

British Admiralty opinion, on the other hand, supported these estimates in view of the extremely heavy burden that would be thrown on all the repair facilities on the south coast shortly before the operation. Experience in the Mediterranean had shown that a greater number of ships and craft always offered for loading for an assault than had been expected, as the incentive of action had a clearly salutary effect on repairs previously deemed essential. While I therefore really expected the planning figures to be exceeded I was very loath to gamble on this and I only accepted higher figures for U.S. L.S.T. of 95 per cent. after Rear-Admiral A. G. Kirk, U.S.N. (Naval Commander, Western Task Force) had agreed them. In the event, due to the splendid efforts of COMLANCRAB-ELEVENTHPHIB* (Rear-Admiral J. Wilkes, U.S.N.), and his staff, the record overall figure of 99.3 per cent. for all types of U.S. landing ships and landing craft was attained. The similar British figure was 97.6 per cent., and, in my opinion, the very highest credit is due to all concerned in the maintenance and repair organisations of both countries for this achievement, which is the more outstanding when it is remembered that the majority of the assault ships and craft had to be used continuously during months of training before the operation.

Increasing Enemy Naval Activity.

23. Although the enemy were slow to react to our much publicised invasion preparations from the end of April onwards, enemy naval activity in the Channel did increase. On 29th April in an engagement between two Canadian destroyers, who were covering a minelaying operation off Ile de Bas, and two Elbing class, one of our destroyers and one of the enemy's were sunk. Throughout the month of May enemy E-Boat activity in the Central Channel increased, and it was apparent that more E-Boats were being moved to Cherbourg and Havre. Our destroyers and light coastal forces operated by Commanders-in-Chief, Portsmouth and Plymouth, were, however, able to keep the enemy in check and to inflict casualties on him.

24. The first enemy U-Boat was reported in the Western Channel on 20th May, which necessitated a change in the dispositions of our covering forces. The Admiralty had some weeks earlier announced their intention of allotting four A/U Support Groups to Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, to operate in the Western Channel and to co-operate with Coastal Command in sealing this approach to the "Neptune" convoy routes. The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command, had similarly made new dispositions to be effective some weeks before D day in anticipation of the movement of the U-Boat battle to the Channel. Coastal Command threw themselves into the preparations for "Neptune" with as much enthusiasm as any unit in the Allied Expeditionary Force, and I personally and the whole Naval Expeditionary Force are deeply indebted to them for the efficiency of the measures they adopted, which was reflected by the very small scale of U-Boat attack that eventuated.

25. No weapon that the enemy might have employed before D day against our forces caused me more anxiety than the potentialities of minelaying. Mines were employed defensively on a considerable scale in the Bay of the Seine during the months prior to D day and caused the naval plan largely to be framed round the requirements for sweeping our forces through the enemy's minefields. In the six weeks before D day the enemy also considerably intensified his minelaying off the south coast of England, using aircraft on a scale which had not been attempted for over two years and introducing two new types of mine. This minelaying was confined to moonless periods. Had D day been in such a period it is doubtful whether the Portsmouth channels could have been cleared in time. As it was, no interruption was caused to the rehearsals nor to the assembly of our forces and it is considered that the enemy missed a great opportunity in not still further extending this form of attack. That he did not attempt more was yet another result of the air superiority we achieved before D day. Towards the end of May some aircraft minelaying was combined with night air bombing attacks on a light scale on south coast ports, but very few casualties were caused to ships and personnel.

D Day and H Hour.

26. No single question was more often discussed during planning than that of H hour. As H hour was linked to tidal conditions, D day was dependent on it. Until obstructions appeared on the assault beaches, the argument was largely confined to the determination of the ideal balance between a sufficiency of light for aimed air and naval bombardment and the minimum daylight approach, taking into consideration the number of days to which postponement in the case of bad weather would be acceptable in view of the different tidal conditions on later days. But as beach obstructions in some numbers were erected on the beaches, the need to deal with these dryshod, and therefore to land below them, overcame all previous arguments and H hour and D day were finally largely determined by the position of these obstacles.

27. As on the western (U.S.) beaches the obstructions were known to be in place further down the beach than on the eastern (British) beaches and as in Force J's sector near low water there were some rocks which would be a danger to the assault craft, it was finally necessary to select five different H hours, ranging over a period of one hour and twenty-five minutes. Anxiety was felt on two counts, first that the earlier H hours in the U.S. Sector, coupled with their requirements to arrive in the transport area earlier relative to H hour than the British, might prejudice surprise in the west before it was lost in the east, and second, that so many H hours might confuse some or many of the ships and craft taking part. In the event the lack of alertness of the enemy obviated the first and good briefing prevented the second.

28. Owing to the need to take account of the latest photographic reconnaissance showing the exact positions of the obstacles, the final decision as to D day and H hour was not made until 17th May when 5th June was selected,

* Admiralty footnote:

COMLANCRABE-ELEVENTHPHIB — Commander Landing Craft and Bases, 11th Amphibious Force.