

(d) The provision of naval assistance for the reduction of pockets of resistance on the west coast of France. Most of these pockets had only nuisance value to the immediate war effort but importance was attached to the early opening of the port of Bordeaux and operations were in train to this end.

(e) The protection of the Scheldt Approaches.

(f) Naval measures to bring speedy relief to Holland.

(g) The planning of operations to occupy the Channel Islands after surrender, and to occupy Norway under a variety of conditions.

Prospects of Opening a North German Port.

7. Of these widespread problems the first one brought into prominence after the Rhine crossing was the opening of a North German port. This project had long been discussed and in the event of prolonged resistance the opening of such a port might become a vital need, though it was agreed that such an early opening was not in the circumstances, as they then were, an urgent necessity; nor in fact was it a feasible project from the naval point of view to open a port as quickly as Army requirements would prefer, particularly the port most required, Hamburg. It was established that owing to the shortage of minesweepers and the necessity for being prepared to open Dutch ports concurrently for civil relief, only one German port could be opened at a time. Apart from the limitations likely to be imposed by the minesweeping conditions, particularly the difficulties of sweeping our own mines, it was necessary for all resistance to have ceased along the Dutch, and North-West German coasts before minesweeping could be started. The reduction of Heligoland and neutralisation of enemy batteries on Wangerooge* were also essential before the Elbe Approaches could be swept.

8. Subject to these considerations naval plans had always been based on the assumption that Hamburg would be the port to be opened on British account, though recent Army opinion had considered Emden as an alternative if enemy resistance was sustained. The opening of Bremen, with the exception of the minesweeping, would be an American responsibility as that port was to work on United States account, and by now the landward and seaward limits of the Bremen enclave had been finally established.

9. Apart from the reduction of Heligoland, which H.M.S. ROBERTS and H.M.S. EREBUS were being held ready to bombard after the major work of neutralisation had been accomplished by Bomber Command, plans were in hand for assaults on the main Frisian Islands on which it was estimated that the German naval personnel alone amounted to over 12,000. With naval assistance, landward assaults were planned as being the more economical and the First Canadian Army was responsible for those on Wangerooge and Alte Mellun, while the Second Army was to be responsible for the reduction of the two islands off the Cuxhaven Peninsula (Neuwerk and Schar-

horn) which was considered necessary to enable minesweeping operations to begin in the Weser and Elbe Estuaries.

Protection of Shipping.

10. Throughout this period much attention and effort were given to reducing the threats to shipping caused by submarines, E-Boats, midget submarines and mines. Especially in the Scheldt Approaches there were almost daily clashes with the enemy either by the naval forces, which were working under Commander-in-Chief, The Nore, or by the local patrol craft operating under Rear-Admiral F. E. P. Hutton, the Flag Officer, Belgium.

11. Despite efforts for their protection a certain number of merchant ships was damaged and sunk by these attacks and due tribute must be paid to the courage and steadfastness of their crews as well as to the efforts made by the escorting warships to prevent casualties.

Operations on the West Coast of France (Operation "Venerable").

12. Of the German pockets remaining on the west coast of France, most had nuisance value only, but it was considered essential to reduce the pockets astride the Gironde Estuary so that the port of Bordeaux could be opened. Plans for this operation had originally been made the previous November under the code-name "Independence," but the operation had to be postponed on account of the Ardennes push. These were now brought up to date, and it was decided to carry out the operation with a target date of 15th April under the code-name "Venerable."

The naval tasks being:—

(a) Bombardment, primarily in the Ponte de Grave area, of enemy armament which could bear on friendly ground and Air Force:

(b) To remove sunken blockships and scuttled shipping to clear the Channel to Bordeaux; preliminary work had been in progress since October, 1944, by French contractors with the assistance of the U.S. Navy.

(c) The minesweeping necessary to sweep the entrance to the Gironde Estuary and the river.

13. It was later decided that the reduction of the Ile d'Oleron was also essential to the opening of the Estuary and River. A supplementary operation, code-name "Jupiter," was therefore planned to achieve this. It included bombardment of targets on the island and transport of personnel and equipment for the assault.

14. Bordeaux was to be opened by French ground forces under General de l'Arminat. The naval operations were under the command of Commander Task Force 122 (Vice-Admiral A. G. Kirk, U.S.N.) and Contre-Amiral Rue was in command of the French Naval Task Force which consisted of the French ships LORRAINE and DUQUESNE with destroyer and minesweeper support.

15. The bombarding ships arrived in an area to the south-west of Ponte de Grave which had been previously swept for mines, and LORRAINE, DUQUESNE and the destroyers carried out shoots on pre-arranged targets on 15th and 16th April, then withdrawing to Brest.

* Admiralty footnote: Wangerooge—the easternmost of the East Frisian Islands.