

Routing of Troop-carrying Aircraft.

30. The routing of aircraft carrying airborne troops to the attack was, from the beginning, recognised as presenting an awkward problem. Allowance was made in the naval approach plan, in conference with Air Plans, for a gap between assault convoys north of Malta through which the troop-carrying aircraft could approach and return without flying over convoys. These routes were promulgated in my operation orders.

In fact these attacks were delivered without interference between naval and air forces involved; but it was not until D - 3 that the airborne troops' plans became firm and that troop-carrier command were able finally to confirm the suitability of routes passing through the corridor laid down so long before.

These late decisions were in large measure due to the late crystallisation of the military tactical plan already referred to in paragraphs 5 to 7 above.

31. Later, airborne troop missions were flown on the night 10th/11th July to the Gela area and on the night 13th/14th July to the Catania area.

In the first instance, an ingress corridor over a deserted portion of coast between the two task forces was allotted and promulgated by signal. The aircraft were to fly inland by this corridor and withdraw passing to the north and west of Licata, well clear of the Western Task Force. In fact, owing to heavy ground A.A. fire and possibly due to bad navigation, large numbers of aircraft forsook the route and flew over the Western Task Force assault areas concurrently with an enemy air attack. Considerable losses resulted.

In the second instance, decision to carry out the operation was taken too late to enable routing to be certainly promulgated to all ships. The airborne troops' representative at my H.Q. was apprised of this danger at the time. This late decision in combination with the unexpectedly late sailing of a convoy from Augusta led to a number of aircraft being shot down by merchant vessel gunfire. In this instance too, enemy aircraft were present to complicate the issue.

32. These incidents led to an enquiry being held by Allied Force Headquarters with a view to eliminating such incidents in future. I concur in the recommendations of committee which are forwarded separately.

Though not easy, the routing of troop-carrier aircraft prior to the main assault, while ships are moving in pre-arranged tracks and in perfect timing, presents a clear cut problem readily susceptible to solution by careful planning as was shown on the night of D - 1/D day in "Husky".

The major problem arises in the routing of aircraft to make drops to fulfil military tactical requirements arising after the main assaults, when the situation has become fluid, convoys are being cleared as they unload, and signal communications are inevitably congested. It was under these conditions that the incidents quoted above occurred.

Naval Forces other than Assault Forces.

33. The work of the main covering force, the hinge pin of the operation, was dull and unspectacular as must ever be the case against a

passive enemy. Force "H" was faced with the prospect of steady patrolling in waters within easy reach of the enemy's air bases, in conditions of moonlight and weather peculiarly suited to air attack and with a growing U-boat threat.

It was not until July 17th (D + 7) that the reduced congestion of Malta and my appreciation of enemy intentions combined to allow this force to be withdrawn into harbour at Malta. In the interval the INDOMITABLE had, not unexpectedly, been torpedoed and severely damaged. Force "H" achieved its object.

34. The effect of the diversionary operations, "Fracture"* by Force "Z" and "Arsenal"† by Force "Q" and coastal forces, cannot be accurately assessed. It is presumed that they contributed to the confusion of the enemy. Both were satisfactorily carried out in precisely the manner ordered.

35. The operations of Force "Q" patrolling nightly northward of the landings, were as necessary as they were unspectacular, and lacked incident. The torpedoing of CLEOPATRA by a U-boat, and the sinking of a U-boat by ILEX and ECHO were merely incidents of passage unconnected with the operational function of this force.

36. The operations of coastal forces, and, at a later stage, of the American P.T. boats‡ in the Straits of Messina were most gallant and determined. They nightly faced an unpleasant volume of gunfire and inflicted losses on the enemy.

37. The anti U-boat operations, both air and surface, which were instituted as soon as a U-boat concentration on the east coast of Sicily became apparent, did not succeed in making any kills. But the U-boat activity achieved little, and that this was the case was probably in no small measure due to the active measures which were taken to discourage their presence.

The U-boat kills which were made were fortuitous, notably the capture of BRONZO by the 13th Minesweeping Flotilla off Syracuse, and LAFOREY's rapid revenge for the torpedoing of NEWFOUNDLAND off Catania.

March of Events subsequent to the Assaults.

38. An outstanding feature of the operation was the rapidity of progress of the left wing U.S. 7th Army once they were firmly ashore. The whole of these operations both before and after the capture of Palermo was a model of amphibious tactics by the Western Task Force.

In particular, after the capture of Palermo on the 22nd July (D + 12) U.S. generalship showed that it had nothing to learn of the value of sea power and Task Force 86 under Rear-Admiral Davidson, U.S.N. that it had nothing to learn of the rapid planning and execution of outflanking operations.

The three "end runs" executed in the north coast of Sicily saved days of costly fighting.

Admiralty footnotes:

* Operation "Fracture"—a bombardment of Favignana (an island off the western point of Sicily) and convoy feints towards the west of Sicily.

† Operation "Arsenal"—a bombardment of Catania (east coast of Sicily).

‡ P.T. boats—the counterpart of British Motor Torpedo Boats.