

were, at the best, indifferent and were beyond the reach of adequate single seater fighter cover based on Sicily. The first of these disadvantages might have been overcome, the second was insurmountable. Therefore, despite the fact that on 27th July information was received that H.M.S. UNICORN, acting in the capacity of a light Fleet Carrier, and four Escort Carriers could be made available from outside my Command, it was decided that the landings must take place in the Gulf of Salerno. Here the beaches were superior to those of the Gulf of Gaeta but the area immediately inland could be covered by artillery fire from the adjacent hills. Further, the roads to Naples led through narrow defiles, which could be easily defended. These disadvantages had, however, to be accepted.

6. Once again, as in Operation "Husky" * the choice of D-Day was largely governed by the period of moon required for the employment of paratroops. The date finally selected for this operation was thus not entirely favourable from the Naval point of view, and the assault forces had to accept a disadvantageous light for the approach. In the event, airborne troops were not employed for the assault.

Preparation, Training and Mounting.

7. Due to the short time available between the final conquest of Sicily and mounting of Operation "Avalanche", there was little time available for rehearsal. In fact, as is stressed by the Naval Commander Western Task Force, it was necessary to overhaul the landing craft at first priority. Every possible repair facility in North Africa was pressed into service and the fact that more craft than had at first seemed likely were overhauled in time to take part in the operation enabled a faster build-up to be achieved than had been expected, and reflects great credit on the repair staffs concerned.

8. In this connection, however, I cannot concur entirely with the remarks of the Naval Commander Western Task Force in Part IV, Section I, paragraph 18 of his report, in which he states that "Naval Planning for Operation 'Avalanche' was affected by the late receipt of orders from higher authority and changes in the composition of the Naval Task Forces brought about by unforeseen releases of Landing Craft from Operations 'Husky' and 'Baytown' †." The increases in the numbers of Landing Craft assigned were largely due to the great efforts of the maintenance personnel. Further changes in the numbers and types of Landing Craft available were caused by the omission of the Naval Commander Western Task Force to provide six L.S.T.s, as required by my Operation Orders, to lift Air Force stores from Milazzo in Northern Sicily to the assault area. To take the place of these L.S.T.s a number of L.C.T.s were diverted from the Messina/Reggio ferry service at considerable expense to the Eighth Army build-up. This is referred to more fully in paragraph 21 of this report.

9. During the loading stages an unfortunate incident took place at Tripoli, due to the

loading without proper authority of some smoke containers into an L.C.T. already containing ammunition. Spontaneous combustion of the smoke led to the explosion of the ammunition which put out of action four L.C.T.s which could ill be spared. This incident serves to stress the necessity for careful supervision of the loading of assault convoys.

Italian Armistice.

10. The fact that an Armistice had been signed between the Allies and the Italians was broadcast by the B.B.C. on the evening of D-1. It had been fully realised that this announcement might well engender an unjustified sense of security in the minds of those taking part in the assault. Accordingly, the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean and the Task Force Commanders sent signals warning all ships taking part in the operation that strong opposition from German forces must still be expected. There can, nevertheless, be no doubt that many took no heed of these warnings and viewed the proceedings with a sense of complacency which was not substantiated in the event.

Intelligence.

11. In general, the intelligence proved reliable and it is satisfactory to note that both beach intelligence and intelligence on fixed Coastal Defence installations were found to be accurate; the only additional defences encountered over and above those estimated being of the mobile type. That the security of the operation was not all to be desired was due to a variety of reasons, the chief of which were:—

(a) The logical selection of the beaches (from the enemy's point of view) for the reasons given in paragraph 5.

(b) The Armistice.

It is interesting to note, however, that although the assaulting forces were sighted by air reconnaissance on the 7th September, it was not until 0230 on 9th September that Alarm Number 3 ("Landing imminent or in progress") was instituted by the Germans.

Assault.

12. The assaults, with a few minor exceptions, went according to plan. The forces arrived at the correct lowering points at the times laid down in the orders. The distances of these lowering points for the deep draught L.S.I.(L)s—9 and 10 miles from the shore—was forced upon the Task Force Commanders by an expected minefield along the 100 fathom line. This expectation was fulfilled.

13. One Brigade of 56 Infantry Division was landed to the South of its allotted beach and became mixed with the other Brigade which had spread North of its sector, thereby causing considerable confusion for some hours.

The Scout Boat marking UNCLE GREEN beach was too far to the South, thus causing a gap in the 46th Division landing, which left an enemy strongpoint unneutralised. This strongpoint subsequently caused considerable trouble to the Division.

Admiralty footnotes :

* Operation "Husky"—the landing in Sicily.

† Operation "Baytown"—the assault across the Straits of Messina, 3rd September, 1943.