

But the main preoccupation at Battle Headquarters centred on the weather. A long spell of fine weather in May was showing signs of breaking up, and as the days went by, it became increasingly clear that an unsettled spell was impending. On 29th May at a meeting at which the Deputy Supreme Commander (Air Chief Marshal Tedder) was present it was decided that Commanders' meetings to give weather forecasts critical examination should be held at Battle Headquarters twice daily from D-3 (2nd June); and on 31st, details of movements of forces in event of postponement of D-day were promulgated, amplifying the instructions in the operation orders. On the same day an inspiring message was issued by the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief in a special order of the day, for distribution to every officer and man in the Naval Expeditionary Force. An order couched in somewhat similar strain was also issued by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief (see Appendix G, G1).

37. Loading and Assembly

Meanwhile in the assault forces, briefing had occupied the days immediately following the opening of the operation orders. On 31st May commenced the intricate business of loading and final assembly. Since all the ports were very congested, every available mooring and berth being occupied¹, this necessitated very careful timing and movement of craft, both loaded and unloaded.

Broadly speaking, all went according to plan (see Sec. 20). Such hitches as occurred had mostly been foreseen, and were overcome without undue difficulty. The majority of the ships and craft and military formations had practised the evolution in exercises, and Commodore Oliver remarked that "the knowledge that they were really 'off at last' acted as a great incentive."

The Naval Commanders of both Forces "S" and "J" remarked on the delays which occurred in loading the L.S.T. due to lack of experience of the military loading personnel; in the case of Force "J" this was aggravated by difficulty experienced in backing trailers down the Southampton hard at low states of tide.

Rear-Admiral Talbot commented on the overloading of craft, which seems to have been general in a greater or less degree, and also on the ill effect of not adhering to the loading plan laid down for the L.C.T.²

There was complete absence of enemy interference throughout the loading, part of which was personally witnessed by the Prime Minister and Field Marshal Smuts.

38. A.N.C.X.F. assumes Operational Command

At 1200, 1st June, 1944, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay assumed operational command of "Neptune" forces and general control of operations in the Channel.

That night a minor episode occurred off the coast of France, when at 0220 2nd June, M.T.B.s 742 and 749 were engaged by enemy shore batteries off

¹ This is no overstatement. Space forbids an account of the special moorings laid and berthing arrangements carried out, but the following extract from the report of the C.-in-C., Portsmouth, gives an idea of the magnitude of this problem:—

"It is a commonplace expression to say that an anchorage is 'full of ships,' but in the case of the East and West Solent with an available area of approximately 22 square miles in which to anchor ships, it was literally true. On 18th May, the Admiralty offered the C.-in-C., Portsmouth, the services of H.M.S. *Tyne*, but it was only possible to accept her because H.M.S. *Warspite* was not being sent to Portsmouth till D-day, which gave one berth in hand."

Report on operation "Overlord," Portsmouth Command, para. 38, plan 2, shows the berthing arrangements referred to.

² A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 2, Report by Naval Commander, Force "S," pp. 8, 9.

Cape de la Heve (near Havre) while carrying out a minelaying operation. No damage or casualty was sustained; the M.T.B.s took avoiding action, and subsequently laid their mines in an alternative position.

The first meeting of the Commanders-in-Chief to consider the weather forecast was held by the Supreme Commander at Battle Headquarters during the forenoon of 2nd June. Less favourable conditions were predicted for D-day, particularly as regards cloud and cloud base, which was of special concern to the Air Force authorities, since it would affect the passage of the airborne divisions.

The first sailings of warships for the assault area took place that evening (2nd June) with the departure of Bombarding Force "D," from the Clyde, and the two midget submarines, X.23 and X.20¹, from Portsmouth. H.M.S. *Nelson* also left Scapa for Milford Haven.

The 3rd June dawned cloudy, with cloud base lowering. Wind was west, 3-4, backing to south-west and increasing to force 5, sea slight, increasing to moderate. Commanders' meetings were held at 0430 and again at 2130 to consider the forecast, which was still unfavourable for 5th June. The conditions predicted affected the Army and Air Force plans more unfavourably than the naval, and at the evening meeting Admiral Ramsay considered that the Navy would be able to undertake its task if reasonable protection could be given from the air. The Supreme Commander decided to await a possible change in the forecast in the next six hours.

Meanwhile the Western Task Force bombarding forces sailed from Belfast, and the *Rodney* and Bombarding Forces "E" and "K" from the Clyde; and—late in the afternoon—the first assault force convoys (sections of Force "U") put to sea from Dartmouth, Salcombe and Brixham.

39. Postponement

At 0415, 4th June, the Supreme Commander and the Commanders-in-Chief again met to consider the weather. The forecast was pessimistic, and it was decided to postpone the operation for one day. This decision was communicated to the Admiralty and the Commanders-in-Chief, Home Commands, by telephone, and a general signal ordering the postponement was promulgated from Battle Headquarters at 0515².

Convoys at sea were ordered to reverse their courses, and proceed to sheltering anchorages; those which had not yet sailed were retained in harbour. The "Corncob" convoys were diverted to Poole Bay, and the bombarding forces reversed courses with the intention of remaining at sea. Movements generally went in accordance with the postponement plan, and at 2250 that evening (4th June) the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, reported all "Neptune" convoys anchored except Group U.2A which was under way off Portland, where the harbour was too crowded to enter.

¹ X.23 and X.20 were towed by H.M. Trawlers *Sapper* and *Darthema* till in Lat. 50° 22' N., Long. 0° 50' W., when they were slipped at about 0430, 3rd June. They proceeded under their own power dived throughout daylight, 3rd June, surfacing after dark to cross the enemy mine barrier, and arrived off the French coast about 0500, 4th June.

² This signal included the revised times of H-hours for 6th June.

This was a very large convoy totalling 138 vessels—128 tank landing craft (77 British, 51 U.S.), four escorts and a rescue tug—and its experiences proved the exception to the general smooth working of the postponement plans. The group had got some distance ahead of its planned position and apparently missed the postponement signal at 0515. Nearly four hours later, at 0900, it was 25 miles to the southward of St. Catherines Point and still heading south. The Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, sent two destroyers at full speed to turn the convoy, and the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, sent a Walrus aircraft which at 0948 reported that all craft had turned to the northward¹. They were ordered to anchor in Weymouth Bay and refuel, but great difficulty was experienced in making to the westward against a west-south-westerly wind, then blowing at force 5 to 6, and a short steep sea on the port bow. It was after midnight (4th/5th) before any of the craft were at anchor. At 2300 (4th June) a U.S. tank landing craft, which had previously broken down, capsized and sank off Portland. No casualties were reported. She is believed to have carried 12 vehicles and 70 men instead of 11 vehicles and 55 men as the allotted load².

Early that morning—at about the time the decision for the postponement was being reluctantly taken at Battle Headquarters—H.M. midget submarines X.23 and X.30 had arrived off the coast of France. The two submarines thus had the honour of being the first Allied vessels to arrive in the assault area. There they remained, within three miles of the enemy coast, checking their positions as opportunity offered, till the arrival of the assault forces some 48 hours later³.

40. The Operation Launched, 5th June, 1944

During the afternoon of 4th June, the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, visited Battle Headquarters. Throughout the day the weather had been overcast, with low cloud and a south-westerly wind, force 6⁴. Cloud conditions were expected to deteriorate, with little improvement before 7th June. Nevertheless, at the evening meeting of the Commanders-in-Chief at 2115, though conditions were still bad—with weather charts typical of December rather than June—the meteorological officers

¹ About half an hour later, the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla reported mines in approximately Lat. 50° 15' N., Long. 1° 16' W. (15 miles south of St. Catherine's Point). This area was in the route of the Force "U" convoys. Five mines were cut and two exploded in the sweep—all of the new German X star type.

² Admiral Ramsay had observed signs of overloading in the course of visits of inspection to some of the hards, and had made a signal the previous day (3rd June) that specified draughts must not be exceeded.

³ The operations of each X-craft were directed by the Senior Officer of a Combined Operations Pilotage Party embarked. They were manned as follows:—

	X.20	X.23
C.O.	.. Lieut. K. R. Hudspeth, R.A.N.V.R.	Lieut. G. B. Honour, R.N.V.R.
1st Lieut.	.. Lieut. B. E. Enser, R.N.V.R.	Sub-Lieut. H. J. Hodges, R.N.V.R.
E.R.A.	.. E.R.A. L. Tilley, R.N.	E.R.A. G. B. Vause, R.N.
C.O.O.P.	.. Lieut.-Cdr. P. C. Clarke, R.N.	Lieut. L. G. Lyne, R.N.
	Sub-Lieut. R. Harbud, R.N.V.R.	Lieut. J. M. Booth, R.N.V.R.

Admiral Ramsay commended the "great skill and endurance" shown, and added: "Their reports of proceedings, which were a masterpiece of understatement, read like the deck log of a surface ship in peace time, and not of a very small and vulnerable submarine carrying out a hazardous operation in time of war." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 11.

⁴ At 1100 4th June the Admiralty promulgated a warning that a south-westerly gale, force 8, was imminent in the Irish Sea.

considered that there was a good chance of suitable conditions existing on the morning of 6th June; they anticipated a return of high winds and rough seas, however, later that day, and these conditions were then likely to continue for an indefinite period¹.

General Eisenhower was therefore "faced with the alternatives of taking the risks involved in an assault during what was likely to be only a partial and temporary break in the bad weather, or of putting off the operation for several weeks until tide and moon should again be favourable. Such a postponement, however, would have been most harmful to the morale of our troops, apart from the likelihood of our losing the benefits of tactical surprise²." It was a grim dilemma, but he decided to proceed with the operation, subject to confirmation next morning, and at 0400, 5th June, he "took the final and irrevocable decision: the invasion of France would take place the following day²."

¹ Admiral Ramsay subsequently remarked that although the unfavourable weather caused difficulties and damage to craft off the beaches later, the advantages gained by surprise were so striking that the decision of the Supreme Commander to go on despite the weather was amply justified. "A postponement of one more day, e.g. till 7th June would, in the event, have proved disastrous owing to the conditions of sea off the beaches. The problems arising out of a postponement of 12 or 14 days to the next suitable period are too appalling even to contemplate." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 10.

² Report by the Supreme Commander, p. 24.

Part II

EXECUTION

V.—PASSAGE

41. Organization of Assault Forces

The assault forces were organized as follows :—

Assault Group.	Headquarters.	Assault Troops.	Beach.	Remarks.
<i>Force "G"</i>				
	H.M.S. <i>Bulolo</i> { Commodore Douglas-Pennant. Maj.-Gen. Graham (50th (N) Div.). Gp. Capt. Simonds.			
G 1	H.M.S. <i>Nith</i> Capt. J. W. Farquhar, R.N. (S.O.A.G.G. 1). Brig. Sir A. Stanier, Bt. (231st Infy. Bde.).	231st Bde.	"Jig" Green	
G 2	H.M.S. <i>Kingsmill</i> Capt. F. A. Ballance, R.N. (S.O.A.G.G. 2). Brig. F. V. C. Knox (69th Infy. Bde.).	69th Bde.	"King" Green	
G 3	H.M.S. <i>Albrighton</i> Capt. G. V. M. Dolphin, R.N. (S.O.A.G.G. 3). Brig. R. H. Senior (151st Infy. Bde.).	151st Bde.		Reserve.
<i>Force "J"</i>				
	H.M.S. <i>Hilary</i> { Commodore G. N. Oliver. Lt.-Gen. C. J. Crocker (1st Corps). Maj.-Gen. Keller (3rd Can. Div.). Gp. Capt. R. Cleland.			
J 1	H.M.S. <i>Lawford</i> Capt. A. F. Pugsley, R.N. (S.O.A.G.J. 1). Brig. H. W. Foster (7th Can. Infy. Bde.).	7th Can. Bde.	"Mike" Green Red "Nan" Green	
J 2	H.M.S. <i>Waveney</i> Capt. R. J. O. Otway-Ruthven, R.N. (S.O.A.G.J. 2). Brig. K. G. Blackader (8th Can. Infy. Bde.).	8th Can. Bde.	"Nan" White Red	
J 3	H.M.S. <i>Royal Ulsterman</i> Capt. A. B. Fanshawe, R.N. Brig. D. G. Cunningham (9th Can. Infy. Bde.).	9th Can. Bde.	Probably "Nan" White Red	Reserve.

Assault Group.	Headquarters.	Assault Troops.	Beach.	Remarks.
<i>Force "S"</i>				
	H.M.S. <i>Largs</i> { Rear-Admiral A. G. Talbot. Maj.-Gen. R. G. Rennie (3rd Div.). Gp. Capt. W. G. Tailour.			
S 1	H.M.S. <i>Locust</i> Capt. W. R. C. Leggatt, R.N. (S.O.A.G.S. 1 and N.O.I.C. "Sword"). Brig. J. C. Cunningham (9th Infy. Bde.).	9th Bde.		Reserve.
S 2	H.M.S. <i>Dacres</i> Capt. R. Gotto, R.N. (S.O.A.G.S. 2). Brig. K. P. Smith (185th Infy. Bde.).	185th Bde.		Intermediate Group.
S 3	H.M.S. <i>Goathland</i> Capt. E. W. Bush, R.N. (S.O.A.G.S. 3). Brig. E. E. Cass (8th Infy. Bde.).	8th Bde.	"Queen" White Red	Assault Group.
<i>Force "O"</i>				
	U.S.S. <i>Ancon</i> { Rear-Admiral J. L. Hall, U.S.N. Maj.-Gen. Huebner, U.S.A. (1st Div.). Col. L. N. Tindall, U.S.A. (9th Air Force and 9th Tactical Air Force).			
O 1	U.S. Transport <i>Samuel Chase</i> Capt. Fritzsche, U.S.C.G. ¹ (S.O.A.G.O. 1). L.C.I. (L) 87 Capt. Imlay, U.S.C.G. (Dep. S.O.A.G.).	16th R.C.T.	"Fox" Green "Easy" Red	
O 2	U.S. Transport <i>Charles Carroll</i> Capt. Bailey, U.S.N. ¹ (S.O.A.G.O. 2). L.C.I. (L) 86 Capt. Wright, U.S.N. (Dep. S.O.A.G.).	115th, 116th R.C.T.	"Easy" Green "Dog" Red White	
O 3	U.S. Transport <i>Anne Arundel</i> Capt. Schulten, U.S.N. ¹ (S.O.A.G.O. 3). L.C.I. (L) 492 Commander Unger, U.S.C.G. (Dep. S.O.A.G.).	18th R.C.T.	"Fox" Green "Easy" Red	

¹ On account of their relative seniority, the transport division Commanders were placed in command of the assault groups, with landing craft officers as their deputies. Rear-Admiral Hall subsequently remarked that this was undesirable because the transports completed their part of the operation at a comparatively early stage and left the assault area, taking with them the Assault Group Commanders, while the Deputy Assault Group Commanders remained throughout the assault, and the first three weeks of the build-up phase.

Assault Group.	Headquarters.	Assault Troops.	Beach.	Remarks.
<i>Force "O"—continued</i>				
O 4	H.M.S. <i>Prince Charles</i> Commander Dennis, R.N. .. (S.O.A.G.O. 4).	2nd Ranger Bn.	"Charlie" Pointe du Hoe "Dog" Green	
<i>Force "U"</i>				
	U.S.S. <i>Bayfield</i> {	Rear-Admiral D. P. Moon, U.S.N. Maj.-Gen. Collins (VII Corps).		
Green	L.C.H. 530 Commander A. L. Warburton, U.S.N. (S.O.A.G.).	1st Bn. 8th Infy.	"Tare" Green	Initial land- ings followed by 1 Infy. Battn. on each beach at H+75 min., H+210 min., H+240 min., H+250 min., l e a v i n g 2 Battns. "on call."
	L.C.I. (L) 321 Commander J. S. Bresman, U.S.C.G. (Dep. S.O.A.G.).			
Red	L.C.H. 10 Commander E. W. Wilson, U.S.N.R. (S.O.A.G.).	2nd Bn. 8th Infy.	"Uncle" Red	
	L.C.I. (L) 217 Lt.-Com. R. G. Newbegin, U.S.N.R. (Dep. S.O.A.G.).			

For the passage, each British Assault Force was organized in 16 or 18 convoys or groups, the composition and numbering of the groups being based on the time of arrival at "the other side".¹ A programme was worked out in great detail, times of the sailings of the various convoys being adjusted to the widely varying speeds and seagoing capacities of the heterogeneous collection of shipping of which the assault forces were composed. The problem was not eased by the necessity for steaming dead across the Channel stream running at times up to 2½ knots² and, in the event, the heavy weather conditions added a further complication.

The American Assault and Follow-up Force convoys were made up in accordance with arrival by tides. The composition of the convoys, which were usually larger than the British, was determined largely by the tactical plan, with the underlying idea of not exposing types which were valuable to the build-up until it was assured that they could be expeditiously and safely unloaded, e.g. only 15 L.S.T. were permitted to arrive off the U.S. beaches on the first tide. Owing to the variety of ships and craft, and the complex movements involved, the assault convoys were limited to two categories in accordance with speed capabilities, viz. :—

12 knots—fire-support ships, transports and L.C.I.(L).

5 knots—fire-support craft, L.S.T., L.C.T. and L.C.M. needed for the assault which could not be lifted.

L.S.T. were not put in a separate category as nearly all were engaged in towing rhino ferries and causeway sections during the assault phase.

¹ See App. "H."

² On the night of 5th/6th June, under the combined effect of wind and tidal streams some craft had to allow as much as 40° to make good the track desired.

Force "U" (Rear-Admiral Moon, U.S.N.) had perhaps the most difficult task of all the assault forces, as regards its organization and passage¹. The lack of a large port in the West Country area necessitated the use of nine different loading ports, and most of the twelve convoys in which its 865 ships were organized contained three or four sections which sailed from different ports and had to rendezvous at sea. The escorts, too, in most cases, were obliged to sail from different ports to their convoys. In addition, Force "U's" embarkation ports were considerably further from the assault area than those of the other assault forces, thus entailing greater fatigue and discomfort on the troops embarked and longer exposure to the hazards of the passage.

42. Departure

At 0900 5th June, the first groups of landing craft sailed from the Portsmouth area, and from then on there was a constant stream of ships passing the Needles and the Nab Tower. Force "G" proceeded through the Needles Channel: Force "J" and those portions of Force "S" in this area—Assault Groups "S1" and "S3"—used the Spithead and Lumps Fort entrances². The sailings of the assault forces from the crowded anchorages proceeded smoothly.

As the first convoy left Spithead the signal "Good Luck: Drive on" was hoisted in the *Largs*, Rear-Admiral Talbot's Flagship—which was anchored at the eastern end of the Force "S" line of L.S.T.—and kept flying until her own departure at 2145.

The wind was west, force 5, slackening to force 3 to 4 and veering to west-north-west in the evening; the sea was 4, swell 1. These conditions were unexpectedly severe and imposed a high test on the landing craft crews³. "Their spirit and seamanship alike rose to meet the greatness of this hour, and they pressed forward . . . in high heart and resolution; there was no faltering, and many of the smaller landing craft were driven on till they foundered⁴."

The reserve group of Force "S"—Assault Group "S2" (S.O. Captain Gotto, R.N.)—which sailed from Newhaven, had a steady beat of 33 miles

¹ The difficulties were enhanced by the fact that Force "U" was the last force to be formed. The craft assigned to it were the last to arrive in England, and in many cases had practically no training.

² The sailing of these convoys was witnessed by Admiral Ramsay during the afternoon, who embarked in a M.T.B. for the purpose, subsequently visiting Rear-Admiral Talbot and Commodore Oliver to wish them Godspeed.

³ Admiral Ramsay subsequently remarked: "That the decision of the Supreme Commander to launch the assaults under such conditions was the correct one has never been questioned. An unfortunate doctrine had, however, been given full promulgation during planning, particularly in Army circles, namely that fine weather and a calm sea were essential for the assault. In retrospect, with the experience of Operation 'Husky' still fresh in our minds, and with the knowledge of the fickleness of the weather in the Channel, this should never have been allowed." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 57.

⁴ A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 2, Report of N.C.E.T.F., p. 3.

Rear-Admiral Vian added: "It may probably be that the weather conditions had some part in what must ever be a matter for wonder that the embarkation, sailing and passage of the force by day should have been carried through without so great a movement being detected by a well-equipped, prepared and determined enemy. That this should have been achieved is a lasting tribute to the admirable work of the Allied Air Force and the excellence of the cover plan."

It is now known that the German meteorological officers had in fact informed the German Command that invasion would not be possible on the 5th or 6th June on account of stormy weather which was expected to last for several days.

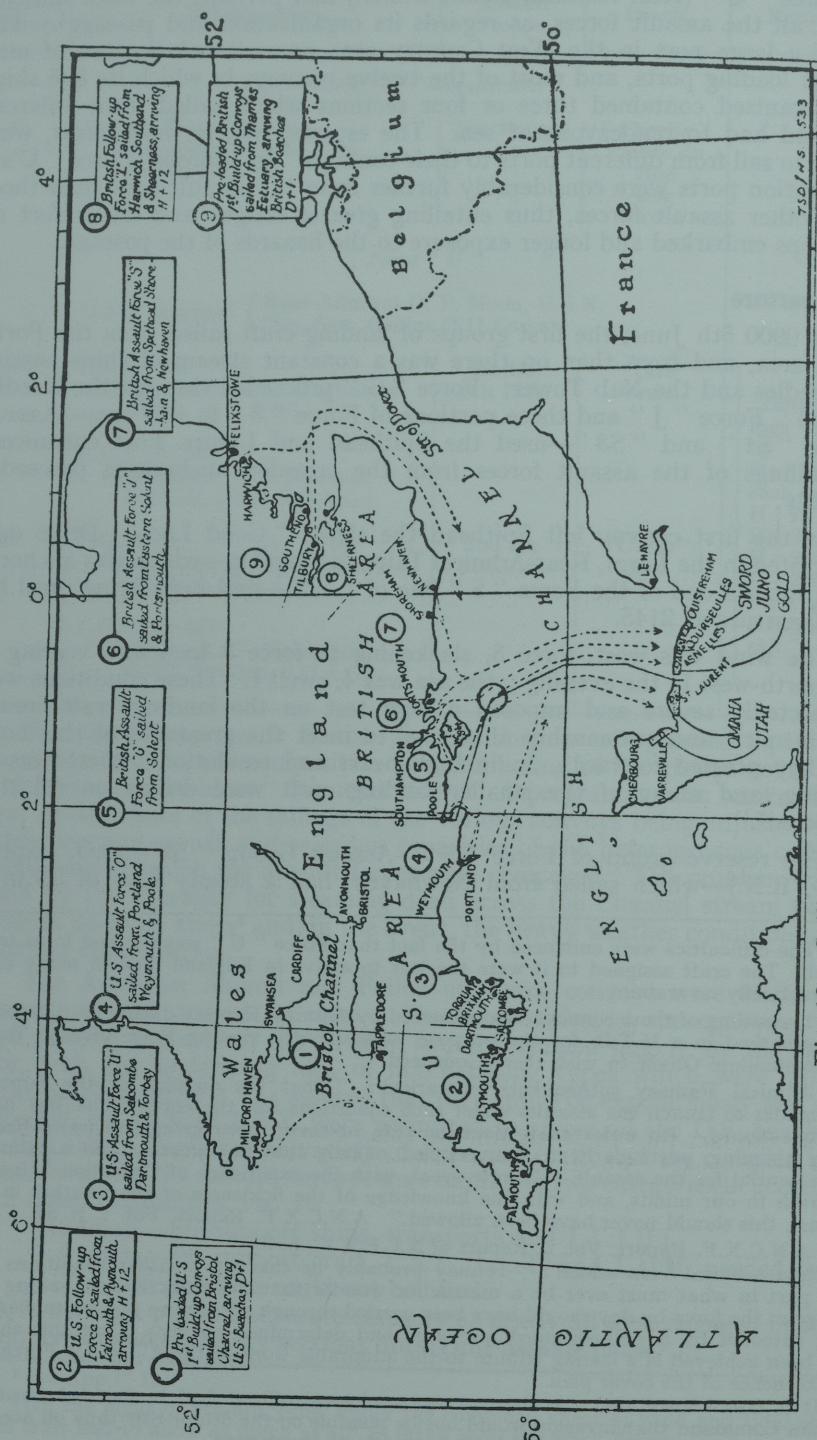


Fig. 12. Sailing of Assault and first Build-up Convoys.

into a head sea, and was hard put to it to keep to its programme. Similar difficulties, enhanced by a strong flood stream, were experienced by the landing craft of Force "G" in getting clear of the Needles.

At 1630, 5th June, H.M.S. *Scylla* wearing the flag of Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian sailed and closed various groups of landing craft in the vicinity of position "Z." Once the groups had turned to the southward, it appeared that the major landing craft would not have serious difficulty in keeping to their time table, but conditions were much harder for the L.C.P.(L) and L.C.A.(H.R.) which were in company or being towed.

Meanwhile the Western Task Force also had put to sea.

Force "O" assault forces sailed from the Portland-Poole area, Rear-Admiral Hall, with his flag in U.S.S. *Ancon*, sailing at 1600, and joining his bombarding ships to the southward of St. Albans Head.

The leading groups of Assault Forces "S," "G," "J" and "O" arrived in area "Z" without incident during the afternoon and headed for the entrances to the channels across the German mine barrier.

Rear-Admiral Moon, with his flag in U.S.S. *Bayfield*, left Portland at 0930, and steered for the entrance to Channels 1 and 2, being joined *en route* by the sections of Force "U" from the West Country ports and his bombarding ships from Belfast. Group "U.2A," as already mentioned, had been disorganized by the heavy weather of the day before, and severe strain was thrown on the commanding officers, some of whom were on their bridges continuously for 70 hours before H-hour, but out of 128 L.C.T. of this group, only seven failed to take part in the assault¹.

As already mentioned (*see* Sec. 39) mines had been found the day before to the southward of St. Catherine's Point in Force "U's" route². The Senior Officer, 14th Minesweeping Flotilla, acting on his own initiative, swept and buoyed a channel through this dangerous area, cutting one mine, while the 16th Flotilla cut four mines some miles to the westward. Force "U" passed safely through this minefield, but it claimed the first casualty of the operation, U.S.S. *Osprey* of the U.S. 7th Minesweeping Squadron, which hit a mine and subsequently sank.

43. Sweeping of Approach Channels

The minesweeping operations in the meantime were going almost exactly to plan in spite of stronger tidal streams than had been expected and the unfavourable weather. They were completely disregarded by the enemy, despite the fact that the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla was in sight of the French coast from 1957³, 5th June and before dark could distinguish individual houses ashore⁴.

¹ "At one time it was thought that Force 'U' would have to return to Devonshire to re-form, but when it was pointed out that this would almost certainly result in the postponement of the operation to the next moon period, Rear-Admiral Kirk, with characteristic verve, announced his readiness to proceed." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 9.

² Admiral Ramsay appreciated that these mines were a chance lay, jettisoned by E-boats, and decided not to attempt to change the route of Force "U."

³ Sunset, 5th June, 2212 M.S.T.

⁴ Some anxiety had been felt lest the appearance of the minesweepers in daylight should compromise security, but the risk had to be accepted.

The fleet minesweepers were preceded by minesweeping motor launches; the latter had great difficulty in working their sweeps in the prevailing weather, but all except two were successful¹.

The change of sweeps on the turn of the tide was successfully accomplished by all flotillas, though the 9th and 18th Flotillas were obliged to execute the manœuvre in a minefield.

The danlayers proved equal to their task and the marking of the channels was very good throughout. The entrances of channels 9 and 10 were about a mile to the eastward of their correct positions, but these channels came in to their right geographical positions at the southern end.

Throughout the approach of the flotillas, positions were checked by the Q.M. and Q.H. radar systems, as well as by taut wire measuring gear. All flotillas laid their terminal buoys within a cable of the correct positions and within a few minutes of the planned time.

Between Lat. 49° 38' N. and Lat. 49° 29' N., 29 mines were cut by the 14th, 18th and 9th Flotillas in channels 2, 6 and 7.

44. Passage of the Mine Barrier

(Plan 4)

The assault forces found little difficulty, generally speaking, in locating the entrances of the swept channels. A few mistakes naturally occurred, but these were of no great moment. For example, four groups of Force "J" and one of Force "S" proceeded down the wrong channels, all to the westward of their correct ones, without serious inconvenience to the proper users. These errors were realized before reaching the end of the channels, but the loss of time involved in making to the eastward could not, in the case of the L.C.T. (A.V.R.E.) of Assault Group "J1," be made up. The leading group of Assault Group "G1," which should have used channel 5, was jostled out of it and to the eastward by a group belonging to Force "O," whose tail had drifted downwind and tide. After midnight the tide turned, the tail wagged the other way and the leading group of "G1" was able to enter its correct channel, only to be forced out of it again by overtaking infantry landing ships and light cruisers; this group only spent one hour in swept waters.

Divergences such as the foregoing were only to be expected in view of the difficulty in the navigation of slow-moving craft in a cross stream, accentuated by heavy weather.

Casualties on passage were almost entirely due to the weather, only two being caused by enemy action—H.M.S. *Wrestler*², which was mined at 0645 6th June, in Lat. 49° 36' N., while a cable to the eastward of channel No. 7—

¹ Rear-Admiral Vian subsequently remarked that the loss of speed and cutting power imposed by the inclusion of M.S./M.L.S. was justified by the sweeping of two mines ahead of the leading Fleet minesweeper in Channel No. 7. A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 2, Report by N.C.E.T.F., p. 5.

² "H.M.S. *Wrestler* had done useful service during the night in rounding up stragglers and guiding stray groups into the correct channels. The Commanding Officer had appreciated that the importance of the punctual arrival of these groups outweighed the risk to his ship by operating in unswept waters." Commodore Oliver's report, A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 3, p. 4.

and later on one L.S.T. of Follow-up Force "L." The total casualties on passage in the Eastern Task Force are shown in the following table:—

Ship or Craft.	Force "S"	Force "J"	Force "G"	Force "L"	
H.M.S. <i>Wrestler</i> ..	—	—	—	—	Mined.
L.S.T.	—	—	—	1	Mined.
L.C.T.	—	1	—	—	Sank in tow.
	—	—	2	—	Missing.
	1	1	3	—	Broke down.
M.G.B.	—	1	—	—	Broke down.
Rhino Ferry ..	1	1	1	—	Sank on passage.
Rhino Tugs ..	7	7	3	—	Sank on passage.
L.C.P. (L) ..	1	—	1	—	Missing.
L.C.A. (H.R.) ..	8	8	7	—	12 sank in tow; 2 missing; 2 broke down and towed to base.

The total casualties suffered on passage by the Western Task Force are not known; such as occurred were due to the weather. Several L.C.P.(L) of Assault Force "O," which were being towed, had to be cast adrift and abandoned and two L.C.T.(A) foundered, the crews being recovered in all cases.

45. Diversions

(Plan 4)

While the assault forces were making their uncomfortable way to the southward, to east and west of the assault area diversions had been in progress since midnight. Their primary object was to delay the movement by the enemy of his military reserves to meet the invading forces. It was also thought possible that the diversionary forces might draw off enemy naval opposition from the assault and follow-up forces.

The diversions were carried out by coastal craft forces fitted with special equipment, which approached suitable beaches and simulated landings by means of radio counter-measures and smoke; they were supported by air sorties.

Six H.D.M.L.s acting under the orders of the Vice-Admiral, Dover, operated in the Pas de Calais area, feinting at suitable beaches at approximately the time of the real assault (Operation "Glimmer"); eight H.D.M.L.s under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, manœuvred on a 14-mile front to seaward of Cap d'Antifer so that the flank ships arrived off the beaches at Bruneval and Fécamp half an hour before civil twilight¹, (Operation "Taxable"), and to the west four H.D.M.L.s under the Naval Commander, Force "U," operated some 6 miles east of Cape Barfleur from about 0230 till 0440 to occupy the attention of the enemy radar stations in the north-east Cotentin (Operation "Big Drum").

46. Arrival at Lowering Positions

(Plan 1B)

Meanwhile at Battle Headquarters first reports were eagerly awaited. "There was an air of unreality during the passage of the assault forces across the Channel"—to quote Admiral Ramsay—"curiously similar to that on

¹ Start of Civil Twilight, 0510 M.S.T., 6th June.

D-1 in 'Husky' as our forces approached Sicily. The achievement of strategical surprise was always hoped for in 'Neptune' but was by no means certain, whereas that of tactical surprise had always seemed extremely unlikely. As our forces approached the French coast without a murmur from the enemy or from their own radio, the realization that once again almost complete tactical surprise had been achieved slowly dawned¹.

This was indeed the case.

Across the Channel at the headquarters of Admiral Krancke, the German Commander of "Group Command West," nothing unusual occurred on this momentous night till 0130, 6th June, when paratroop landings east of the Orne were reported². This was not considered likely to portend a large scale landing, but as a precaution all forces under F.O.I.C., Western Defences, and S.O., Motor Torpedo Boats, were brought to immediate notice³. An hour and a half went by; then, at 0309, ten large craft were reported seven miles north of Port en Bessin. This, in conjunction with amplifying reports of the airborne landings, convinced Admiral Krancke that a large scale operation was in progress, and the following orders were issued:—

- (i) Vessels of West Defence Force to patrol coastal waters.
- (ii) "Landwirt" submarines⁴ to be in immediate readiness.
- (iii) 8th Destroyer Flotilla (Narviks) to move from Royan to Brest.
- (iv) 5th Torpedo Boat Flotilla from Le Havre to reconnoitre in Port en Bessin-Grandcamp area. This was later changed to the Orne estuary (see Sec. 48).
- (v) 5th and 9th Motor Torpedo Boat Flotillas from Cherbourg to patrol off Cape Barfleur and west of Cape de la Hague respectively⁵.

But it was too late.

As the assault forces neared the French coast, signs of the Allied bombing became visible; there was considerable flak over the land and many fires were seen well alight. All the assault forces reached their lowering positions as planned, the American Forces "O" and "U" some three hours before the British, since their landings were to take place about an hour earlier and their

¹ Admiral Ramsay went on to remark: "This astonishing feat cannot be explained by any single factor and must be attributed in part to all of the following: the cover and deception plan; the high degree of air superiority attained by our Air Forces, which drastically reduced the enemy's air reconnaissance; the bad weather which caused the enemy to withdraw his E-Boat patrols to Cherbourg, and finally the radio counter measures employed by our forces, which, coupled with the diversions against the Pas de Calais and Cap d'Antifer, left the enemy in doubt as to the points at which we would land even when he had become aware that the invasion was in progress." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 10.

² At about 0050, 6th June, the Supreme Commander, West, stated that during 5th June reports stating that the invasion would be launched very shortly were broadcast by the B.B.C. Admiral Krancke remarked that "although it is hardly to be assumed that the invasion will be announced in advance over the radio" such announcements should cause acts of sabotage, etc., which would pave the way for the invasion proper.

³ The normal surface patrols had been kept in harbour on the night of 5th/6th June on account of weather.

⁴ A group of 36 submarines based on the west coast of France earmarked for use against the invasion.

⁵ These flotillas left Cherbourg at 0445, but bad weather compelled them to return at first light.

lowering positions (transport areas) were further from the beaches¹. U.S.S. *Bayfield* (Naval Commander, Force "U") anchored at 0229 and U.S.S. *Ancon* (Naval Commander, Force "O") at 0251, closely followed by their leading convoys, and the disembarkation of the troops into L.C.V.P.s commenced at once.

In the Eastern Task Force area, Forces "G" and "J" arrived at the lowering positions without the slightest molestation, the *Bulolo* (Naval Commander, Force "G") and leading L.S.I.s anchoring at about 0535, and the *Hilary* (Naval Commander, Force "J") at 0558. The only opposition at this stage consisted of a torpedo attack on Force "S," which developed from the eastern flank just as the leading ships were arriving at the lowering position. This attack, as well as the conditions obtaining at the time, is best described in the words of Rear-Admiral Talbot's report.

47. German Torpedo Attack on Eastern Flank.

(Plan 1B)

"As H.M.S. *Largs*, bringing up the rear of the L.S.I. convoy, approached the coast of France, the sense that we had achieved a large measure of tactical surprise became apparent. No air attacks, no E-Boat attacks, no radar or W/T jamming worth mentioning. The air plot showed enemy aircraft on patrol away to the eastward in the Pas de Calais area. A glance to starboard showed the assault convoys on time as far as could be judged. The operation was proceeding with unreal precision. . . ."

As we approached the lowering position, H.M.S. *Warspite*, H.M.S. *Ramillies*, H.M.S. *Roberts* and H.M.S. *Arethusa* were already anchored in their bombarding positions to port of us, down the extension of channel 10 swept by the 40th Minesweeping Flotilla, H.M.S. *Scylla*, H.M.S. *Mauritius*, H.M.S. *Danae*, O.R.P. *Dragon* and H.M.S. *Frobisher* disposed at anchor along the swept "Loop" channel joining the lowering position to the southern extremity of channel 10 extension. The bombarding squadron had opened fire, but were only being engaged by the enemy in a desultory fashion, few shots falling anywhere near them. The bombarding destroyers, under the command of Captain (D) 23rd Flotilla (Captain P. G. L. Cazalet, D.S.C., Royal Navy), in H.M.S. *Saumarez* were waiting, as ordered, clear of the swept channels where they merged, to be swept into their inshore positions by the 165th B.Y.M.S. The "DD" L.C.T. convoy was just coming up to the lowering position—on time, but the L.C.T.(A) convoy was obviously late. Such was the picture at 0510 as we ran down from the knuckle to join channel 9.

Then events started to move swiftly. In accordance with plan, our own aircraft streaked low across the eastern flank at about this time and laid a most effective smoke screen to shield the force from the heavy batteries at Havre. Unfortunately, three German torpedo boats took advantage of this to carry out a torpedo attack, and though engaged by the bombarding squadron,

¹ In choosing the lowering positions (U.S. "Transport Areas") it had been necessary to balance the conflicting factors of being south of the mine barrier and outside the range of enemy shore batteries. The Eastern Task Force finally chose positions 7 to 8 miles from the beaches, whilst the Western Task Force placed them 10 to 11 miles out.

In the event, the L.S.I. of the E.T.F. were not seriously menaced by enemy fire, but the longer passage inshore in the rough weather seemed to add appreciably to the difficulties of the assault craft of the W.T.F.

Admiral Ramsay subsequently remarked that it was unfortunate that the Americans did not anchor closer in: "although one can fully sympathise with the decisions of the U.S. Forces . . . it is considered that immunity from coastal batteries should not be given undue weight in the selection of the lowering positions, especially when adequate naval counter battery fire is available." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 58.

were able to make good their escape in the smoke¹. Two torpedoes passed between H.M.S. *Warspite* and H.M.S. *Ramillies* and at 0530 one hit H. Nor. M.S. *Svenner* close on the port beam of H.M.S. *Largs*. Another torpedo was seen approaching H.M.S. *Largs*; her engines were put emergency full astern and the torpedo passed a few feet ahead of her. It then came to rest and sank just short of H.M.S. *Virago*. She had, however, seen H. Nor. M.S. *Svenner's* signal "Torpedo Port" and with the remainder of the starboard division of bombarding destroyers, waiting stopped in a group, went emergency full ahead². The *Svenner* had apparently been hit immediately under her boiler room. There was a burst of steam amidships and her funnel fell aft as the whole ship lifted out of the water. She broke her back and sank rapidly; the greater part of her ship's company were picked up.

The *Warspite* followed the enemy in by radar and opened fire at 14,000 yards; she reported one torpedo boat sunk. The *Mauritius*, *Ramillies* and *Arethusa* also opened fire, the former claiming one trawler sunk and one damaged³.

After this mauvais quart d'heure things quietened down; the L.S.I. of Force "S" anchored in the lowering positions in accordance with plan, and the convoys began to arrive⁴.

The fire from the enemy's coast defence batteries was singularly ineffective. In "Gold" area Longues battery opened fire on the *Bulolo* at 0557; no hits were obtained, and the battery was silenced by the *Ajax* by 0620⁵. The two main batteries opposing Force "J" were neutralized during the assault and subsequently captured before they could interfere with the shipping. In "Sword" area the fire from the batteries east of the Orne was directed mainly against the bombarding ships; the *Warspite* shifted berth after being straddled by shells from the Benerville battery, but received no damage⁶. By 0930 the main enemy batteries had been silenced, though they required periodic attention throughout the day; the *Ramillies*, for example, carried out eleven shoots at

¹ Rear-Admiral Vian subsequently remarked that the fact that it was not possible to stop the aircraft from laying smoke probably enabled the German torpedo boats (who were accompanied by trawlers) to make their escape, and recommended that in future direct communication between smoke laying aircraft and the unit being screened should be arranged.

² A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 2, Report of N.C. Force "S," pp. 15, 16.

³ The attack was carried out by the 5th Torpedo Boat Flotilla, 15 torpedoes in all being fired. According to the Germans, only minor damage was sustained by the torpedo boats; but the 15th Patrol Flotilla, stationed off Havre, "ran into heavy enemy fire" under which one vessel sank after striking a mine.

⁴ Rear-Admiral Talbot remarked that it was a pleasant surprise that the congestion anticipated with such large numbers of ships—minesweepers, destroyers, L.S.I. anchored or waiting in the lowering position, and the steady stream of landing craft steaming in two columns, one either side of the L.S.I.—was no problem at all.

⁵ This battery came to life again later and was engaged by the *Argonaut*. It was subsequently found that two guns had been put out of action by direct hits with 6-in. shell through the embrasures. These hits must be attributed to chance, since the density of craters around the guns was not high. The remaining two guns were undamaged, though in one case the casemate had been hit. In all, 150 rounds of 6-in. (*Ajax*) and 29 rounds of 5.25-in. (*Argonaut*) were fired at Longues battery.

⁶ Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian remarked: "The inability of the enemy on the eastern flank to find or hold the range may have been due to the radar counter measures, which included "window" and R.C.M. balloons . . . planted in clumps to the north-eastward of the bombarding ships. Some of these balloons were seen to be engaged by shore batteries." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 2. Report by the Naval Commander, Eastern Task Force, p. 7.

Benerville with considerable observed success. The cruisers of Force "D" fired on the batteries assigned to them as occasion demanded. As the day wore on the beaches and anchorage were subjected to an increasing fire from mobile guns in the woods south of Franceville which proved most difficult to locate and engage.

48. Deployment of Assault Forces

(Plans 1C, 5, 6, 6A, 7)

Meanwhile the assaulting flotillas had started on their passage to the beaches. The weather at the lowering position—wind west-north-west, force 4, with a short steep sea—somewhat impeded the lowering and loading of the landing craft, but despite this the "marriage" of the minor craft from the L.S.I. with their various major craft was completed successfully, and in general the flotillas got away on time.

The detailed organization of the assault groups varied in the several assault forces, depending as it did on the type of assault intended, the physical characteristics of the beaches, the nature of the defences and so forth. A typical organization (based on the orders for Force "S") is shown diagrammatically in Plan 5.

Destroyers proceeded in on the flanks of the first wave of the assaults, giving direct close support fire, while B.Y.M.S. swept the waters ahead of them. The "Hunts" closed the beaches as near as possible, while the "Fleets" anchored between three and four thousand yards to seaward. Prearranged targets were engaged accurately and effectively till the leading craft had touched down, after which fire was shifted to strong points on the flanks and inland as opportunity offered. In "Sword" area, Rear-Admiral Sir Philip Vian in the *Scylla*—after engaging prearranged targets in Ouistreham till 0705—closed to within 5,500 yards of the beach and intensified the fire on the beach defences till a minute before the touch down.

The deployment and approach of the flotillas was admittedly not conducted with the precision of the later rehearsals. The weather allowed craft but little margin of speed to adjust the errors of timing which had inevitably crept in during the night passage; nevertheless, the landings all took place within 15 minutes of the scheduled times¹ and, except in "Utah" area, at the correct positions on the beaches, which in most cases were identified without difficulty². In areas "Sword" and "Juno" the lights of submarines X.23 and X.20—which had up to that time spent 64 hours dived out of 76 hours at sea—were readily picked up by the approaching flotillas and provided a useful check on their position.

The leading groups approached the beaches unopposed until about 3,000 yards off shore. Even then fire was desultory and inaccurate, except in "Sword" area, where landing craft sustained damage from mortar fire.

¹An exception was the Ranger landing at Pointe du Hoe which was 35 minutes late owing to an error of the control vessel in mistaking Raz de la Perce for Pointe du Hoe (see Section 52, *postea*).

²Specialist hydrographic teams in L.C.P. (Sy) and U.S. Scout teams in L.C.S. were provided to assist the leading headquarters landing craft.

VI.—THE ASSAULT

49. General Narrative.

(Plans 1B, 1C)

From the naval point of view the assault was carried out in every main essential exactly as planned. Contrary to expectation, tactical surprise was achieved in every sector save one, thereby greatly easing the problem of getting ashore. This phase of the operation was further facilitated by the strange immunity enjoyed by the Allied shipping lying in the anchorages from interference either by coastal batteries or air attack¹.

To this extent the operation proved easier than had been expected, but it would be a great mistake to suppose on that account that the assaults were easy or unopposed landings. The enemy troops manning the coast defence batteries may have been of inferior quality, but there was no doubt as to the quality of the field troops manning the various strong points and the mobile field batteries which dominated the beaches. These put up a most stubborn resistance; their fire, in combination with a heavy surf on the beaches and extensive obstacles, called for endurance and seamanship of the highest order in the handling of the landing craft, and the exits from the beaches were only secured by the assaulting troops after a desperate struggle².

The weather conditions were on the border line for "swimming" "DD" tanks³; the decisions as to launching them varied in different sectors, but in all cases they arrived on shore late and after the first landing craft had touched down⁴. After beaching, they met with varying success; for example, in the "Sword" and "Utah" areas they were of great value, on "Omaha" beaches they were quickly knocked out⁵.

¹ This immunity was attributed to the numbing blow of the pre-H-hour bombardment, Allied superiority in the air, counter battery fire and perhaps in part to the poor quality of the enemy troops manning the coast defences.

² Admiral Ramsay subsequently remarked that there was nothing but praise in the Reports of the Task and Assault Force Commanders "for the courage and devotion to duty on the part of the landing craft crews, just as the greatest admiration has been expressed by both navies for the magnificent bearing of the assaulting troops whom they put ashore. In short, the assault proceeded according to plan not necessarily because it was a good plan, but because every single individual taking part had confidence in it and was determined to achieve his objective." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 56.

³ Rear-Admiral Hall remarked that "the so-called 'Secret Weapon' of the invasion forces, the 'DD' tank, was no secret at all, except possibly to our own personnel. A captured document . . . by General Rommel . . . warned the defenders that when the invasion came the Allies would use all sorts of weapons, including an amphibious tank that actually would float with its body beneath the surface." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1. Report by N.C., Force "O3," p. 73.

⁴ Force "U" . . . Launched and landed successfully; reached shore H+20 mins.
Force "O" . . . Left flank: launched 6,000 yards off shore; all but two or three foundered.

Right flank: landed on beach; quickly put out of action by enemy fire.

Force "G" . . . Landed on beach just after L.C.T. (Avre).
Force "J" . . . Group J.2: landed on beach with L.C.T. (Avre).
Group J.2: launched 1,500 yards from shore; reached shore 15 minutes later (6 minutes after infantry).

Force "S" . . . Launched 5,000 yards off shore; 31 out of 40 reached shore 12 minutes late, and did valuable work.

⁵ "It has to be admitted that conditions could not have been less ideal for this novel weapon, but even so the consensus of naval opinion is that ordinary water-proofed tanks, landed on the beach in the normal manner, would have served the purpose equally well. Had the assault been conducted at dusk or in low visibility, on the other hand, "DD" tanks might have achieved a valuable surprise." A.N.C.X.F. Report, Vol. 1, p. 58.

The initial landings were made by the Americans in the western area at about 0630, the British landings in the eastern area following about an hour to an hour and a half later.

On most beaches obstacle clearance presented greater difficulties than had been anticipated. The weather preceding D-day had tended to build-up the tide, and the surf and the large number of landing craft arriving on the beaches prevented work in the water. Except on the "Utah" beaches but little clearance could be effected during the initial assaults. Major craft smashed their way through the obstacles at high speed, while the L.C.A. threaded their way between them¹.

By the end of the forenoon all the beaches in the eastern area had been secured with the exception of one in "Gold" area, and the landing of the assault and reserve brigades other than elements arriving in L.S.T. had been completed by about 1500². The first of the return convoys of empty landing craft were sailed from Area "Juno" at about 1300 and from them onwards there was a steady stream of landing craft sailing from all areas³.

In the western area Force "U" met with little opposition, but owing to a variety of causes, in the "Omaha" area the assaulting troops were pinned to the beaches for nearly seven hours and it was not until 1400 that the position was stabilized.

Some account of how each assault force fared will be found in the ensuing sections, starting with Force "U" and working from west to east.

50. Western Task Force : Force "U"⁴

(Plans 1B, 1C)

In the western area the assaults in general went according to plan, but whereas in "Omaha" area the task proved far more difficult than had been expected, in "Utah" area it proved considerably easier. This was partly due to relatively quiet weather under the lee of the Cotentin Peninsula and partly to the comparative feebleness of the enemy opposition.

Force "U's" general scheme was to land on a two-battalion front, the initial landings being carried out at H-hour (0630) by "DD" tanks and the 1st Battalion 8th Infantry on "Tare" Green beach and the 2nd Battalion 8th Infantry on "Uncle" Red beach. Succeeding waves were to follow as closely as beaching conditions permitted. In the event, the first landings were made at 0635—five minutes late on the planned time.

¹ As soon as the tide started to fall, about 1330, and uncover the obstacles, beach clearance proceeded rapidly, and by midnight all sections of the beaches in use had been cleared.

² To achieve this a number of L.C.T. had to be dried out as there was no room for their vehicles until the tide started to fall.

³ No L.S.T. were sailed till the following day (7th June).

⁴ Force "U"

Rear-Admiral Moon, U.S.N., Flag in H.Q. ship U.S.S. <i>Bayfield</i> .		
<i>Bombarding Force "A"</i>	<i>Destroyers.</i>	<i>Support Craft.</i>
<i>Nevada, Quincy, Erebus,</i>	<i>Fitch, Corry, Forrest,</i>	4 L.C.G. (L)
<i>Hawkins, Tuscaloosa, Soemba,</i>	<i>Hobson, Herndon, Shub-</i>	4 L.C.F.
<i>Black Prince, Enterprise.</i>	<i>rick, Butler, Gherardi.</i>	5 L.C.T. (R)
		8 L.C.T. (A).

L.S. and L.C. embarking troops of 7th U.S. Corps.