

than expected and the repair of craft was proving difficult in the Portsmouth area before the gale. After it, it became clear that this area alone would be unable to compete even with all the short-term repairs. Directions were accordingly given by COREP (Admiralty) to increase the number of repairs that were undertaken in yards in the southwest and on the east coast. Throughout the period of this report the number of unserviceable L.S.T. and L.C.T. increased slowly day by day and the number available for the build-up accordingly slowly decreased. This was disappointing to the army who at times demanded that more vigorous measures should be taken by the naval authorities responsible. I made a number of representations regarding this to the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, and to the Admiralty, but except for minor improvements they were always able to show that all that could be done was already being done. The COREP organisation had been specially set up to meet the heavy demands of "Neptune" and it is clear that without it the distribution for, and early completion of, the repairs of hundreds of ships and craft would have been entirely impracticable.

Release of Warships.

74. COMINCH* and the Admiralty began to press about 20th June for the release of a considerable number of warships and landing craft from the operation. Some of these were required for Operation "Anvil" (later "Dragoon")† and some for service in the Far East. Vessels were released progressively as they could be spared but no large withdrawal of bombarding ships was possible until after Cherbourg had been captured. Previous experience in this war had shown the danger of withdrawing ships from an area before an operation had fully succeeded, and I was careful not to agree to the release of ships before I was really satisfied that they could be spared.

Naval Bombardment of Cherbourg.

75. General Bradley‡ had asked for naval bombardment of the defences of Cherbourg to synchronise with his final assault by land. A Task Force consisting of three battleships and four cruisers with screening destroyers and two minesweeping flotillas was formed under the command of Rear-Admiral M. L. Deyo, U.S.N. (C.T.F. 129), and was withdrawn to Portland, a few days before the operation for planning and briefing. The initial plan provided for a preliminary bombardment at a range of 28,000 yards to neutralise the long-range batteries, after which ships were to close in to about 14,000 yards and engage targets designated by the Army. The long-range bombardment was, however, cancelled at the request of the army after the ships had arrived in their initial positions, presumably due to the uncertainty of the position of our forward troops at the time. The bombarding ships then closed in to their close-range positions before they opened fire. The enemy batteries opened

fire with extreme accuracy whilst the force was turning at slow speed from the approach channel into the fire support area. To avoid heavy damage destroyers had to make smoke and the heavier ships to manoeuvre at increased speed and, in some cases, without regard to keeping inside swept water, in order to maintain manoeuvring searoom. Fire was opened with all speed on the army's targets but in many cases had very soon to be shifted to the batteries which were straddling our ships. Despite the accuracy of the enemy's fire, by frequent use of helm and alterations in speed the force managed to avoid any but minor casualties and damage, whilst at the same time continuing accurate fire on the enemy's defences. The bombarding force withdrew 3½ hours after it first came in, by which time it was reported that all batteries save two had been silenced. This operation was carried out with skill and determination by Rear-Admiral Deyo, but it is considered unfortunate that it was not found possible to adhere to the original plan, which provided for the initial neutralisation of the enemy long-range batteries as, had better fortune attended the enemy gunners, they might well have inflicted heavy damage to our ships at the relatively close range at which they were firing.

Increased Casualties due to Mines.

76. By about 24th June casualties to our ships due to enemy mines were becoming serious. This was apparently as much due to the ripening of mines that had already been laid as to new lays that were made by enemy aircraft at night. Special measures were taken to reduce all traffic and the speed at which it proceeded within the assault area to a minimum. As soon as these regulations were rigidly enforced, casualties were reduced to small dimensions. Our sweeping was also largely successful. By 3rd July it was estimated that, including spontaneous detonations, nearly 500 mines had been accounted for by our mine-sweepers, and at this date, although the threat had not been completely mastered, it was felt that the worst was probably over and that the build-up and our operations generally would develop as desired in spite of mining.

Increasing Air Attacks in Assault Area.

77. Enemy aircraft were more active at night during this period and, in addition to continued minelaying by low-flying aircraft, attacks by composite aircraft and by torpedo aircraft were also reported. It is possible that the enemy were aware that craft on the eastern defence line were restricted from A.A. fire because aircraft sometimes came in very low over them. The restriction of ships' gunfire at night in order to give full scope to night fighters will always remain a most vexed problem, as low-flying enemy aircraft cannot be successfully countered by night fighters whilst, in this case, A.A. fire is often most effective.

Capture of Cherbourg.

78. The completion of the capture of Cherbourg was effected p.m. 27th June and no time was lost in commencing a reconnaissance of the port and deciding upon salvage operations. The first naval report on the state of the harbour showed that severe damage had been done to the docks and the arsenal,

Admiralty footnotes:

* COMINCH—C.-in-C. U.S. Fleet, Navy Department, Washington.

† ANVIL (later DRAGOON)—The landing on the South Coast of France.

‡ General Bradley—In command of U.S. Troops employed in this sector.