assault the Island of Maaloy.

Group 4 was retained as a floating reserve in the hands of the Military Commander of the Force.

Group 5 was to be landed from a destroyer on the western shore of Ulvesund in order to cut communications between South and North Vaagso and to send a fighting patrol into the latter village.

The Landings.

27. At 0839 PRINCE CHARLES and PRINCE LEOPOLD lowered all landing craft

which moved off in formation about three minutes later. In little more than five minutes No. 1 Group was ashore at Halnoesvik and the landing craft of Nos. 2 and 3 Groups were moving towards the headland just south of Halnoesvik Village.

28. Just before the landing craft came into view of the enemy defences in South Vaagso and Maaloy Island, KENYA opened fire. The Naval bombardment was extremely accurate and most effective, and Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Durnford-Slater, who was in command of Group 2 and the Senior Officer proceeding ashore, was able to let the landing craft of Groups 2 and 3 approach to within 100 yards of their landing places before sending up the "cease bombardment" signal. KENYA signalled the Hampden aircraft who then came in at very low altitudes to drop their smoke bombs. As a result of these bombs Group 3 completed their landing unopposed and the volume of fire brought to bear on Group 2 was considerably reduced.

The Operations Ashore.

29. Groups Nos. 2 and 3 landed almost simultaneously, and from that time onwards the sequence of events was as follows:—

30. Group 1 cleared the area and village of Halnoesvik very rapidly and signalled the Headquarters Ship for instructions. They were at once ordered to move along the coastal road and to come into reserve at Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Durnford-Slater's Headquarters which were situated near Group 2's landing place. This signal was made at 0950.

31. Group 3 very quickly gained control of Maaloy Island, where those enemy troops who had not been killed by the Naval bombardment were for the most part demoralised and dazed by its effect, and quickly surrendered. At 0920 Major J. M. T. F. Churchill was able to signal that all guns on the island were in our hands and four minutes later he reported that the whole area was under control. ORIBI, carrying Group 5 and followed by ONSLOW, moved past Maaloy some 10 minutes later, as soon as the smoke had cleared sufficiently for them to do so, and entered Ulvesund.

32. Group 2, from the start, encountered very stiff opposition, both from German Infantry who fought to the last man in the buildings, in which they were established, and from snipers, armed often with automatic rifles, who took up positions on the hillside west of the town where they were very difficult to locate owing to the excellent natural cover. It must be emphasised that the opposition in South Vaagso was severe in degree and skilful in quality. It appears from the interrogation of prisoners that the garrison had been fortuitously augmented by a detachment who had been moved into the town for Christmas but, however that may be, there is no doubt that the fighting spirit, marksmanship and efficiency of the enemy in this area was of a high order.

33. At 1020 Group 5 were landed just south of the village of North Vaagso. They cratered the coast road between North and South Vaagso and were able to capture a number of prisoners who had escaped ashore from ships attacked by ORIBI and ONSLOW. A fighting patrol, which was sent forward into North Vaagso