

Ports.—The situation at Syracuse was not satisfactory, and it was decided by Naval Commander Eastern Task Force that Naval Commander Force "A" should take over there to permit Flag Officer Sicily to proceed to Augusta where he was urgently required. Accordingly the staff of Force "A" were placed at the disposal of N.O.I.C. Syracuse to help straighten matters out.

At Augusta the harbour and approach channel were both swept for mines during the day with negative result. A start was made with the establishment of coastal forces and landing craft bases.

N.C.E.T.F. visits ports.—Naval Commander Eastern Task Force visited Syracuse and Augusta in H.M.S. LAFOREY during the day.

Gun support.—The normal supporting fire was carried out when, and where, required by the army. The only incident of note was damage inflicted by H.M.S. ROBERTS upon herself while engaged in a bombardment. This included one 4-inch mounting put out of action and an Oerlikon wrecked.

Air activity.—Air activity was restricted to night raids in the north which resulted in nothing worse than some near misses. Heavy barrage from shore defences and extensive use of smoke probably prevented any attempt at precision bombing.

D.S. SOEMBA and FLORES to Augusta.—By order of Flag Officer Sicily the Dutch gunboats SOEMBA and FLORES sailed from BARK EAST for Augusta.

D + 6 DAY.

Friday, 16th July.

Weather.—Fine weather still prevailed over the whole area of operations.

Beaches.

A. BARK SOUTH.

Discharge of stores continued satisfactorily all day. The pontoon with three mobile cranes on it was used for discharging stores from L.C.T. and Scammels to off-load crates from beached L.C.M. Part of the beach repair parties having come round from BARK WEST, a repair park for craft was established on one section of the beach.

B. BARK EAST.

Good progress was made with the unloading of the three M.T. ships in the anchorage and L.C.T. with stores for 51 Division continued to arrive from BARK SOUTH for unloading.

Four ships of the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla carried out a searching sweep in the approach to the anchorage.

C. ACID SOUTH and NORTH.

The last Class "A" ship of the D+3 day convoy sailed to join a convoy from Syracuse.

F.O.S.Y. to Augusta.—Flag Officer Sicily in H.M.S. LARGS transferred from Syracuse to Augusta.

K.M.S. 19B and C forward.—It was decided that K.M.S. convoys 19B and C, which had been held at Malta, should be sailed for Sicily the following morning. This was to relieve congestion at Malta and permit economic use to be made of escorts.

Gun support.—Supporting fire was given to the army as required, but there was again no shoot worthy of particular note.

Enemy air activity.—Only at the northern end of the area of operations was there any particular incident. Raids on a reduced scale were experienced during the night 15th/16th July at Syracuse and near misses resulted in some damage to H.M.S. BOSTON and a few minor casualties in that ship and H.M.S. POOLE. Aircraft mining was also reported south of Syracuse by H.M.S. ROOKWOOD.

D + 7 DAY.

Saturday, 17th July.

Weather.—There was no change in the weather which remained consistently favourable.

Beaches.

A. BARK SOUTH.

Unloading continued satisfactorily and four M.T. ships and two cased petrol carriers were cleared and sailed, leaving eight ships in the anchorage.

B. BARK EAST.

It was decided by Naval Commander Force "V" that after the completion of discharge of the three ships then present, BARK EAST beaches were to be closed. S.N.O.L. (N) was relieved in the evening by Commander R. W. D. Thompson, R.N. and Captain (D), 21st Flotilla assumed responsibility for the safety of the ships in the anchorage.

When S.N.O.L. (N) left, all landing craft in the sector with the exception of two L.C.M. and one L.C.T. were still in good running order.

Augusta.—The presence of two E-boats in the searched channel during the night 16th/17th July caused minelaying to be suspected. Convoy movements were held up until 0930 when the port was re-opened after a 100 per cent. sweep of the channel over a width of two cables on either side of the centre line had been completed without disclosing a mine of any type.

The E-boats were also reported by a patrol trawler to have fired torpedoes and H.M.S. MAURITIUS at anchor in the harbour observed two flashes resembling torpedo explosions outside. No damage was done.

Syracuse.—H.M.S. BULOLO sailed from Syracuse for Malta at 2000 with Naval Commander Force "A" on board, the situation being, by then, satisfactory with a new N.O.I.C., Captain A. N. Grey, R.N. temporarily in charge. It had previously been agreed between Naval Commander Force "A" and Flag Officer Sicily that a prolongation of the stay of H.M.S. BULOLO would eventually lead to confusion owing to divided control, and that the shore organisation would settle down more quickly when there was no doubt as to who was in charge.

Gun Support.

The Inshore Squadron once more gave its support to the army in their operations along the coast, but no call was made upon the bombardment cruisers.

In the evening between 1842 and 1902, H.M.S. WARSPITE bombarded Catania, firing 57 rounds of 15-inch at ranges opening at