

to afford support by direct fire or that they would even be able to keep the landing craft in view throughout the passage between the ships and the shore.

These were, of course, important considerations and changed somewhat drastically the military aspect of the operation, under which it had been envisaged that the landing craft would be able to move into each port with the escorting destroyers in the closest attendance and dominating any possible opposition with their guns.

However, in view of the information available concerning the enemy forces which were likely to be encountered, it was decided to accept the disadvantages and difficulties arising from the possible employment of indirect fire and to insert special instructions in the operation order concerning the use of this method of support.

In this connection, it will be appreciated that the lack of gridded maps, the restricted size of each port, the danger areas which would have to be allowed for and the desire to avoid any unnecessary damage to Norwegian property, all tended to complicate the situation and to make it more and more apparent that there would probably be a period in each port during which the troops would have to rely only on their own weapons and on such covering fire as could be given by any detachments which had already been landed.

In these circumstances, Commanders were instructed to make their approach with caution and to use the leading craft at each port as a scout so that all would not be subjected to fire at one and the same time.

Further, troops were to be prepared to open fire and mutually support each other from their landing craft should the need arise.

The situations which might have arisen clearly called for the use of S.L.C.s* but there were none available.

6. A further decision arrived at after a study of the navigational difficulties, concerned the movement of H.M.S. QUEEN EMMA after the landing craft for Svolvaer had been launched.

It was thought originally that the two A.L.C.s† required for Brettesnes could be dropped at the same time as those for Svolvaer and that they would then be able to proceed astern of their escorting destroyer through the narrow channel named on the chart as Holen Skjoldver.

It was decided, however, that it would be both unsound and unwise to risk passing either a destroyer or unescorted landing craft through this passage.

As a result of this decision, H.M.S. QUEEN EMMA was instructed that, having dropped the landing craft for Svolvaer, she was to proceed to Brettesnes in company with the escorting destroyer, passing to the south of Skravven.

As this route was appreciably longer than that through Holen Skjoldver and as it was desirable that the concentration of the force after the conclusion of the shore operation should not be delayed, orders were issued that the troops landed at Brettesnes should be ready to re-embark at 1130 hours which was 1 hour

earlier than the time limit fixed for the other three ports.

7. The third matter of importance from the military point of view was the possibility which was explained by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, that the escorting destroyers might be forced to leave the vicinity of the four ports should a naval action be precipitated by the move of the force to the Lofotens.

The period during which the destroyers might be away could not, of course, be forecast with any accuracy but, as a precautionary measure, each man was ordered to take ashore with him rations sufficient for 48 hours.

8. It should be stressed that it was the few days spent at Scapa which gave each Commander ample opportunity to examine in the most complete detail the problems which faced him and to consult naval officers concerned on any points of difficulty arising out of them.

It is also worthy of emphasis that, had the nature of the operation entailed a long approach in darkness for the landing craft, or had the tasks allotted to the various detachments been such as to require exact and repeated rehearsal, this preparatory period of six days would not have been long enough.

In such circumstances, 14 to 18 days might well have been required.

The approach to the Lofoten Islands.

9. The force, which bore the code name "Rebel", left Scapa Flow at 0000 hrs. on the 1st March and proceeded first to Skaalefjord in the Faroes where the destroyers were to refuel.

The fjord was reached at 1900 hrs. on 1st March, and the weather conditions had been such that it was hoped, with some degree of confidence, that Force "Rebel" had escaped enemy observation.

10. After a stay of about five hours, the force proceeded on its way routed through various points previously fixed by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet.

11. During the night of Monday, 3rd March, Force "Rebel" entered the Vestfjord and shortly before 0400 hrs. on the following morning, the many navigational lights in the neighbourhood of the Lofotens came into view.

That these should have been burning at what appeared to be full brilliance was somewhat surprising but certainly gave good cause for the hope that the arrival of the force had been unheralded and that the complete effects of surprise might be obtained. Such indeed proved to be the case.

12. The exactness of the timing and the extreme accuracy of the naval approach, both of which were due to the careful arrangements and the untiring supervision of Captain C. Caslon, R.N., and of his Navigating Officer, Lieut-Commander Shaw, R.N., cannot be praised too highly.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the accomplishment of the military tasks on shore was much facilitated thereby.

The operations on shore.

13. The operations ashore proceeded according to plan and all tasks allotted to the force were carried out. The times of the initial landings at each port varied but troops were ashore at all of them by 0650 hours. By 1300 hours

Admiralty footnotes —

* S.L.C.—Support Landing Craft

† A.L.C.—landing craft for landing troops