

The greatest co-operation was given by Captain Barber, Superintendent of Trinity House, Cowes, to whom considerable credit is due. The difficulty of keeping to a swept channel with a strong cross tide had always been foreseen before D day and the attention of all concerned was drawn to it in my Operation Orders. As feared, however, the light buoys were roughly treated during the opening phases of the operation and a very large number of these was sunk.

Heavy Air Attack on Havre.

68. By 14th June there was a considerable concentration of enemy E-Boats in Havre and at my request Bomber Command carried out a heavy attack on the port just before dusk with the object of immobilising the enemy craft. This attack was extremely successful and 10 E-Boats and three torpedo boats are known to have been sunk, in addition to many other minor vessels.

Visit of H.M. The King.

69. His Majesty The King visited the British assault area on 16th June in H.M.S. *ARETHUSA*. This visit gave the greatest satisfaction and encouragement to all British naval personnel on the Far Shore. On the other hand it is worth remarking here that I had to make strenuous efforts to reduce the overall number of official visitors to the assault area during the first few weeks of the operation. The number of persons of greater or less importance who produced good reasons for proceeding there was alarming, observing that, during their stay, of necessity they occupied the time and attention of officers who should have been engaged in other more useful work.

The Northerly Gale.

70. From D day onwards the weather was never what one expected for June in the Channel and from 14th June onwards it deteriorated steadily apart from a temporary improvement during the night 17th-18th June which raised false hopes of better conditions. Low cloud very largely deprived our army of their close air support and a moderate to strong wind made conditions generally unfavourable for the optimum rate of discharge of shipping off the beaches and for the cross-Channel MULBERRY tows. On 19th June a north-easterly gale, unexpected and unforecast, began and at once stopped all unloading to the beaches. Conditions deteriorated rapidly and a large number of landing craft was soon in difficulties. Steps were taken to stop the sailing of further build-up convoys, but some of those already at sea had to continue, to prevent congestion in U.K. anchorages. Additional tugs were despatched to the Far Shore to assist ships and craft in difficulty until the weather moderated. Casualties were suffered by MULBERRY tows that were already at sea and all further sailings of these had also to be stopped. By 20th June a large number of ferry craft had been stranded by the onshore wind and had received serious damage. All unloading was on this day suspended, although a quantity of stores had been discharged the two previous days in the shelter of MULBERRY B (Arromanches). To meet this situation it was decided to dry out, regardless of risk of damage, a number of stores coasters and all

L.S.T. awaiting discharge.* It had previously been considered that L.S.T. should not dry out except in an emergency, but the operation was so successful when attempted on a large scale that thereafter this became the normal method of discharge. Coasters were also beached successfully and only a few of these ships suffered damage. By 21st June it was apparent that the continued high seas were seriously damaging the MULBERRIES. The BOMBARDONS protecting both harbours broke adrift and sank and generally proved useless to withstand weather with wind force 6† and above. The damage to blockships and the PHOENIX breakwaters was far more severe at MULBERRY A (St. Laurent) than at Arromanches. GOOSEBERRY I also lost all protective value. The WHALE piers in MULBERRY A were completely wrecked, chiefly by landing craft being driven down on to them. The gale eased slowly on 22nd June, but the sea did not finally go down until the next day.

71. The results of the gale were to confront the Task Force and Assault Force Commanders with a very critical situation just at the time when their organisations were finally settling down and when it was hoped that they and their staffs might be withdrawn. It is very difficult to estimate the total effect of the gale on the operation as a whole. An army estimate was made which suggested that from 19th to 24th June inclusive the unloading loss due to the gale was in the neighbourhood of 20,000 vehicles and 140,000 tons of stores. The effect of the gale on the arrivals of shipping and craft in France during these days is shown in the attached Table A. From the naval point of view the most serious result was the stranding of about 800 craft of all types, most of which were damaged and neaped, as this caused an immediate shortage of ferry craft on the far shore. It was soon also apparent that the damage done to St. Laurent harbour was very largely irreparable, and, shortly afterwards, you decided that this harbour would not be completed but that all remaining resources would be devoted to the strengthening of Arromanches to withstand winter conditions.

72. As a result of the gale it was decided that the Task Force and Assault Force Commanders would have to remain in the assault area until conditions were again normal. Energetic measures were taken to salve all the damaged craft possible, and new equipment and blockships were sent over for the MULBERRIES. About 250 additional hull repair ratings drawn from the Home Fleet and Home Commands were brought forward as planned for such an emergency, and an additional repair ship and a reserve port repair party were moved over to the assault area. The full salvage organisation was mustered. Due to the energy and resource of all concerned about 600 stranded craft and a few coasters and other small vessels were temporarily repaired and refloated at the next spring-tides, on 8th July. A further 100 were refloated a fortnight later.

Landing Craft Repair Situation.

73. The numbers of damaged landing craft returning after the assault were much greater

Admiralty footnotes:

* On some beaches the practice of drying out L.S.T. had been resorted to as early as D + 2 day.

† Force 6—Strong breeze (21-26 m.p.h. at sea level).