

55. The first move by the enemy was when it was reported that five U-Boats had sailed from Brest on the 6th June. On this night there were no less than 11 U-Boat sightings by Coastal Command aircraft, six of which were attacked. The next night there were 10 more sightings, seven being attacked. After this vigorous action the enemy tried to approach the assault area with submarines using Schnorkel but it was some days before U-Boats penetrated into the area of the cross-Channel convoy routes.

56. Within the period of this report the success achieved by U-Boats in the Channel was extremely slight. This was primarily due to the offensive operations of Coastal Command and of the A/U Support Groups covering our convoy routes. Between the 1st June and 3rd July, 1944, Coastal Command aircraft had 96 sightings in the Bay of Biscay and the Channel and its approaches, 59 attacks were made, six U-Boats were known to be sunk, and many other attacks were promising.

Build-up Improvement in Better Weather.

57. From p.m. D+1 until D+8 better weather enabled the rate of build-up to be progressed, despite some shortage of ferry craft due to casualties from the first two days. Convoys sailed from the U.K. and arrived in France on time. As had been anticipated, some difficulties naturally arose initially in the assault area with regard to the great volume of shipping that had to be unloaded and sailed back to England. This resulted in a slower turn round than had been planned, and for a period there was some shortage of ships to be reloaded in the U.K. When the conditions which obtained at the outset on the French coast are further considered, however, it is thought that what was achieved by the Task Force Commanders and their subordinates was in fact very creditable.

Increased Enemy Action.

58. Once it was apparent that our landings constituted invasion on a major scale, it was to be expected that the enemy would attempt to interfere with our build-up convoys and with the shipping off the beaches with all means available to him. Increased enemy shelling of the beaches, particularly on the eastern flank, was experienced from D+2 onwards, but no great success was achieved by the enemy, although unloading in the SWORD sector was retarded. Our bombarding forces were kept busy countering enemy shelling of the beaches and also in assisting the army ashore. It was evident that the enemy was reinforcing his E-Boats in Havre and E-Boat sorties were made nightly from Havre and from Cherbourg. Indications of the enemy's intentions to lay mines in the assault area first became apparent on 9th June when Naval Commander Western Task Force reported attempts to restrict the movements of his bombarding ships by laying a mine barrier on his northern flank. During the first week, Task Force, Assault Force and Assault Group Commanders were fully occupied in combating the various forms of attack which the enemy tried to bring against the assault area, whilst at the same time developing their organisations, first afloat and later ashore, in order to speed up the unloading and turn round of shipping and craft. Enemy attacks were

very largely beaten off, except in the case of air mine-laying which later proved almost impossible to prevent. The similarity of the defence plans for both Task Force Areas, which was the result of close co-operation between the Task Force Commanders during planning, was an important factor in ensuring the overall security of the anchorages.

Destroyer Action off Ile de Bas.

59. In the early morning of 9th June, Force 26, consisting of eight destroyers operating under the orders of Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, made contact with four enemy destroyers 20 miles north-west of the Ile de Bas. A spirited action followed, which resulted in two of the enemy being destroyed and the other two being damaged. This action virtually ended the threat to "Neptune" convoys from attack by enemy destroyers.

Construction of MULBERRIES.

60. MULBERRY tows commenced sailing on D day so that the first PHOENIX, WHALE and BOMBARDON units arrived on the Far Shore early on 8th June (D+2). The laying of the BOMBARDON moorings and the sinking of the PHOENIX breakwaters began at once. The construction of the MULBERRIES proceeded as quickly as had been expected, and in general all units were accurately placed. The weather was on the whole not favourable for cross-Channel tows, and a number of WHALE roadway tows was lost on passage, the total losses being in the region of 40 per cent. of these units, including damage sustained on the Far Shore. On a number of occasions WHALE roadway units having sailed in reasonable conditions were overtaken by bad weather half-way across. By D+5 the CORNCOB breakwaters in both harbours were completed and by D+8 the PHOENIX detached breakwaters were half completed.

Increased Enemy Mining.

61. It was soon apparent that the most serious threat to our shipping in the assault area would be enemy minelaying, as this was carried out at night by both E-Boats and aircraft. Defence against the latter proved extremely difficult as had been expected, as low-flying aircraft were not picked up in sufficient time by radar and so avoided our night fighters. The enemy introduced two new types of mine, both of which were actuated by the reduction of pressure caused by a ship passing over them. One of these could not be swept under any conditions and the other only in certain weather conditions, and a number of casualties was early sustained amongst ships and craft of all types. The problem of sweeping ground mines in the congested anchorages off the beaches proved very difficult as the tails were continually liable to foul other ships and craft. The uncertainty of the distance from the sweeper that an acoustic mine would detonate also proved a constant menace to neighbouring ships.

Bombardment Support of the Land Advance.

62. From D Day onwards, Battleships, Monitors, Cruisers, Destroyers and L.C.G.(L) engaged enemy targets ashore until our armies had advanced beyond the range of their guns. Ships and craft on both flanks engaged coast