



**SUPPLEMENT**

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**THE CAPTURE OF DIEGO SUAREZ**

*The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 16th June, 1942, by Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, C.B., Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F":—*

*Office of Flag Officer Commanding,  
Force "F."*

*16th June, 1942.*

Be pleased to lay before the Board the accompanying report on the capture of Diego Suarez, which covers the period when the first convoy left Durban until the entry of the Fleet into Diego Suarez on 8th and 9th May, 1942.

2. In view of the detailed nature of the operation orders and observing that the operations were carried out almost exactly as laid down therein, I have purposely phrased my report in broad terms, sufficient to give a connected and general story, and stressing certain salient factors and incidents.

3. I have not made any mention of the operations of the Army, as these will be reported by Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., Royal Marines, who was in command of Force 121 under me, but I wish here to place on record the excellent relations that existed throughout the operation between the Royal Navy, the Army and the South African Air Force.

Co-operation at all times between the Services was most cordial, and to this must be attributed a great measure of the success of the enterprise.

4. I also wish to record the excellent manner in which H.M. Ships, Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, and Ships of the Merchant Navy, carried out their tasks. The enthusiasm and efficiency shown by Captains, Officers and Ships' Companies were most gratifying.

Few references will be found in this report to the work performed by the Corvettes since the

nature of their duties was not so spectacular as that of other units. But throughout, and subsequent to, the operation, whether providing A/S\* protection or ferrying troops and stores, they carried out their duties in fine spirit, and most efficiently.

(Signed) E. N. SYFRET,  
*Rear-Admiral.*

**SECTION I**

**DURBAN TO DISPERSAL FOR FINAL APPROACH TO COURRIER BAY.**

The slow convoy comprising eight Motor Transport ships, tankers and the tank landing ship sailed from Durban in accordance with programme on 25th April, escorted by DEVONSHIRE (Captain R. D. Oliver), two low endurance destroyers, 14th M/S† Flotilla and 3rd Escort Group. ANTHONY, delayed by defects, sailed later to overtake the convoy, as did CITY OF HONG KONG, who had not arrived in time to sail with the convoy. She sailed the following day escorted by two corvettes.

2. The passage of the convoy proceeded according to plan, but time had to be "wasted" owing to considerable favourable currents being experienced.

3. On 28th April, the fast convoy comprising the five assault ships, and three transports carrying personnel, and escorted by RAMILLIES (wearing my Flag), ILLUSTRIOUS, HERMIONE, and six destroyers, sailed from Durban.

4. The General Officer Commanding, Major-General Sturges, Royal Marines, and three of his Staff, together with Colonel Melville, South African Air Force, and two Staff Officers, embarked in my Flagship.

*Admiralty footnotes —*  
\* A/S = anti-submarine  
† M/S = minesweeping.

5. The passage up the Mozambique Channel was made in excellent conditions, and favourable currents experienced necessitated adjustment of speed to ensure not being ahead of time at the rendezvous with the slow convoy on D minus 2.

6. On 1st May, the course of the convoy was altered to the Eastward to keep clear of shipping, a certain amount of which was sighted from time to time.

7. A report received on 2nd May that a submarine had arrived at Majunga together with reports of sightings of U-boats in mid-channel, suggested that our movements were being anticipated and caused me some apprehension. A/S air patrols maintained for the rest of the passage, however, sighted nothing.

8. During the passage a number of intelligence reports were received which, if accepted, required certain modifications to the orders for the assault. After discussion with the General, certain amendments to the plan were decided upon and subsequently distributed to the Assault Commanders and others concerned. In the event some of these intelligence reports proved to be most valuable.

9. In addition, complete sets of orders for the assaults on Tamatave and Majunga were produced and distributed to all ships concerned.

10. During the night 1st/2nd May definite orders were received from the Admiralty that Operation "Ironclad" was to proceed. On 2nd May instructions were received regarding the nature of an "Ultimatum" which was to be delivered by all possible means to the Governor as soon as the attack on Diego Suarez had started. This required the production of English and French versions for dropping by aircraft and delivery by hand as and when the opportunity should arise. These instructions were distributed to ILLUSTRIOUS, to the Military Assault Commander, and to Officers Commanding the Assault Battalions.

#### *D minus 2.*

11. At 0835 on 3rd May, INDOMITABLE, wearing the Flag of Rear-Admiral (Aircraft) (Rear-Admiral D. W. Boyd), and escorted by two destroyers, joined me as previously arranged, and a complete set of operation orders were flown across to Rear-Admiral (Aircraft).

12. Less than forty-eight hours were thus available for the Rear-Admiral and INDOMITABLE to study and absorb and arrange for compliance with the many and complicated air commitments.

Certain alterations in the number and nature of the tasks allotted to the aircraft were considered desirable by Rear-Admiral (A), and as a result of discussion of the points by signal, I approved certain modifications, which, while retaining the essential requirements, made the operation of the aircraft and the co-operation between the carriers more satisfactory for them.

13. Aircraft sent ahead in the morning facilitated contact with the slow convoy located some 60 miles ahead of me.

14. DEVONSHIRE reported that practically all the destroyers, corvettes, and sloops escorting the convoy had been refuelled during the

passage from EASEDALE, whose work in this respect had been magnificent, and from DEVONSHIRE herself.

15. During D minus 2 and the following night, the destroyers escorting the fast convoy, and HERMIONE, completed with oil from EASEDALE. DERWENTDALE, also intended for oiling at sea, had proved unsatisfactory for this purpose.

16. By dusk the fast convoy had closed to about four miles from the slow convoy, and remained in that position until the time came to form up for the final approach the following afternoon.

An unexpected North-Easterly set showed that the convoys were ahead of schedule, and time had to be "wasted" by large alterations of course.

17. Weather conditions were excellent and visibility extreme. The convoys were in sight of Mayotta Island 40 miles distant, for most of the day, but were probably too far off to be observed.

#### *D minus 1.*

18. At 1430 Group I, comprising RAMILLIES, carriers and destroyer screen, disengaged and at 1500 Groups II to V, comprising DEVONSHIRE, transports and escort, proceeded under the orders of the Commanding Officer, DEVONSHIRE, in execution of previous orders.

At 1700 HERMIONE was detached to proceed with her diversionary operation to the Eastward of Diego Suarez.

## SECTION II

### FINAL APPROACH UP TO AND INCLUDING THE ASSAULT LANDING.

19. Whilst Groups II to V inclusive were making their final approach RAMILLIES and the carriers proceeded to a position to the West of Cape Amber some 30 miles from the land.

At 0300 the carriers and four destroyers were detached under the orders of Rear-Admiral (A), to operate independently as requisite for flying operations, RAMILLIES with her screen remaining in the vicinity.

20. ANTHONY, who had been sent in with LAFOREY and LIGHTNING to accompany them during the buoing of the channel and thence to come out and report progress made, to me, rejoined my Flag at 0255.

She reported conditions for landing were very good, that the channel had been buoyed without difficulty, and that at 0115 WINCHESTER CASTLE was approaching the final turning point before the anchorage, with the remainder of the ships closed up.

This was a great relief to me, and everything up to that moment seemed set fair.

21. Groups II to V made the passage to their anchorages as planned. This was greatly to the credit of all, but particularly so to the Commanding Officer, DEVONSHIRE, on whom lay the main responsibility.

22. It had been anticipated that unpredictable, varying and possibly strong currents would be experienced and, in the event, the unpredictable nature of these currents was confirmed.

However, the night being clear, star sights and the use of R.D.F.\* echoes from islets and prominent land, together with good visibility, made it possible to allow for these variations.

23. Meanwhile, LAFOREY and LIGHTNING had gone inshore, LAFOREY's task being to buoy the channel roughly, and ascertain the conditions for landing craft, LIGHTNING'S initial task being to act as a navigational fixed light to mark Nosi Fati shoal—the starting point for the approaching ships.

In due course, LAFOREY laid her first lighted dan, and thereafter buoyed the approach channel as planned.

#### D.I.

24. Unfortunately, the first Main Channel buoy was either laid by LAFOREY in the incorrect position or dragged, with the result that the sweepers went too close to Nosi Fati shoal and all four of them parted their sweeps.

M/S 14 was unaware at the time that the sweeps of all had parted, and believed that the channel was being swept according to plan.

In fact, this was not the case, and the channel so far as the initial anchor berth of the leading ships of the Assault Force, was not swept.

25. At 0124 DEVONSHIRE rounded Nosi Hara and anchored as arranged, the transports and M.T. ships anchoring to seaward in their allotted berths.

26. At 0154 WINCHESTER CASTLE anchored silently in her pre-arranged position, assault landing craft were lowered and by 0214 FREESIA, followed by ROMNEY and CROMARTY, assault landing craft, and LAFOREY, were proceeding up Courier Bay for the point where the assault craft would be unleashed to attack Red Beach.

27. At 0303 a mine detonated in ROMNEY'S sweep and others were seen to have been cut by her. A second mine detonated and parted ROMNEY'S sweep at 0315.

The setting off point for the assault craft was reached at 0308 by which time it was estimated that at least 17 mines had been cut or detonated.

The skill, coolness, and accuracy with which these ships and craft were brought safely through a most difficult channel bristling with mines, is above all praise, and is a shining example of devotion to duty.

28. At 0230 the assault craft containing troops of No. 5 Commando and B Company of 2 East Lancashire Regiment, which was under command, set off for Red Beach, in the North part of Courier Bay. LAFOREY and FREESIA stood by as ordered, to give support.

LIGHTNING and ROYAL ULSTERMAN who had followed up the channel arrived at 0415, and on the return of A.L.C.s† from Red Beach at 0515, troops from ROYAL ULSTERMAN embarked in them and set off at 0611 for Blue Beach, at Basse Point.

29. Meanwhile, assault craft containing 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers from KEREN‡ and KARANJA

respectively had left their ships at 0227 and 0319 for Green and White Beaches in Ambararata Bay. These beaches were located successfully without the use of the Lorenz beam which was ineffective owing to the line of the ships at anchor coinciding with the approach to White Beach.

Complete surprise was achieved at Red, Green and White Beaches, and only at Blue Beach was opposition experienced. This was successfully overcome by troops which had landed at White Beach, crossed the peninsula, and taken the defenders in the rear.

By 0620 about 2,300 of our troops had been landed.

30. The situation in the main anchorage was that mines were likely to be encountered to the North and East of a line joining Nosi Famaho to Mangoaka Point and the move to Ambararata Bay anchorage could not be made until a clearance sweep had been carried out. This was completed without any mines being cut by 0750, and ships were then ordered to shift billet. This anchorage had been laid out when it was considered that White would be developed as the main beach, and in consequence the turn round to Blue Beach was long and it was obviously desirable to move the anchorage opposite Blue Beach. Sweepers were instructed to clear a new anchorage, but before it could be completed, 24 mines had been cut, AURICULA mined, and so much gear destroyed as to prejudice subsequent sweeping operations in the main harbour. It was therefore decided to abandon further sweeping and accept the longer turn round and bad loading conditions caused by wind and sea. Difficulty was experienced in finding a suitable beach for BACHAQUERO\* and she was finally beached on Red centre in the afternoon after being swept in by CROMARTY.

31. To turn to the picture of the situation as seen by the G.O.C., and me in the Flagship to seaward.

At 0314, having then received ANTHONY'S report, I informed the Admiralty that the operation had begun, this message being cleared at 0351.

My first intimation of any occurrence inshore was LAFOREY'S report at 0318 that mines had been cut off Red Beach.

At about 0440 sighting of starshell showed that HERMIONE was carrying out the pre-arranged diversion on the East coast.

But communication with ships inshore was poor, and undependable, and indeed so they remained for much of D.I.

The first and positive report of progress was LAFOREY'S message received at 0540 stating that there was no sign of opposition ashore and an optimistic suggestion that the Fleet could now enter Courier Bay.

Messages, some of them very much delayed, showed that the vital No. 7 Battery had been captured, and that our troops everywhere seemed to be advancing, taking prisoners and incurring negligible casualties themselves.

32. I knew that air operations had proceeded according to plan and by 0720 I felt that the assault had made a very good start. Troops

#### Admiralty footnotes

\* R D F = radar.

† A L C = Assault Landing Craft

‡ KEREN was the Headquarters Ship of the Senior Naval Officer Landing, Captain G A Garnons-Williams.

#### Admiralty footnote —

\* BACHAQUERO was an early type of tank landing ship, not constructed but converted for this purpose.

advancing, prisoners taken, HERMIONE's diversion had proceeded satisfactorily, and air attacks successful both on the aerodrome and hangar and on ships including an A.M.C. and a submarine, in harbour.

On the debit side, it was clear, however, that the unswept mines in Courrier Bay were causing delays to disembarkation and the rejection of my "ultimatum" by the Military Commander showed that opposition might be expected to stiffen.

In view of the probable presence of French submarines, I was apprehensive for the safety of RAMILLIES and the carriers operating in restricted waters to seaward, and also to some extent for the ships inshore, though the establishment of A/S patrols by the corvettes in the entrances was some comfort.

33. During the forenoon, although news was somewhat scanty, it seemed clear that the disembarkation was proceeding satisfactorily, and our assault troops advancing to their objectives though it was evident that resistance on the Antsirane axis was stiffening.

### SECTION III

#### AFTER THE ASSAULT LANDING TO THE FLEET'S ENTRY INTO DIEGO SUAREZ.

##### D.1.

34. As soon as the 17th Brigade started to land, the G.O.C. expressed his wish to disembark and accordingly RAMILLIES proceeded down the channel to the Eastward of Nosi Fati and at 1430, G.O.C. and Staff, together with my Chief of Staff, were disembarked into ANTHONY and thence to KEREN and the shore.

35. During the afternoon two Morane fighters machine-gunned the beaches on two occasions without causing any casualties. This was the only time throughout the entire operation when enemy aircraft caused any inconvenience.

36. At 2325 orders were given to sail the fast convoy at 0400/D.2 and the slow at 1600/D.2 for Diego Suarez. At 0245 these orders were cancelled as it had become obvious that the entry into Diego Suarez could not be made on D.2. As DEVONSHIRE was no longer required for bombarding she was ordered to refuel and put to sea; later she was ordered to join HERMIONE in readiness for bombarding Oranja. Four ships of 14th M/S Flotilla were also sailed to be ready to sweep the entrance channel to Diego Suarez.

37. G.O.C. reported that the attack on the Antsirane position had been held up but that a fresh assault would be made at daylight. He asked for air support and this was arranged.

##### D.2.

38. As the time when entry into Diego Suarez would be possible was so uncertain, I deemed it advisable to refuel RAMILLIES and screen forthwith. This was commenced at 0800/D.2 in the Ambararata anchorage. Subsequently the aircraft carrier screening destroyers were relieved to enable them to refuel.

39. During the forenoon, no information was forthcoming as to the progress of the assault, and it was not until 1250 that I learnt that it had failed.

40. At about 1400 the General arrived on board. Things were not going well, he said.

The 29th Brigade had been held up about 3-5 miles South of Antsirane since the previous afternoon. The enemy held a strong, well-sited defensive position; they were plentifully equipped with 75 mm. and machine guns. The 29th Brigade in 30 hours had marched 18 miles, and had made two unsuccessful attacks on this well-defended position. Their casualties were high—25 per cent. over the whole brigade.\* The General decided to put in a night attack against the Antsirane position with the 17th Brigade, assisted as necessary by 29 Independent Brigade, with zero hour at 2000 hours. The 17th Brigade were gradually getting up to the front line, mostly on foot, and the majority should be in position by 1800. He considered that after a two hours' rest they should be ready to go into battle.

He was emphatic the attack must be carried out before the moon rose at 2300, as the position was too strong to be captured in moonlight or daylight in the absence of strong artillery support. Any further delay to give the troops longer to rest would be playing into the enemy's hands.

41. I offered any and all assistance the Fleet could give. The enemy's position was outside the range of RAMILLIES' and cruisers' guns. Aircraft bombing up to zero hour was promised. The General asked if I could land a party on Antsirane peninsula to create a diversion in the enemy's rear. I replied that I would try to get 50 Royal Marines there by means of a destroyer. I asked for zero hour to be delayed till 2030 in order to give a little more time (it was then 1430) to put this project into effect, as the party had yet to be collected, a destroyer detailed, and a 100 miles' journey lay before them. Assistance from No. 5 Commando who were in control of Diego Suarez North peninsula would be forthcoming, the General said, if they could find boats to carry them across Port Nievre.

42. H.M.S. ANTHONY was called alongside and the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Commander Hodges, given his instructions. Captain Price, R.M., of H.M.S. RAMILLIES, was sent for, given his instructions and told to collect 50 Royal Marines and embark as quickly as possible in ANTHONY. The General then left RAMILLIES in order to organise the night attack by the 17th Brigade. At 1530 ANTHONY sailed with the Royal Marines. I then proceeded to sea in RAMILLIES.

43. The impression left with me after the General's visit was that the intended quick capture of Diego Suarez was already a 90 per cent. failure. The night attack, planned in a hurry, to be carried out by tired troops against very strong positions, had only a 10 per cent. chance of success. Prolonged operations, which we so much wished to avoid, was the unpleasant alternative.

ANTHONY's chance of success I assessed as about 50 per cent., my advisers thought 15 per cent., and of the Royal Marines I did not expect a score to survive the night. The next few hours were not happy ones.

##### Admiralty footnote —

\* The estimate of 25 per cent casualties in 29 Independent Brigade Group was caused by the complete disappearance behind the lines of about two and a half companies of the 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment. Actually they were doing stout work, killing and taking large numbers of prisoners.

44. The first indication that the unexpected was about to happen came at 2129 when ANTHONY's signal timed 2115 was received reporting she had accomplished her task successfully. This was a fine achievement brilliantly carried out, and, in my opinion, was the principal and direct cause of the enemy's collapse. The attack by 17th and 29th Brigades commenced at 2030 hours. A success signal from the town showed that the Marines had landed. 17th Brigade secured their objective which was about 1800 yards beyond the main enemy position at 2300 hours and fired their success signals. The two battalions of the 29th Brigade were then ordered forward and pushed right through to the main town of Antsirane with little or no opposition and reached the main harbour. The Commando were unable to find boats so could not assist.

45. I had decided that RAMILLIES and screen would not join the carriers during the night D.2/D.3 as the latter were carrying out night flying operations to support the attack on Antsirane.

D.3.

At 0313/D.3 I received a message from the General telling me he would like all available air and ship support at 0900 when the 29th Brigade would assault Oranjia Peninsula. From this, it was obvious that the night attack had succeeded. I therefore proceeded with RAMILLIES and screen to join DEVONSHIRE and HERMIONE to the Eastward of the Oranjia Peninsula at daylight in readiness to bombard.

At 0400 a situation report was received confirming the capture of Antsirane.

46. During the night a report was received that GENISTA had attacked a contact to the North-West of Nosi Hara and about 0700 signals were received from ILLUSTRIOUS aircraft that she had sunk a submarine. This subsequently proved to be LE HEROS from whom survivors were picked up in position 12° 03' S. 49° E.

47. At 0723, Headquarters 121 Force asked me to postpone bombardment until 1000. I instructed RAMILLIES, DEVONSHIRE, HERMIONE and LIGHTNING accordingly, and detailed their respective targets.

At 0945 Headquarters 121 Force gave me some details of the intended assault including the furthest on position of our troops at 1200. The main assault would not commence till noon, but I was asked to commence a preliminary bombardment as soon as possible after 1000 unless I heard that the ultimatum had been accepted.

At 0950 I was asked to postpone the bombardment until 1030 and at 1066 I was asked to postpone action until further orders as chances of surrender appeared good.

48. I was tired of these delays which were keeping the Fleet steaming up and down in dangerous waters, consequently I informed the General that I intended to commence a 15 minutes' bombardment to encourage the enemy to surrender.

At 1040 RAMILLIES, HERMIONE and LIGHTNING commenced a bombardment of Oranjia Peninsula, but "Cease Fire" was ordered 10 minutes later on receipt of a message from Headquarters 121 Force that Oranjia Peninsula had surrendered.

49. DEVONSHIRE, PANTHER and ACTIVE were then detached to screen the carriers.

14th M/S Flotilla swept the channel, entered the Bay and searched the harbour.

On receipt of signal that no mines had been found, RAMILLIES, HERMIONE, LIGHTNING and PALADIN proceeded into Diego Suarez Bay, anchoring at 1730.

50. The slow convoy sailed from Courrier Bay at 1600/D.3 and the fast convoy at 0500/D.4.

D.4.

Both convoys entered harbour on D.4 and anchored in Scotch Bay.

51. INDOMITABLE and screen also entered harbour on D.4, INDOMITABLE being attacked off the entrance by a submarine which was afterwards destroyed by ACTIVE. Her destruction was subsequently confirmed by a Vichy report, which gave her name as the MONGE.

ILLUSTRIOUS, DEVONSHIRE and screen remained at sea to provide A/S and fighter protection, entering harbour on D.5.

*Surrender Negotiations.*

52. At 0920 on Friday, 8th May, in answer to my summons, the following French Officers appeared on board H.M.S. RAMILLIES:—

Colonel Claerebout, Officer Commanding Defences, Diego Suarez,

Capitaine de Vaisseau Maerten, Naval Officer-in-Charge, Madagascar,

Capitaine de Vaisseau Simon, ex Commanding Officer of French Sloop D'ENTRE-CASTEAUX;

and were received by me in my cabin.

I informed them that since they had not accepted my summons to surrender, British forces under my command had been compelled to take Diego Suarez by force. I intended to ensure that it did not fall into the hands of our enemies and I asked for the co-operation of the French authorities in this task. I stated that the terms of British occupation would be communicated later.

The French Officers then left the ship.

53. At 1100 I held a conference in the Residency at Antsirane, with General Sturges and our respective staffs, to convey to the French authorities the terms of surrender.

54. The following were present:—

Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, C.B., Commander-in-Chief,

Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., R.M., Military Commander,

Brigadier F. W. Festing, Assault Commander,

Brigadier M. S. Lush, Chief Political Officer,

Captain J. M. Howson, R.N., Chief of Staff to Commander-in-Chief,

Colonel Melville, South African Air Force;

Colonel Claerebout, Officer Commanding Defences, Diego Suarez,

Capitaine de Vaisseau Maerten, Naval Officer-in-Charge, Madagascar,

Colonel Rouves, Commanding Infantry Regiment,

M. Bourguine, Administrateur-Maire of Diego Suarez.

55. I opened the conference by stating the general conditions of the occupation of Diego Suarez by British forces. These allowed for the port remaining under French administration, to be handed back to them after the war, for payment of salaries and pensions to all who would co-operate, and for repatriation of those who would not, excluding wives and families who, however, could be evacuated by private arrangements at their own risk.

56. As evidence of our good faith to regard Diego Suarez as French, subject to temporary control by us, I expressed a wish to see a tricolour ceremony and, though coldly received at the time, this suggestion was complied with a few days later.

57. After considerable discussion over matters of detail, general agreement was reached and the following document embodying the surrender terms was signed by myself and Colonel Claerebout, Officer Commanding the Defences of Diego Suarez:—

*Conditions agreed upon regarding the French Naval, Military and Air Force in the Diego Suarez area.*

1. Hostilities on Land, Sea and Air between the British Forces and the Forces under the command of the French Officer Commanding the defence area of the Naval Base of Diego Suarez will cease as from the time of signature of this document.

2. The French Forces will be accorded the honours of war. Officers will be treated as prisoners on parole in so far as the Military situation shall allow.

3. All arms will be deposited at a place to be notified later with the exception of officers who will be permitted to retain either one revolver or pistol.

4. The area of the French minefields in the Diego Suarez and neighbouring waters will be described exactly to the British Naval Authorities and all maps.

5. The conditions of repatriation to Metropolitan France as described by Commander-in-Chief of the British Force will apply, viz.:—  
“If any civil and military employees do not wish to co-operate they will, provided they can claim the right to residence in Metropolitan France, be repatriated as and when shipping becomes available.” No objection will be raised to the evacuation of families of the men therein referred to under arrangements to be made by them with the approval of the British Military Authorities.

6. The British Military Authorities will consider particular cases, not exceeding 100 (one hundred), of European members of the French Forces who, after engaging themselves in writing not to take up arms against British Naval, Military and Air Forces or their Allies in Madagascar or surrounding waters, wish to reside in the unoccupied part of the Island.

7. The repatriation of Senegalese native troops up to 400 (four hundred) will be carried out in accordance with instructions to be sought from His Britannic Majesty's Government.

8. Malgash native troops will be demobilised under arrangements to be made by the British Military Authorities and returned to their homes.

9. The French Authorities hereby undertake to do all such things necessary to carry into full effect the provisions of this Agreement.

Signed at Diego Suarez on 8th of May, 1942, at 1625 hours by

E. N. SYFRET, *Rear-Admiral,*  
*Commander-in-Chief, British Forces.*

CLAEREBOUT,  
*Commandant le Défense du Point d'appui de la Flotte.*

TRANSLATION OF THE ULTIMATUM.

*On Board the British Flagship,*  
*3rd May, 1942.*

Your Excellency,

The strategic position of Diego Suarez requires that it should not fall into the hands of the Japanese and that the territory should be available for those forces which are fighting to restore freedom in the world and secure the liberation of France and French territory. It cannot be allowed to suffer the fate of Indo China.

I therefore request that in order that bloodshed may be avoided you will surrender the territory under your control to me unconditionally and instruct your officials and Armed Forces to obey the orders which I shall issue.

The action which I am now taking on the instruction of H.M. Government has the full approval of the Government of the United States.

In order to assist you in reaching a favourable decision I have been instructed by H.M. Government to inform you of the following:—

(1) Diego Suarez is French and will remain French, and will be restored to France after the war. H.M. Government have repeatedly made it clear that they do not covet an inch of French territory. I repeat this assurance.

(2) Funds will be made available to meet the salaries and pensions of all personnel, Civil and Military, who elect to co-operate with the United Nations.

(3) If any Civil and Military employees do not wish to co-operate, they will, provided they can claim the right to residence in Metropolitan France, be repatriated as and when shipping becomes available.

(4) The trade of Diego Suarez with the United Nations will be restored. H.M. Government will extend to Diego Suarez all the economic benefits accorded to French territories which have already joined the United Nations.

(5) There must be no destruction of Civil and Military installations, W/T Stations, War Stores, etc. Those responsible for any such sabotage will not benefit by conditions (2) and (3) above.

Your reply to this communication should be sent to me immediately in plain language by radio on 500 kc/s (600 metres) using call sign GBXZ.

Alternatively it should be sent by hand of officer under flag of truce to the Officer Commanding Occupying Troops.

I am, Your Excellency  
E. N. SYFRET.

Rear-Admiral and  
Commander-in-Chief, British Forces.

His Excellency,  
The Governor of Diego Suarez.

ENCLOSURE I.  
H.M.S. DEVONSHIRE.  
13th May, 1942.

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS—OPERATION  
"IRONCLAD".

*The Approach to the Western Anchorage.*

During the greater part of the passage from Durban with convoy Y (slow convoy) DEVONSHIRE experienced favourable currents which made the problem of arriving at the right time

principally a question of delaying the advance of the convoy by the correct amount. It was essential to keep a certain amount in hand since at any moment a strong South Westerly set from the direction of Cape Amber might be experienced. During the night of Sunday, 3rd May/Monday, 4th May, a set of 0.7 knots in a direction of 090° was experienced. It was decided to hold the convoy back sufficiently for DEVONSHIRE to be within reach of position AA at 8 knots. During the forenoon of Monday, 4th May, convoy Y was manoeuvred on courses at right angles to the line of advance in order to achieve the necessary delay, but in so doing the screen became considerably disorganised.

2. At 1500 the signal "Proceed in execution of previous orders" was received and the whole force formed up. DEVONSHIRE was in station 5 miles ahead of the starboard wing of the convoy steering 058° at 9 knots by 1545.

3. Group II formed up as an A/S screen two miles ahead as shown below:—

FREESIA

CROMER

POOLE

ROMNEY

AURICULA

CROMARTY

NIGELLA

ANTHONY

DEVONSHIRE

LAFOREY

WINCHESTER CASTLE

LIGHTNING

ROYAL ULSTERMAN

4. The estimated 1800 position was passed to LAFOREY at 1603 based on the latest fix obtained at noon. At 1800, which was just before dark, LAFOREY, LIGHTNING and ANTHONY were detached. The remainder of the screen altered course to 118° to conform with DEVONSHIRE's intended alteration at 1830. It had been anticipated that DEVONSHIRE would pass through position 298° AA two miles at 1830.

5. At 1840, by which time it was quite dark, the evening star sights showed that the North Easterly set had in effect reversed during the afternoon, and DEVONSHIRE's position at 1830 was 220° AA seven miles. Course was therefore altered without signal at 1900 to 096° in order to regain the correct line of approach and to counteract this set. This alteration was not immediately noticed by the screen who got a long way out of position in consequence. However they did not lose touch and had regained their stations by 2000.

6. This last fix also indicated that the force was early. No immediate adjustment was made because the possibility of an adverse current had still to be allowed for.

7. Land echoes by R.D.F. were obtained between 2030 and 2100, but were of no value at that time. At 2100, just before moonrise, the high land on Cape San Sebastian was sighted and a reasonably good fix obtained by visual bearing and R.D.F. range. More land was sighted after moonrise, and at 2150 Windsor Castle was identified at a distance of 40 miles and a good fix obtained. At this time DEVONSHIRE was in position 298° ZB 18 miles.

8. Course was altered to 118° at 2200 and the speed reduced to 8½ knots without signal. The screen detected this alteration with less difficulty than before and was soon back in station.

9. The set now seemed to work round to the Eastward again, and speed was reduced to 8 knots at 2230 to allow for it. No reliable fixes could be obtained between 2230 and 2300 because the land was in shadow, but at 2312 another good fix was obtained putting DEVONSHIRE in position 330° ZB 6 miles, having been set about 2¼ miles to the Northward. It was evident that the sweepers and FREESIA were short of manoeuvring room, but they had to be left to work it out for themselves.

10. The first dan buoy was sighted at 2306. At 2318 DEVONSHIRE altered to 138° and later to 155°.

11. At 2338 LIGHTNING's three vertical lights were switched on, and thereafter the navigation was not difficult. At 2342 ANTHONY passed close alongside and reported that there was no set, also that the outer dan had drifted to the South West.

*Tuesday, 5th May.*

12. At 0001 course was altered to 109° past the first dan buoy to follow the minesweepers which could be clearly seen ahead; LIGHTNING was abeam to starboard 6 cables away at 0008 and signalled "Set 150° ½ knot." The right hand edge of Nosi Hara which had been selected as a leading mark was clearly visible bearing 114°. DEVONSHIRE had thus passed ZB 33 minutes early.

13. The passage along the swept channel was somewhat confused because it was difficult to see which sweepers were sweeping, and several of the dans broke adrift. The first or outer dan (laid by LAFOREY) had been cut and had drifted to the South West, so it was left to starboard.

14. At 0018 an Oropesa float was passed on the starboard hand, presumably CROMER's, as that ship was met at 0022 proceeding towards it.

15. Dan buoys correctly marking the channel were passed at 0023, 0042, 0048, 0057, 0101, 0111, 0131 and 0142. In two cases sweeping dans and the original channel dans laid by LAFOREY were close together and were confusing.

16. At 0026 LAFOREY was met steaming to seaward. She reported "Channel O.K. No cross set"

17. At 0028 CROMARTY was passed standing by a drifting dan buoy.

18. At 0052 LAFOREY and ANTHONY passed at high speed steaming towards Nosi Hara.

19. At 0106 ANTHONY turned round and steamed to seaward.

20. At 0130 course was altered to 136° for the passage between Nosi Hara and Nosi Anjombavola and at 0142 DEVONSHIRE passed Q.1 berth and altered course to the Northward round Nosi Hara, coming to an anchor in position 053° Q.1 berth 1.65 miles at 0057. This berth was 3½ cables from the shore, half way along the island, and was chosen to have the island as a background on the bearings from Nos. 7 and 8 batteries.

21. Two minesweepers were already at anchor off Nosi Hara, and CROMER joined them at about 0205. LAFOREY, FREESIA and probably two more minesweepers were to the South Eastward of Q.1 when DEVONSHIRE passed.

#### *Proceedings in the Western Anchorage.*

22. A period of waiting followed. The movements of Groups IV and V were obscured by Nosi Hara, but the passage of WINCHESTER CASTLE and KEREN's landing craft, and that of LAFOREY, LIGHTNING, FREESIA and ROYAL ULSTERMAN could be followed almost up to the beaches.

23. At 0342 LAFOREY's report of mines in the vicinity of JJ was received.

24. DEVONSHIRE's position lying head to wind did not enable her to keep all her guns bearing on No. 7 fort. Arrangements were made to slip cable instantly in case it was necessary to open fire. The pinnace was lowered and a dan buoy was laid off Nosi Hara reefs to facilitate manoeuvring the ship in the narrow space available. The officer who laid this buoy reported that it was almost impossible to see the ship against the background of the island, even in the bright moonlight.

25. At 0440 flares were seen on White Beach signifying local success there. At 0454 LAFOREY's report that "Red landing 0430 believed unopposed" was received. At 0454 star shell appeared in the sky and was presumed to be HERMIONE at Ambodi-Vahibe. At 0523 the Senior Naval Officer (L)'s order for WINCHESTER CASTLE to weigh and proceed to main anchorage was received. At 0540 the Walrus aircraft was sent off to reconnoitre the batteries and report particularly on No. 8 battery. At 0546 the success signal for No. 7 battery was received.

26. By now it was broad daylight; WINCHESTER CASTLE and BACHAQUERO were seen advancing down the swept channel towards the main anchorage. Simultaneously a signal was received from ROMNEY to the effect that she had cut and exploded two moored mines in the neighbourhood of Nosi Famaho. I decided to stop these ships immediately until I was certain that the Senior Naval Officer (L) understood the situation. Both ships were told that there were mines in the anchorage and that they were not to proceed until ordered by the Senior Naval Officer (L). ROMNEY's signal indicated that 100 per cent. clearance of the anchorage would be necessary to make it safe. Signals explaining the position were passed to WINCHESTER CASTLE at 0620, the Senior Naval Officer (L) at 0625, BACHAQUERO at 0628 and the Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F" at 0652. The Senior Naval Officer (L) subsequently sent a staff officer on board DEVONSHIRE where the situation was fully explained.

27. DEVONSHIRE and LAFOREY were acting as W/T guards for F.O.O.\* 2 and F.O.O. 1 respectively. Both got into communication quickly and easily, LAFOREY at 0459 and DEVONSHIRE at 0514, reports being passed by V/S† to KEREN as they came in.

28. At 0620 the Walrus returned and landed, reporting that no sign of No. 8 battery was visible.

29. Swordfish, Albacores, Martlets and Hurricanes were all now seen at intervals on their various tasks. No hostile aircraft were sighted at this stage.

30. At 0705 Senior Naval Officer (L) asked if DEVONSHIRE was in communication with the Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F." Difficulty was being experienced as the Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F" only answered occasionally and several reports were broadcast.

31. FREESIA and FRITILLARY began inner A/S patrols.

32. At 0750 KEREN and various ships of Group IV moved to the main anchorage, which the sweepers had now swept. Mines continued to be reported from Courrier Bay.

33. Consideration was now given to the question of shifting berth to my inshore bombarding position (N.1). Senior Naval Officer (L) offered me sweepers but it subsequently transpired that no sweepers could be spared from the more important task of clearing the channel for BACHAQUERO. I decided therefore to proceed to an intermediate position from which I could enfilade the main road to Antsirane and at the same time keep in good visual communication with ships in both anchorages. The position chosen was 105° Q.1 1.4 miles, where the ship anchored at 0851.

34. During the forenoon ships of Group V came into the anchorage and by 1200 the outer anchorage was clear.

35. At 1126 a general call from the Army on shore asked for bombing of the observation post at Windsor Castle. At 1138 the Walrus was sent off for this duty and carried out ten

#### *Admiralty footnotes:—*

\* F.O.O. = Forward Observation Officer

† V/S = visual signal



bombing runs. Later two Albatrosses and Hurricanes joined in and the Walrus returned at 1219. Nothing had been seen of the enemy on the top of the mountain though subsequent events proved them to have been there all the time.

36. At 1054 F.O.O. 2 asked that DEVONSHIRE should close in in order to extend her command of the area to the South of Antsirane and ensure the continuation of W/T communication. This request was complied with and a new berth in position 134° Q.1 2.1 miles was taken up at 1146 and F.O.O. 2 informed that it would be impossible to move the ship any closer. Unfortunately this position shut DEVONSHIRE out from direct visual communication with KEREN, and the disadvantages of this break in communications soon began to be felt. Eventually, when F.O.O. 2 had advanced beyond our extreme gun range, it was decided that the maintenance of good communication outweighed other considerations and at 1420 the ship again shifted berth 2 cables to the Westward from which position KEREN could be seen.

37. At 1149 the Senior Officer, Minesweepers, reported that AURICULA had struck a mine and asked for assistance for her wounded. It could be seen that she had not sunk and that a number of boats were in attendance. Later she drifted out of sight behind a merchant ship. At 1239, having heard nothing further, I asked the Senior Naval Officer (L) if he required any assistance, and at 1248 asked the Senior Officer, Minesweepers, to report the position regarding AURICULA. No news was received until 1530 when a staff officer from the Senior Naval Officer (L) arrived on board to see me. He seemed in some doubt as to who should have been in charge of the operation of salvaging AURICULA, which was still afloat. I explained to him that DEVONSHIRE would provide any assistance asked for but that the Senior Naval Officer (L) was in charge of the anchorage and would have to make the arrangements for towing AURICULA inshore. Hearing that the ship had a shaky bulkhead I sent a boat at 1545 with a Shipwright Officer, three Shipwrights and a load of wood to undertake the necessary shoring. This officer returned and reported to me about 1830 that the ship would undoubtedly sink before the morning, and should be beached as soon as possible. This was reported to the Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F," the Senior Naval Officer (L) and the Senior Officer, Minesweepers.

38. At 1300 three Potez aircraft were sighted over the target area. The air raid warning "Red" was hoisted and passed by W/T. At 1326 the hostile aircraft had disappeared and orders were given to revert to 15 minutes notice.

39. At 0758 the Senior Naval Officer (L) informed me that Captain (D), 12th Destroyer Flotilla had been asked to send EASEDALE to oil DEVONSHIRE as soon as PAKENHAM had fuelled. At 0852 Captain (D), 12th Destroyer Flotilla informed me that DERWENTDALE, alongside whom he was lying, considered the weather unsuitable for berthing alongside. I replied to the effect that I did not wish to oil in any case until my role as bombarding ship had come to an end. During the afternoon EASEDALE anchored in my

vicinity and I asked her whether she could come alongside in the weather conditions then prevailing and was informed that she could. Arrangements were therefore made to get her alongside with the last of the light so that I could complete with oil before the moon rose. These arrangements unfortunately clashed with Captain (D), 12th Destroyer Flotilla's organisation, and subsequently led to EASEDALE being emptied of oil at a time when she was required for fuelling destroyers. EASEDALE is more handy than DERWENTDALE and can come alongside under worse weather conditions.

40. About 1630 your signal timed 1533 was received which suggested that the anchorage could not be considered safe from submarine attack and that I should proceed to join your flag before dark. To comply meant proceeding immediately and the sudden removal of the ship would have broken an important line of army communication without adequate warning. I also considered it important to complete with fuel, for which arrangements were already in train, and proposed in my signal timed 1657 to join you in the morning. This signal was repeated to the Senior Naval Officer (L) and cleared to KEREN at 1738. It was subsequently approved by your signal timed 2057.

41. Before proceeding, arrangements were made for PAKENHAM to take over the line of communication with F.O.O. 2 who had not been heard since 1622 and she was subsequently told to confirm that she had made touch (my signal timed 0610/6th May and PAKENHAM's signal timed 0743/6th May which reported that communications had not been re-established with F.O.O. 2 until 0733/6th May).

42. The LINDZ, a small black yacht, wearing the Red Ensign entered harbour at 1510 and proceeded into Ambararata Bay. After enquiries, FREESIA reported that she had been examined by GENISTA.

43. ANTHONY arrived at 1512 proceeding up the anchorage at high speed. I thought it advisable to warn her that the anchorage was mined.

44. Three French Morane fighters were sighted at 1707 machine gunning Blue Beach. Air raid warning "Red" was initiated immediately afterwards and repeated by the Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F", at 1728. No attacks on the fleet developed and the fighters were seen to disappear in a South Easterly direction and the air raid warning "White" was passed at 1731.

45. The moon rose at 2213, oiling was completed by 2300. EASEDALE was anchored and DEVONSHIRE slipped from her and proceeded to sea, passing Nosi Hara at 2341. It was assumed that my departure would be reported to the Senior Naval Officer (L) and as V/S signalling in the anchorage was undesirable no further signal reporting my movements was made. This was regretted later when the Senior Naval Officer (L)'s signal timed 0705 was received off Cape Amber asking me to engage the French warship that was making a nuisance of herself in English Bay.

#### *Bombardment of the Oranjia Peninsula.*

46. At 0553 the Flag Officer Commanding, Force "F" 's signal timed 0350 was received ordering DEVONSHIRE to be ready to bombard the Oranjia Peninsula by 1200. Course was altered for Cape Amber which was passed

at 0845 and DEVONSHIRE proceeded to the South to join HERMIONE off the entrance to the harbour about 1000.

47. Consideration had to be given to the employment and subsequent recovery of the Walrus aircraft. It was most desirable to use my own observer for the bombardment and it was most undesirable to leave the Walrus on the catapult when the ship went into action. After an exchange of signals with the Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers and ILLUSTRIOUS it was decided to catapult the Walrus before opening fire and land it in Ambararata Bay where it could run up on the beach and remain until an opportunity offered for its recovery in calm water. The weather on the Eastern side of the island was consistently unfavourable for a recovery at sea. While ashore the crew were joined by other Fleet Air Arm personnel from force landed aircraft and communication was maintained by W/T.

48. DEVONSHIRE arrived in position 10 miles East of Oranjia Point by 1000 to find HERMIONE in action with the coast defences. She informed me that the Headquarters of the 29th Independent Brigade had asked for a general strafe of the peninsula, that No. 1 battery was not firing but that a new battery had opened up and that the maximum range was 18,000 yards.

49. HERMIONE was getting very short of suitable ammunition for bombardment and DEVONSHIRE had none to waste. I knew that the centre of resistance was South of Antsirane and it seemed probable that the Oranjia Peninsula would capitulate as soon as Antsirane fell. In the circumstances it appeared undesirable to damage the batteries unless they came into action against our own troops advancing towards the Oranjia Peninsula, since we would require these batteries for the defence of the port as soon as it passed into our possession.

50. Arrangements were made therefore for one cruiser to maintain her position within range and in readiness for instant action while the other stood off to seaward. The area of operations was limited and made the ships an easy target for submarine attack unless a high speed and zigzag were maintained. HERMIONE had already spent over 24 hours in the area so the extent of the "pitch" would be obvious to the submarine. Four ships of the 14th Minesweeping Flotilla who were waiting off the entrance to sweep the passage in were instructed to carry out an A/S sweep of the area.

51. DEVONSHIRE carried out registration shoots between 1125 and 1300 on Nos. 1 and 2 batteries, Mamelon Vert and the new position reported by HERMIONE. The object was to exercise the gunnery control team in preparation for more serious work later if called for. It was found that accurate indirect fire was impossible in the weather conditions and with the speed and zigzag in use, mainly owing to the wander of the gyro compass. With the sun high in the sky visibility deteriorated in the target area and made direct fire impossible. It was decided that if a call for fire came, the firing would be carried out at slow speed and on as straight a course as enemy opposition would permit. Two conspicuous trees at Mamelon Vert which had been used as aiming marks on this occasion were subsequently cut down by the French.

52. HERMIONE took over between 1300 and 1600, after which DEVONSHIRE took over until dark. The Walrus landed at 1345 after which air observation was maintained by Swordfish from ILLUSTRIOUS until 1700.

53. During the afternoon dispositions were made for the night, and the Senior Officer, 14th Minesweeping Flotilla, was instructed to remain North of a line 115° from Cape Amber during dark hours in order to avoid any possibility of a clash between friendly forces during the night. At 1720 HERMIONE took station astern and as darkness fell the two cruisers withdrew to the Eastward.

54. At 1754 your signal stating that a destroyer with 50 Marines would be proceeding into Diego Suarez was received from HERMIONE. This signal had been missed in DEVONSHIRE and was only discovered by chance, but fortunately both cruisers were in a position to give support when required. At 1749 your amplifying signal was received ordering cruisers to support ANTHONY in any way possible. An effort to inform ANTHONY of my intentions, without giving anything away or causing her to answer on W/T, failed.

55. ANTHONY was due to enter the pass at 2010. It was planned to be in a position five miles 090° from Oranjia Light House at that time and to bombard the searchlights when they were switched on. A strong Westerly set was experienced, and a turn of 360° had to be made in order not to be early. It was obviously imperative that the cruisers should not be sighted until ANTHONY was in, for otherwise the whole "game" would be given away.

56. At 1957 a position 080° 6½ miles from the lighthouse was reached, and course was altered to starboard to 347°. At 2008 course was altered to 257° and when HERMIONE was round, to 167°. The idea was to have at least one of the cruisers with guns bearing all the time. At 2023, while still on the Southerly course, a searchlight on Oranjia Point was switched on across the entrance, and an object was seen in the beam which might have been ANTHONY so fire was immediately opened with 4 gun salvos of 8 inch. With the arrival of the second salvo the searchlight went out and was not seen again.

57. DEVONSHIRE and HERMIONE continued to patrol across the entrance until 2050 but nothing more was seen. At this time ANTHONY's future movements were not known and it was thought possible that she might go round into English Bay under cover of Andrakaka which was in our hands. Course was altered to seaward for a short time, but at 2109 gunflashes and tracer were sighted which were presumed to be ANTHONY fighting her way out. Fire could not be opened, for there was not point of aim, and the possibility of damaging ANTHONY could not be accepted. At 2128 ANTHONY's report that she was clear was received, so DEVONSHIRE altered course to the Eastward and later to the South East. At 0130 course was altered to 320° to close the entrance at dawn.

*Thursday, 7th May.*

58. Your intentions to bombard Oranjia Peninsula were received at 0415. I therefore continued to the North Westward to join your

flag; sending HERMIONE to be off the entrance at daybreak. Both cruisers joined company by 0830.

59. In the actual bombardment DEVONSHIRE did not open fire. The signals which were being received from the Army on shore indicated that the bombardment was unnecessary.

60. At 1330 DEVONSHIRE was detached with ACTIVE and PANTHER to join Rear-Admiral Aircraft Carriers to give cover to the carriers. INDOMITABLE was sighted at 1630.

*Friday, 8th May, and Saturday, 9th May.*

61. DEVONSHIRE remained to the West of the island covering the carriers' movements and also that of the fast convoy, finally entering Diego Suarez Bay at 0810 on Saturday, 9th May, astern of ILLUSTRIOUS.

(Signed) R. D. OLIVER,  
*Captain, R.N.*  
*Commanding Officer.*

The Flag Officer Commanding,  
Force "F".

ENCLOSURE 2.

H.M.S. LAFOREY.  
*8th May, 1942.*

I have the honour to forward the following report of proceedings in Operation "Ironclad".

2. LAFOREY fuelled from Oiler EASEDALE a.m. 4th May, 1942, rejoining the slow convoy at 1330, and took station to form up for the final approach.

3. At 1800 parted company with LIGHTNING and ANTHONY on course 125° speed 14 knots, to close Nosi Anambo, adjusting course to 114° following fix by stars at 1839.

4. At 1950 ANTHONY reported a suspicious vessel in sight on the starboard bow. Destroyers reduced to slow speed to try to evade, altering to port and forming single line. It was not until 2021, when the Division were about to attack with torpedoes that the phantom vessel was identified as an island, and course to Anambo was resumed.

5. At 2040 soundings shoaled very rapidly to 4 fathoms. Division was stopped to ascertain bur position. This shoal was unexpectedly shallow and raised some doubt as to ships' position. Shortly after 2100 a bright white light was seen on a bearing of 100° range 7,000 yards, and at 2122 the moon very conveniently rose directly behind the tower on the island, to the relief of all concerned.

6. ZA buoy was laid at 2150 and course shaped for Nosi Fati shoal, which was found without difficulty, both land and breakers showing up well in the moon's rays. The 3 white light buoy to mark this shoal was dropped at 2249 but to our consternation capsized. It was, however, quickly relaid by the First Lieutenant's danlaying party.

7. At 2310 No. 1 Main Channel buoy was laid and the positions of these two buoys checked. LIGHTNING was instructed to anchor and show her lights immediately, and ANTHONY to inform the convoy that the buoys were properly laid.

8. LAFOREY then proceeded down the channel laying buoys 2 to 5. This part of the operation was not difficult as the entrance to the bay between Nosi Hara and Nosi Anjombavola was well defined by the moon and no appreciable set was experienced. No. 3 buoy was laid 2 cables to the Northward of the correct position.

9. After dropping the last buoy, weather conditions were obviously so good for boatwork that there was no necessity to investigate further, and at 0003/5th course was altered to 295° turning up channel. At that time it was with some foreboding that the whole convoy was visible without binoculars just entering the channel. At 0030 spoke DEVONSHIRE, and at 0040 KEREN, on her way in, informing them that the channel was correctly laid. Course was then reversed to take station close astern of the minesweepers.

10. At 0100 ANTHONY closed and was given a message for transmission to F.O.C. Force "F" that all was in order.

11. At 0127 passed the entrance and at 0141 stopped engines with two minesweepers and FREESIA close ahead. At 0154 WINCHESTER CASTLE anchored very commendably with a minimum of noise, and by 0203 tows were seen lining up.

12. There was a slight hitch at this time as tows went ahead with the leading minesweeper, and caused both of them to haul in their sweeps. However, the loud hailer proved invaluable, and by 0235 the party was sorted out and proceeding up the bay with LAFOREY and 10 landing craft close astern of FREESIA, CROMARTY and ROMNEY. At 0301 a mine exploded ahead in the vicinity of position HH, and various reports were received from sweepers of mines being encountered and being seen close to the ship. At 0328 when near JJ a mine exploded close ahead and was reported to S.N.O.(L), and we all expected the fireworks to begin. To our surprise the quiet of the night was undisturbed while the tows passed LAFOREY and were informed by loud hailer that their dispersal point marked by FREESIA was 2 cables ahead. At 0330 they were seen moving towards the land.

13. At 0438 received a signal that the Commandos had landed unopposed, and informed F.O.C. Force "F" and S.N.O.(L) accordingly at 0444. By this time LIGHTNING and ROYAL ULSTERMAN were in close company, latter disembarking troops. At 0510 it was clear that no opposition from the batteries ashore was likely, and a signal was sent to suggest that ships should enter the bay, expediting minesweeping.

14. At 0525 I was informed that the Commando was still advancing without opposition, and at 0545 the "Success Colt" signal was received and retransmitted to F.O.C. Force "F" and S.N.O.(L).

15. Meanwhile the first flight of landing craft had been seen returning from shore, and at 0520 were closing ROYAL ULSTERMAN. There appeared to have been some delay in getting away Blue Beach landing, and ROYAL ULSTERMAN was told to expedite this.

16. Following reports from F.O.O.1, a situation report was made at 0606 informing

S.N.O.(L) that Windsor Castle had been captured with negligible opposition,\* that enemy native troops were surrendering, that the advance was continuing and that own troops were mopping up in this area. This was followed by a further report at 0640 that the Commando was reorganising in Windsor Castle area preparatory to advancing on Diego Suarez North. At about 0615 landing craft from ROYAL ULSTERMAN proceeded towards Blue Beach, and when close off shore machine-gun fire could be heard but no flashes were seen. Shortly afterwards troops were seen landing, and communication was established at 0705 by Aldis, and I was informed that the landing craft had been machine-gunned on the way in, but that Army units were now moving inland. S.N.O.(L) was informed at 0723 that landing had been effected.

17. During this period LAFOREY was anchored ready to give any bombardment support required.

18. DEVONSHIRE's signal reporting ROMNEY cutting mines and that the anchorage could not be safe until 1000 was received at 0653. From my appreciation of the mine situation, I informed DEVONSHIRE at 0745 that mines were unlikely South West of line Nosi Famaho to Mangoaka, and that the Southern part of the anchorage was clear of mines. This signal was passed to S.N.O.(L) by DEVONSHIRE at 0805.

19. At this time KEREN was seen to be entering harbour astern of minesweepers. When the sweepers reached the area Nosi Famaho to Mangoaka Point a number of mines were cut, and LAFOREY weighed and proceeded to sink mines by machine-gun fire.

20. At 0901 I closed KEREN to the South Westwards of the mined area and reported the situation by loud hailer, informing F.O.C. Force "F" of the existence of the minefield, that at least six mines had been cut in the last sweep, and that operations were continuing. There was, however, a narrow channel through the minefield marked by yellow and black dan buoys which I was confident was clear.

21. At 0817 I had ascertained from Blue Beach Signal Station, which had been set up 7 cables from Basse Point, that the beach was suitable for landing M.T., S.N.O.(L) being informed; and at 0849 I offered to take BACHAQUERO through the minefield to the vicinity of JJ, preparatory to her being swept in to Blue Beach. S.N.O.(L) however replied at 0910 that no beach was yet suitable for her, and told me to anchor, which I did at 0920.

22. About 1030 minesweepers were widening the channel in the minefield, and cut at least 18 mines within a few minutes. As some of these were drifting towards BACHAQUERO and ROYAL ULSTERMAN, LAFOREY weighed and helped to sink them using 2 four-barrelled machine-guns and rifles. Several were sunk but none exploded. At 1138 AURICULA struck a mine and was holed forward.

23. At this time all mines still floating had drifted clear of ships, and LAFOREY was proceeding up channel to a suitable bombardment position close to JJ where I anchored at noon.

24. At 1215 AURICULA was still drifting out of control and down by the bows, with 2 minesweepers standing by. She informed me that her First Lieutenant was in command and her Captain wounded and disembarked.

25. At 1232 I asked AURICULA if she had all the assistance she required, to which her reply was "No, think tow stern first possible". As LIGHTNING had been ordered to complete with fuel at 1315 I instructed her to close AURICULA before oiling and assist, and that if she was salvageable she should be towed to a lee anchorage.

26. At 1300 three enemy Potez 63 twin-engined reconnaissance bombers appeared over the anchorage but remained at a respectful distance without attacking any ship, flying off in the direction of Windsor Castle.

27. During the period 1100-1330 the Commando had been advancing steadily with little opposition and at 1335 informed S.N.O.(L) that they expected to reach Diego Suarez soon.

28. BACHAQUERO proceeded through the minefield swept channel about 1330 and went inshore to Red Beach with a minesweeper ahead of her.

29. At 1408 and 1424 two large explosions, which were definitely not mines, were seen half a mile North East of the ship. It is now suspected that they were large shell fired from some shore battery using Windsor Castle O.P. as observer.

30. At 1330 I was informed that machine-gun fire from the observation tower on Windsor Castle summit was being a nuisance, and at 1526 29 rounds were fired at the O.P. which then hoisted the white flag. A signal was sent by light "Descendez ou nous continuerons" and I ask the Beach Station whether the French were coming down, to which the reply was "Yes." However they changed their minds and returned, and at 1658 F.O.O.3 asked me to re-engage, and a further 36 rounds were fired; a direct hit was made on the living quarters just below the summit. The crew of the tower was seen to come out and disappear over the lee side. LIGHTNING took over the shoot at 1732.

31. LAFOREY then proceeded to the main anchorage and fuelled from EASEDALE. On completion at 0120/6th, anchored in the South West of the anchorage and set A/S watch.

32. At 0600 returned to the bombardment billet close to JJ, and was informed that a French sloop in English Bay was firing on our troops advancing on Antsirane; F.O.O.2 could not see this target and F.O.O.1 was in Diego Suarez, and it was not until 0804 that he obtained transport to take him to observe.

33. At 0843 he was in position and informed me that the fires caused by INDOMITABLE's air attack were out and the battle ensign still flying. At 0855 LAFOREY opened fire and fired 86 rounds at the sloop. A number of these were reported very close, one hit was seen, and at 0930 F.O.O.1 was asked for general effect. He reported that the bridge was on fire and the ammunition exploding, but that there

*Admiralty footnote* —

\* It ultimately transpired that the complete eviction of the defenders of Windsor Castle was not accomplished until the morning of D 2.

were no signs of the crew. This convinced me that the ship had been partially abandoned, probably as a result of INDOMITABLE's air attack, and fire was ceased.

34. At 0857 intercepted F.O.O.2's signal to PAKENHAM urgently requiring bombarding ship. LIGHTNING was detailed and proceeded to a position close to Red Beach at 0926, opening fire at 0953.

35. As soon as the shoot at the sloop D'ENTRECASTEAUX had been completed, LAFOREY proceeded inshore to bombard to support LIGHTNING, being ready at 1026, 3 cables from the shore off Red Beach.

36. At 1033 F.O.O.2 indicated the bombarding areas, reported position of own troops and suggested air spotting.

37. From map references own troops appeared very close, and at 1101 LAFOREY opened fire with single-gun salvos to see if F.O.O.2 could observe fall of shot. 7 rounds were fired but none seen. LIGHTNING was also in action until 1055 when F.O.C. Force "F"'s signal 1044 ordering her to cease fire was received.

38. At 1124 I asked F.O.O.2 whether I could go on, and told him that the last series had been fired 1500 yards North of own troops. At 1130 F.O.O.2 informed me that it was impossible for own troops to approach certain areas owing to strong points of enemy batteries and machine-gun posts. LAFOREY continued bombarding but no fall of shot was reported and it was obvious that F.O.O.2 could not see the fire but that own troops were not being endangered while the enemy lines of communication were being attacked. During this period 3 series of five 2-gun salvos at 2 minute intervals firing 30 in all were carried out. Fire was checked at 1208.

39. At 1159 F.O.O.2 asked for duplication by LIGHTNING and was informed that 6-gun salvos could be fired and duplicated, and that either series could be repeated, or rapid unseen fire for effect could be commenced. F.O.O.2 asked for a repetition of the series and this request confirmed that own troops were all right. LAFOREY continued with 2-gun salvos until 1221 when LIGHTNING was ready to fire broadsides of 4 to 6 guns at target. LAFOREY then increased to 4- to 6-gun salvos at target. 38 rounds were fired by LAFOREY with LIGHTNING joining in until 1233 when fire was checked.

40. None of this fire was observed by F.O.O.2 but it has since been learnt that it proved most helpful to a company of the 2nd Battalion South Lancashire Regiment who had infiltrated behind the enemy's lines and seized the wireless station, being practically surrounded. This was extremely fortunate.

41. In the meantime I had asked ILLUSTRIOUS for a spotting aircraft, and had sent my B.L.O.\* and one officer to Windsor Castle O.P. to see if they could distinguish the position of the enemy batteries in action against own troops. At 1327 touch was lost with F.O.O.2 who informed me that he was changing his battery.

42. Windsor Castle O.P. was manned at 1330 and the observer reported that the battle area

was obscured by smoke. 8 single rounds were fired at a safe range but accurate observation was impossible from this position.

43. At 1440 touch was obtained with the spotting aircraft from ILLUSTRIOUS but no target could be identified for some time, but at 1527 the aircraft ordered "Open Fire," and one round was fired, reported as 100 yards over.

44. At 1530 9 bombing aircraft were seen going in to attack, and the spotting aircraft was informed that fire would not be continued until this was completed.

45. At 1618, after the bombers had retired, the spotting aircraft called for fire on a gun battery. This was engaged from 1618 to 1705, firing 58 rounds from A and B turrets, when a signal was received from F.O.O.2 relayed by PAKENHAM, to "stop firing—moving." This had been transmitted at 1637. The spotting aircraft was then told to return to the carrier. Spotting had been carried out most efficiently with excellent communication.

46. This aircraft had originally been asked for at 1034, and, while it is fully realised that four hours was not a long time under the circumstances, had a spotting aircraft been kept available for destroyers the Army could have been helped more effectively much earlier.

47. Anchor was weighed at 0210/7th and LAFOREY proceeded through the minefield to hunt for a submarine reported by GENISTA as ordered by F.O.C. Force "F" and Captain (D), 12th Destroyer Flotilla.

48. At 0537 while off Nosi Hara received an aircraft's signal passed by Captain (D), 12th D.F.—"Survivors of submarine struggling in the water." There was some difficulty in establishing the position in which the submarine had been sunk, and when it was seen that PAKENHAM and one corvette were closing the right spot LAFOREY returned to the anchorage to provide A.A. protection.

49. LAFOREY proceeded for A/S patrol off the main entrance at 1800, closing JASMINE aground on Nosi Fati shoal at 2100; finding she had got off, A/S patrol was resumed until 0500/8th.

50. LAFOREY then escorted the fast convoy from the anchorage to Diego Suarez, entering harbour at 1500.

51. The bearing and enthusiasm of the Ship's Company over a long period of Action Stations was most satisfactory, and the fact that only one misfire (in Director) was experienced in a total of 297 rounds fired proved that the material of the ship had been maintained in first class condition. In general, all departments carried out arduous duties without a hitch. In particular, I would mention the Engine-room Department who met the constant calls on the engines in very trying conditions of heat most efficiently.

52. I should like to stress the very useful work and fine co-operation carried out by Captain B. Clark, the Royal Artillery, the Bombardment Liaison Officer attached to LAFOREY.

(Signed) R. M. J. HUTTON,

Captain (D),

Nineteenth Destroyer Flotilla.

Admiralty footnote —

\* B.L.O. = Bombardment Liaison Officer

ENCLOSURE 3.

H.M.S. KEREN.

15th May, 1942.

I have the honour to submit the following report of proceedings, covering the period from the time of assembly of the Force for Operation "Ironclad" at Durban until the arrival at Diego Suarez harbour.

*Assembly of Ships at Durban.*

2. M/V WINCHESTER CASTLE, having on board my Staff, H.Q. Staff of 121 Force and 29th Independent Brigade, arrived at Durban on 22nd April in convoy accompanied by H.M.S. KEREN, H.M.S. KARANJA, M/V SOBIESKI, S.S. ORONSAY and S.S. DUCHESS OF ATHOLL. This force carried the personnel of 29th and 17th Brigades.

3. The following ships connected with Operation "Ironclad" were already at Durban or arrived during the next 3 days:—

H.M.S. BACHAQUERO, H.M.S. ROYAL ULSTERMAN, R.F.A. DERWENTDALE, R.F.A. EASEDALE, M/V THALATTA, S.S. MAHOUT, S.S. EMPIRE KINGSLEY, S.S. CITY OF HONG KONG, S.S. FRANCONIA, M/V NAIRNBANK and S.S. MARTAND, besides H.M. Ships composing escort, minesweeping and covering forces for the operation.

*Preparations at Durban.*

4. In view of the short time available, arrangements had been made with C.-in-C., South Atlantic, for as many ships as possible connected with the operation, particularly personnel ships and certain M.T. ships requiring to restow cargo, to berth alongside. These arrangements were made very satisfactorily.

5. During the stay at Durban the following preparations were made:—

(a) Cargo of M.T. ships not assault stowed was restowed as far as possible, M.T. being serviced and water-proofed.

(b) Landing craft brought out by ships not connected with the operation were allocated to their respective ships for the operation.

(c) All landing craft were fuelled, engines tried and compasses adjusted.

(d) Chart folios brought from the U.K., orders, photographs, maps, propaganda leaflets and intelligence data were distributed to all ships concerned.

(e) Dan buoys, taut wire measuring gear and other special stores brought from the U.K. were distributed to destroyers and minesweepers concerned.

(f) Conferences were held on board H.M.S. RAMILLIES, Flagship of S.O.F. and on board M/V WINCHESTER CASTLE, (H.Q. Ship until 23rd April), and final planning was made.

Two demonstrations were held on board M/V WINCHESTER CASTLE in which the operation was fully explained with the aid of models, for the benefit of Commanding Officers of ships, Masters and Naval Liaison Officers concerned, with all Military and South African liaison personnel present.

(g) Military personnel carried out route marches ashore and, where possible, Naval personnel required to land during the operation did likewise

(h) Special security measures were taken which included the sailing and routing of the force for Mombasa by N.C.S.O.\* Durban in two separate convoys by the ordinary routine procedure. The real orders were issued quite separately and only opened after proceeding to sea.

(i) W/T and R/T sets in all ships of the force were netted and tuned. Communication stores and personnel were allocated to ships as necessary.

(j) Special communication arrangements were made for S.A.A.F., and arrangements were made for the introduction of special broadcast services to cover the area of operations.

*Passage from Durban to William Pitt Bay.*

*Slow Convoy: Convoy Y.*

6. Convoy Y, consisting of DERWENTDALE, BACHAQUERO, MAHOUT, EMPIRE KINGSLEY, THALATTA, EASEDALE, NAIRNBANK and MARTAND sailed on 25th April escorted by DEVONSHIRE, 3 destroyers, the 14th M/S Flotilla and 4 corvettes.

7. S.S. CITY OF HONG KONG, which arrived at Durban a.m. 26th April was sailed p.m. that day after unloading a deck cargo of aircraft, and proceeded with escort of 2 corvettes to overtake and join the slow convoy.

8. This convoy followed the route ordered by S.O.F. which conformed to the normal shipping route Northwards along the coast to approximately 15 degrees South, then East North Eastwards as if to pass North of Madagascar.

9. The speed of this convoy was 9 knots (through the water) and arrangements were made to fuel destroyers and minesweepers from the two oilers on passage. The weather proved sufficiently favourable to allow this speed to be maintained and for fuelling to be carried out. The principal anxiety was that a head sea might stop BACHAQUERO owing to her bow door, but this fortunately did not eventuate.

*Fast Convoy: Convoy Z.*

10. The Military Commander, Major-General R. G. Sturges, C.B., R.M., transferred a part of his H.Q. to H.M.S. RAMILLIES, Flagship of the Combined C.-in-C., Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, C.B., on 23rd April. On the 28th April, S.N.O.(L), Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams and Staff, with Brigadier F. W. Festing, Commanding 29th Brigade and Staff, and a proportion of General Sturges' Staff transferred from WINCHESTER CASTLE to H.M.S. KEREN, the latter becoming Headquarters Ship of the Assault.

11. Convoy Z, consisting of KEREN, KARANJA, WINCHESTER CASTLE, SOBIESKI, ROYAL ULSTERMAN, DUCHESS OF ATHOLL, ORONSAY and FRANCONIA sailed from Durban on 28th April, escorted by RAMILLIES, ILLUSTRIOUS, HERMIONE and destroyers.

12. The route planned was similar to that of Convoy Y. On 30th April, however, reports were received of a hostile submarine off the Mozambique coast and S.O.F. ordered a change of route, the new route passing some 60 miles to the Eastward of the original track.

*Admiralty footnote* —

\* N C S O = Naval Control Service Officer

*Approach to objective.*

13. H.M.S. INDOMITABLE joined Flag on 3rd May and contact was made between Convoys Y and Z, the latter slowing down and increasing zig-zag so as to remain in rear.

14. Approval having been received from S.O.F., the object of the expedition was announced to all officers and men, maps were issued and Assault Commanders gave lectures outlining the intended plan.

All officers of landing craft received special instruction to enable them to recognise their respective beaches. This included the study of maps, models, panorama sketches and photographs which had been prepared for the purpose.

15. Convoys Y and Z formed into groups p.m. 4th May and the approach was made in accordance with the pre-arranged orders.

16. The strong Westerly set which had been expected between positions AA and ZB did not materialise. Visibility was good and contact was made with H.M.S. LIGHTNING, anchored off Nosi Fati, as expected. The final approach was carried out as ordered, groups anchoring approximately 10 minutes earlier than planned.

17. Slight inconvenience was caused by the fact that the first dan had been laid too close to Nosi Fati. Warning of this however was received from LAFOREY and ships left this dan on their starboard hand. Remaining dans were laid accurately and were easy to pick up; the successful danning of this channel was a first-class bit of work and largely contributed to the result.

18. The successful execution of this approach, which resulted from long and careful planning tends to obscure the great difficulties which were overcome. An extract from a Memoire Militaire captured from Windsor Castle battery reads: "Tir de nuit n'est pas envisagé, l'accès de la Baie étant considéré comme impossible de nuit."

*The Assault.*

19. The assault proceeded according to plan, zero being at 0430 on Tuesday, 5th May (D.1). WINCHESTER CASTLE's (Captain Sebastian Francis Newdigate, Master) (No. 5 Commando and 2 East Lancs. Regt.), KEREN's (1st R.S.F.) and KARANJA's (2 R.W.F.) flotillas left their ships at 0230, 0227 and 0319 for Red, Green and White Beaches respectively. Complete surprise was effected in spite of the explosion of at least one mine, and No. 7 battery (Red Beach), White and Green landings were carried out without loss. Landing craft navigation was as good as that of their parent ships and all made accurate beachings.

In accordance with the tactical plan, Blue Beach was then assaulted and encountered machine-gun fire, but was carried.

20. On receipt of the success signal from No. 5 Commando, KEREN, KARANJA, WINCHESTER CASTLE, SOBIESKI and BACHAQUERO were ordered to anchor in the main anchorage off Ambararata Bay. WINCHESTER CASTLE and BACHAQUERO led whilst remainder loaded their second flight.

A signal reporting mines near position HH at the end of the main anchorage had not been received in KEREN, but DEVONSHIRE,

who had got it and who was then anchored East of Nosi Hara, promptly and properly ordered both ships to stop. The departure of the remaining ships was therefore delayed by me, until further minesweeping had been carried out.

21. Up to this time surprise had been achieved and by 0620 about 2,300 of our troops were ashore. On the other hand, the turn round for landing craft was very long, and as LAFOREY, LIGHTNING and ROYAL ULSTERMAN were anchored in or near a minefield, I ordered them to remain at anchor.

My joint Assault Commander, Brigadier F. W. Festing and his Command Post landed at 0710 at White Beach.

22. Reports of successful advance and taking of prisoners began to come in. At 0750 KEREN led Group IV to the main anchorage where minesweeping had just been completed, followed by the remainder of the assault force. About this time, the S.E. wind had increased to about force 8\* and raised a sea of such size that in any other circumstances I would have ordered boats to be hoisted. Ships dropped second anchors.

The handling and loading of craft under these circumstances was exemplary. None were put out of action, and disembarkation continued at full speed.

23. Sweeping continued and at 1138 I regret to report that H.M.S. AURICULA struck a mine close to position HH (without loss of life), and remained anchored by her sweep. No action could be taken without prejudice to the operation and risk to the other ships and sweepers, and as she had ceased to sink she was left where she was, her back being broken.

By this time, minesweepers were 50 per cent. out of action, 35 mines had been swept and sweepers had done splendidly.

24. White Beach, opposite main anchorage, then became unsuitable after half tide so Blue was developed. This involved a 2 mile further turn round for landing craft, but with the risk of yet more sweeper casualties I ordered sweeping to cease and accepted the longer turn round in order to preserve the minesweepers for sweeping the Fleet into Diego Suarez harbour.

25. The landing continued at full pressure, two or three machine-gun attacks being made on the beaches during the day by enemy fighter aircraft. Fleet Air Arm fighter patrols however provided effective protection and with the initial air blow on the aerodrome, no attacks were made on the transports. Landing operations were suspended during the period from sunset to moonrise, to avoid damage to craft.

26. About 1354 an enemy post on Windsor Castle became a nuisance and a little later was engaged by LAFOREY. Shortly after, signals of surrender and a white flag were observed and fire was ceased. The following morning LAFOREY and LIGHTNING engaged this post which was found to be empty on our troops taking possession.

27. The Hospital Ship ATLANTIS arrived in the afternoon, being led by a corvette through the swept channel to her anchorage close West of the main anchorage.

*Admiralty footnote —*

\* Wind force 8—fresh gale, 34–40 knots.

28. During the day great efforts had been made to find a suitable beach for BACHA-QUERO, whose draught was 6 feet forward and 15 feet aft. A beach was eventually found close North of Red centre at the foot of Windsor Castle. The approach to this beach lay through the minefield. However, BACHA-QUERO was swept through by CROMARTY who cut 2 mines, and her cargo landed near Red Beach centre in 14 minutes.

29. Before night fell I ordered AURICULA to be abandoned by her ship's company. Destroyers and A/S corvettes were disposed for A/S patrol.

30. General Sturges arrived from the Flagship in a destroyer and after consultation in KEREN proceeded ashore. Situation reports up to the end of D.1 indicated that No. 5 Commando had captured the whole of the Andrakaka Peninsula, and that the 29th Brigade had reached a line about 3 miles South of Antsirane town, where heavy opposition had been encountered.

*May 6th, Day Two.*

31. After daylight LIGHTNING and LAFOREY engaged the enemy post still holding out at Windsor Castle. INDOMITABLE was asked to attack a sloop in English Bay, Diego Suarez harbour, whose fire was controlling the road to Diego Suarez North. At 0744 INDOMITABLE reported this ship, which proved to be the D'ENTRECASTEAUX, as being on fire. LAFOREY, LIGHTNING and PAKENHAM took up positions to engage targets indicated by F.O.O.s, LAFOREY bombarding D'ENTRECASTEAUX at extreme range.

32. At daylight AURICULA was observed to be lower in the water and as an emergency measure FREESIA was ordered to tow her to shallow water; the effort however was too great and AURICULA broke in half and sank at 0823.

33. H.M.S. RAMILLIES, wearing the flag of S.O.F. arrived and anchored at ZD and proceeded to fuel.

34. The landing continued at full speed, the 13th Brigade being landed on completion of the 17th Brigade. All personnel numbering approximately 10,000 men were ashore by 1700.

35. About 1600 a mine exploded in POOLE's sweep and severely wounded her First Lieutenant, who, I deeply regret to report, died of his wounds. He was buried at sea from POOLE.

36. General Sturges came on board and outlined the plan of attack on Antsirane for the night, which included the entry of H.M.S. ANTHONY in the port of Diego Suarez and the landing of H.M.S. RAMILLIES' Royal Marines at Antsirane.

*Day Three: 7th May.*

37. From about midnight various reports were received from GENISTA on A/S patrol, indicating that she had been in contact with a submarine, had attacked and lost contact North West of Nosi Hara. PAKENHAM, LAFOREY and corvettes proceeded to assist in the search. At 0500 an aircraft from ILLUSTRIOUS sighted the French submarine LE HEROS on the surface outside the reefs North

East of Nosi Fati and sank her by torpedo. The first news of this received in KEREN was an aircraft report at 0548 that submarine survivors were struggling in the water.

38. From 0330 onwards reports of the successful occupation of Antsirane and subsequent negotiations for the signing of a Protocol began to come in.

39. At 0930 ANTHONY arrived at the main anchorage escorting S.S. GREYSTOKE CASTLE, who had arrived from Durban with ammunition and other stores. In view of the brilliant operation carried out by ANTHONY the previous night in landing the R M s from RAMILLIES at Antsirane, I arranged for her to pass all ships at the anchorage who cleared lower decks and cheered her with great enthusiasm.

40. The landing of vehicles and stores continued. Returning landing craft conveyed casualties to the hospital ship. Arrangements were also made to convey several hundred prisoners from Red and Blue Beaches to ORONSAY, where it had been decided to accommodate all prisoners.

41. Survivors of the submarine LE HEROS were interrogated on board KEREN and a report signalled to S.O.F. No information concerning the minefields at Diego Suarez could be obtained from them. The only item of interest was that LE HEROS had left Diego Suarez on 1st May and had been patrolling ever since.

42. On receipt of a signal from S.O.F. approving my proposals to sail slow and fast convoys for Diego Suarez, preparations were made to sail the slow convoy at 1600/7th, and the fast convoy at 0500/8th. A route passing eight miles North of Cape Amber was selected and anchor berths for all ships in Scotch Bay were allocated.

43. The slow convoy, composed as for Convoy Y on passage from Durban with the addition of GREYSTOKE CASTLE, duly sailed by the swept channel shortly after 1600, escorted by D.12 and all available corvettes, EMPIRE KINGSLEY acting as Commodore as before.

*May 8th, Day Four.*

44. All landing craft were ordered to leave the beaches by 0300 and to be hoisted.

At 0500 the fast convoy, composed as for Convoy Z on passage from Durban, sailed by the swept channel, escorted by LAFOREY and JAVELIN. KEREN acted as Commodore.

45. I instructed POOLE, the only remaining ship at the anchorage, to recover the dan buoys marking the channel and to follow the Fleet to Diego Suarez.

46. DEVONSHIRE and additional destroyers joined the escort of the convoy when clear of the swept channel and aircraft from ILLUSTRIOUS carried out A/S reconnaissance. The route of both convoys to Diego Suarez fortunately avoided the submarine which was eventually destroyed by ACTIVE and passage was uneventful though S.E. wind force 8 was experienced from Cape Amber onwards.

47. The slow convoy entered harbour at 1000 and the fast convoy at 1330, all ships picking up their berths in Scotch Bay creditably in spite of the strong wind.



48. With regard to the remarks on H.M. Ships, I understand that their reports are all sent to DEVONSHIRE and so presumably none are called for from me, but this report would be incomplete without them.

Very great responsibility lay in the hands of FREESIA (Acting Commander T.C.P. Crick) who led in through the minefield in unswept water, drawing 16 feet, accurately and steadfastly. The navigational responsibility for the whole force rested largely on DEVONSHIRE (Captain R. D. Oliver) although the initial anxiety was LAFOREY's (Captain R. M. J. Hutton).

The offensive spirit shown by PAKENHAM (Captain E. B. K. Stevens) and LAFOREY ably supported by LIGHTNING (Commander H. G. Walters) was a pleasure to watch although I had many moments of anxiety when they were passing through swept channels. However, I realised they knew more of that immediate local situation than I.

All three post captains mentioned are senior to me and I deeply appreciate their full and generous acceptance of being placed under my orders.

CROMER (Commander R. H. Stephenson) ably supported by CROMARTY (Lieutenant Commander C. G. Palmer, R.N.V.R.) were the outstanding ships in the gallant 14th M/S Flotilla.

The A/S corvettes performed their task in guarding the anchorage from submarine attack, and GENISTA (Lt.-Cdr. R. Pattinson, D.S.C., R.N.R.) may have had a contributory share in the sinking of LE HEROS.

49. The task assigned to the cutter LINDI was carried out successfully and provided that one crucial aid to navigation which Captain D.19, from his report, was very glad to get at 2040/D-1. Great credit is due to Lieutenant A. G. Booker, R.N.V.R., her Commanding Officer, for his very successful navigation

50. Of the masters and crews of ships of the Merchant Navy taking part, it is impossible to speak too highly. In every way they gave of their best. Their ship handling was superb: groups were composed of ships varying from 20,000 to 5,000 tons and they anchored in station in the swept channel as if they had done it all their lives.

Unstinted help came from all concerned. Docks Operating Groups were backed up by ships' companies; ships' motor boats were run as landing craft; stewards, cooks and boat-swains' parties and all took their full share. When volunteers were called for for special engineering parties, the entire engine room staffs volunteered including one old greaser who fought as a cavalryman in the South African war.

51. There is one lesson, however, which is so important and at the same time so commonplace to us all, that it nearly became overlooked. That is the perfect co-operation and friendship that exists between General Sturges and his Headquarters, Brigadier Festing and the 29th Independent Brigade Group Staff and my own Staff. This was not confined to the Commands and Senior Officers; but went right down through to stewards and batmen, all of whom

learnt to forget the word "my" and referred to the Force as "our". This state of affairs became crystallised when we joined the Flag of the Commander-in-Chief who turned the Force into a formidable fighting unit.

(Signed) G. A. GARNONS-WILLIAMS,  
*Captain, Royal Navy.*  
*Senior Naval Officer, Landing.*

## APPENDIX.

### THE CAPTURE OF DIEGO SUAREZ

*The following Report was submitted on 15th June, 1942, to the Secretary of State for War by LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR ROBERT G. STURGES, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., General Officer Commanding 121 Force.*

Sir,

I have the honour to forward herewith an account of Operation "Ironclad" for the capture of Diego Suarez.

### PLANNING AND EMBARKATION

#### *Operation "Bonus"*

1. I first received information on 23rd December, of the project to capture Diego Suarez, when I was informed that I had been nominated as Joint Commander, with Rear-Admiral T. B. Drew, R.N., for this operation, which was to be known by the code word "Bonus". The military forces allotted were H.Q. R.M. Division, 102 R.M. Brigade, 36 Infantry Brigade, two commandos, and a normal combined operational allotment of supporting and ancillary units. These included a detachment of the M.N.B.D.O.\* to erect coast defence and A.A. guns for the consolidation of the naval and air base. Sufficient assault, personnel, and motor transport shipping was allotted to carry the formations and units with their vehicles on a reduced scale, similar to that used on various exercises carried out in the previous year. This Force was reasonably well found. The infantry brigades, 102 R.M. Brigade and 36 Infantry Brigade, had been water trained and had exercised on shore over long distances and with little or no transport. Signals were just adequate. All units were tactically stowed and a minimum of personnel was allowed to enable signals to function after capture of objective. The provision of one squadron of aircraft only, fifteen Lysanders, subsequently reduced to six, appeared to me a little peculiar, but the decision by the Chief of the Air Staff was that this was perfectly adequate for the occupation of the objective.

Planning at once commenced, and, by 31st December, the draft operation order, the maintenance project, the detailed order of battle, the allotment of personnel and vehicles to ships, and the landing tables were complete and had been handed to the Q.M.G. Movements Branch at the War Office for the preparation of loading tables and the issue of movement orders for embarkation. Subject to the final decision of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, the expedition was planned to embark at the end of January, to carry out a rehearsal exercise in Loch Fyne in early February, and sail on 20th February.

\* M N B, D, O — Mobile Naval Base Defence Organisation.

2. In planning this operation in conjunction with Rear-Admiral Drew, I made a military plan which was in outline that actually used in Operation "Ironclad", and together we reached certain conclusions which were of great importance in planning the latter operation:—

(a) The plan prepared by the Joint Planning Section envisaged a landing on the difficult beaches in Ambararata Bay on the West coast, by one brigade, which was to secure a bridgehead and to cover the landing and forming up of the remainder of the force. It was estimated that the advance on Antsirane could commence on D2 or D3. I formed the opinion that this very orthodox plan gave the enemy far too much time to recover from the hoped for initial surprise, and I decided that, in spite of the difficulties of the beaches and terrain, the first brigade to land should advance on Antsirane immediately after securing the beaches. I considered that speed in the advance of this brigade, with limited armour was more important than the completion of its supporting arms and transport. Further, this advance would give sufficient cover to enable the remainder of the force to land without undue risk.

(b) Rear-Admiral Drew and I decided that much fuller information than was then available would be necessary, that air photographs of the beach area ought to be taken, and that the risk of compromising surprise in doing so should be accepted. As a result of our request to the Chiefs of Staff, orders were issued for the air photographs to be taken which were subsequently used in the operation "Ironclad" and for the collection of further intelligence which was of great value in that operation.

(c) We also reached the conclusion that, while a night or dawn assault on the beaches was essential, the final approach could only be made under certain combined conditions of moon and tide. These, in the Spring and early Summer of 1942, occurred in the early part of each calendar month. We calculated the time required for loading ships, the move to Durban, adjustments at Durban, and final approach, deciding that, if the expedition sailed on 20th February, the assault could take place in the favourable period at the beginning of April.

Meanwhile arrangements were put in train for the rehearsal exercise which was to be conducted by H.Q. Expeditionary Force. About 15th January orders were received that operation "Bonus" was to be held in abeyance and that much of the shipping required for it was to be taken for other convoys.

On the cancellation of operation "Bonus" the forces concerned reverted to command of their normal formations. Later "Z" H.Q. Signals, the only combined operation signals in the United Kingdom, were drafted away.

#### *Exercise "Charcoal"*

3. In spite of the cancellation of operation "Bonus", I decided that rehearsal exercise for which plans had been prepared would be of value to my command. I therefore asked H.Q. Expeditionary Force to continue with the exercise, on the reduced scale necessitated by the removal of much of the shipping. This

exercise, known as exercise "Charcoal", was carried out by 102 R.M. Brigade early in February, and many valuable lessons were learnt. I summarise below two lessons which were of particular importance to operation "Ironclad".

This was the first combined operation exercise carried out since October that gave an opportunity to practise the naval and military staffs, the landing craft crews, the beach parties, the docks operating personnel, and the naval and military signals which took part in operation "Ironclad". Due to postings, it was the only combined operations training that many of the new drafts were able to be given.

The exercise was carried out over difficult beaches and required the rapid advance inland of one brigade. This drew attention to the extreme importance of close scrutiny of the landing tables, so that essential vehicles had priority in landing and that these had a high cross country performance. All units had to be prepared to make long advances with very little transport. Although the facts were well known to all concerned in combined operations, a new standard was set by the difficult beaches and terrain used in this exercise.

On conclusion of exercise "Charcoal", my H.Q. and the troops taking part dispersed to their billeting areas, and continued with their training.

#### *Operation "Ironclad"*

4. On the 12th March I received orders from H.Q. Expeditionary Force to report to the War Office on the morning 14th March. When I arrived at the War Office, I was informed that the Chiefs of Staff Committee had decided at 11 o'clock the previous night, that the operation, subsequently known as "Ironclad", was to be prepared to capture and to hold the naval base and air base at Diego Suarez during the favourable May moon and tide period, that is between the 3rd and 8th May. The expedition was to sail with convoy WS 17 which was to be delayed until the 23rd March.

Rear Admiral E. N. Syfret was nominated as Combined Commander and I was nominated as Military Commander under him. I was informed that a meeting with him was quite impossible until the arrival of the convoy at Freetown. For all planning before that, which of course included the vital planning for loading the assault ships, he would be represented by Capt. G. W. A. Waller, R.N., who was to be Chief of Staff for the operation; Captain G. A. Garnons-Williams, R.N., who had acted as C.O.S. to Rear Admiral Drew in planning operation "Bonus", was nominated as Senior Naval Officer (Landing) and Naval Assault Commander. Brigadier F. W. Festing as commander of 29 Independent Brigade, the only combined operationally-trained formation in this revised expedition, naturally became the Military Assault Commander.

It will be seen that the time available for preparing this expedition was far less than previously considered necessary. It was estimated, based on operation "Bonus", that the period of time for a similar operation to be mounted was 91 days from the issue of the preparatory orders to the assault; in the event, 52 days elapsed between the two. This saving of time was effected first by using the 29th Independent Brigade and

5 Commando to capture the beaches, embarking them with minimum transport in the four assault ships semi-permanently allotted to the Expeditionary Force for training and operational purposes; secondly, by the use of 17 Infantry Brigade Group, already embarked close stowed in convoy WS 17, as the second brigade; thirdly by the immediate acceptance by 29 Independent Brigade of the modified "Bonus" plan for the assault forces. If the operation was postponed after sailing, a brigade group from 2 Division in WS 18 would take the place of 17 Infantry Brigade Group.

This plan had certain serious disadvantages. The first was that Force H.Q., 29 Independent Brigade, 5 Commando, and Force troops were reduced to what could be put in the four assault ships. Examination of the problem showed that this was only possible by making severe reductions in the personnel and even severer reductions in vehicles previously considered essential. The second disadvantage was that 17 Infantry Brigade Group had no experience or training in combined operations, and its personnel and vehicles had been embarked as for a normal WS convoy and not for an assault landing. Neither time nor shipping was available to rectify this.

5. Embarkation of vehicles and stores in the four assault ships was to commence on 18th March, and all planning had to be completed to this schedule. After examination of the new intelligence available, which did not as yet include the air photographs, we decided that our previous plans were sound and could be carried out with the reduced forces available. On the military side, new topographical information suggested that the beaches were far better than was originally reported. The postponement of the operation from April to May placed it at the beginning of the dry season, which considerably reduced anticipated difficulties of advance along the only, very doubtful, road which was available. Thanks to this and "Bonus" Captain Garnons-Williams and myself were able to meet Brigadier Festing and Brigadier G. W. B. Tarleton, commanding 29 Independent Brigade and 17 Infantry Brigade respectively, and my advisers and heads of services, all of whom arrived in London on the morning of 15th March, with a completed outline-plan and an outline draft of the Force operation order.

From the 15th March to 19th March, Captain Garnons-Williams, Brigadier Festing and myself with our staffs were engaged in close co-operation in preparing the necessary plans for loading the ships and completing necessary preparations for the Force to leave the United Kingdom.

6. A difficult combined problem was to decide in detail the composition of the naval and military forces to be embarked in the four assault ships; *H.M.S. Keren* and *Karanja*, *M.Vs. Winchester Castle* and *Sobieski*. To these were to be added *H.M.S. Royal Ulsterman* and *Bachaquero*. These two ships could not meet the convoy until arrival at Durban, and any troops and vehicles required to make the assault from them had either to be embarked in the four assault ships or be taken from those units already embarked with 17 Infantry Brigade Group. The four assault ships could take an approximate total of 323 officers, 4,753 O.Rs. and 115 vehicles. Of these 76 officers,

499 O.Rs., were finally allotted to Force H.Q. and Force troops including the Docks Operating Company: 38 officers, 328 O.Rs. to Royal Navy; leaving 209 officers, 3,926 O.Rs. for the fighting troops of the assault force. It must be realised that this small allotment of H.Q. and Force troops had to command and administer not only the assault force, but also 17 Infantry Brigade Group, and later the 13 Infantry Brigade Group which was to be added to the Force. In addition they were to be faced with the problems of the control and consolidation of the captured base.

I had also, in this short planning period, to hand over the command of the Royal Marine Division. It was a great disappointment to the two Royal Marine Brigades that they were not employed on this operation, from which they were excluded by the need for extreme speed in embarkation and by the chance disposition of the brigades when the operation was ordered. 29th Brigade were quite fortuitously embarked in the assault ships for exercises and these assault ships were then actually detailed for the operation.

7. On 17th March I met Major-General H. P. M. Berney-Ficklin, commanding 5 Division from which 17 Infantry Brigade Group was to be taken. On the 18th March, I was interviewed by the Chiefs of Staff on my plans for the operation and on 19th March I met the Prime Minister. On the evening of the same day I left for my H.Q. at Melrose, and on 21st March embarked in *M.V. Winchester Castle* which sailed on the 23rd March. On the 22nd March I saw Lieutenant-General E. C. A. Schreiber, commanding the Expeditionary Force which I was now leaving. I thanked him for the great assistance that his staff had given to Force 121, and handed over 101 and 102 R.M. Brigades to his direct command.

During this brief and very fully occupied planning and embarkation period, very great assistance was given to us all by HQ Expeditionary Force. Without it the expedition could not have sailed, in the time and the state of preparation it did. I was also assisted by those branches of the War Office concerned and by the Adviser of Combined Operations and his staff.

The speed with which the revised operation was mounted was only possible because of the experience that all the staffs, advisers and services concerned had gained in planning previous projects, and carrying out exercises based on them.

#### THE PASSAGE TO THE THEATRE OF OPERATIONS.

##### *The Completion of the Plan for the Assault.*

8. Captain Garnons-Williams, Brigadier Festing and myself with limited staffs had embarked in *M.V. Winchester Castle*. We were therefore able to continue our study of the operation in constant consultation. Owing to the short planning period, detailed study of the operation, other than that required for embarkation and loading, had not been possible for Brigadier Festing and his staff. Immediately before sailing the air photographs of the beach area had been received on board *M.V. Winchester Castle* (Unfortunately the photographs stopped a few miles short of Antsirane and thus missed the final prepared defence

line, which was only discovered during the operation.) We were now able to make a full and detailed study of the operation, and the final selection of the beaches, the assault commanders dealing with these problems in great detail. Meanwhile the staff was able to complete the maintenance project, the detailed work on the final preparations to be carried out at Durban, and the study of the employment of 17 Infantry Brigade Group. By the time the convoy reached Freetown on 6th April, written draft instructions, both operational and administrative, had been prepared for the employment of that brigade group and for the final preparations that were to be made at Durban. These included the only re-stowage possible for 17 Infantry Brigade Group.

On arrival at Freetown I met for the first time Rear Admiral Syfret. During the short stay at Freetown from 6th to 9th April he examined the plans for the operation, discussed the naval plans with Captains Waller and Garnons-Williams; and the military plans with myself. He gave his approval for the military plans and made certain alterations to the naval plans which however did not affect the military side of the operations.

I was also able to meet and confer with Major General Berney-Ficklin and Brigadier Tarleton on the detailed arrangements for the withdrawal of 17 Infantry Brigade Group from 5 Division and its employment in operation "Ironclad". I would here like to express my appreciation of the assistance and the generous minded attitude of Major General Berney-Ficklin. The withdrawal of one-third of his division could not have been welcome, and there were many points of detail to be settled between us. In all discussions he gave me every possible assistance and encouragement, even to the extent of supplying a few non-commissioned officers and men from units of his division other than those in my order of battle.

During the passage from Freetown to Durban, commanders and staffs in the *Winchester Castle* were able to continue the study of the operation. On 17th April a signal was received from Rear Admiral Syfret in *H.M.S. Malaya* informing me that the War Office had placed 13 Infantry Brigade Group at my disposal for the operation, but it was not to be committed unless the degree of opposition justified it. By the time the convoy reached Durban the final plan for the assault had become firm to a considerable degree of detail, and the final operation and administrative orders and instructions were ready for issue.

#### *Final Preparations at Durban.*

9. It was clear that a large amount of work would be necessary at Durban in preparation for the operation. Naval and military representatives had flown to Durban from Freetown where they had reported to the Imperial Movement Control and harbour authorities in order to make all possible preparations for the reception of the convoy. All ships were thus able to come alongside and work started immediately on arrival. Although the convoy only arrived at about noon on the 22nd April, a tour of the dock area that evening showed that work was in full swing. In general terms the work to be carried out was as follows:—

(a) The final plans had to be discussed with Rear Admiral Syfret and his staff.

Many alterations had occurred in the composition of the naval force; these in practice made little difference to the military plan, but full discussion was of course necessary to ensure proper co-ordination.

(b) Vehicles, guns and equipment of the 29 Independent Brigade although embarked for an assault landing had now to be checked, serviced and waterproofed after a month in the holds of the ships.

(c) Vehicles, guns and equipment of the 17 Infantry Brigade Group had not been stowed for a combined operation and everything possible had to be done to make a limited amount of transport and guns available tactically stowed. These vehicles had to be serviced, waterproofed and examined. In particular the electrical batteries of the vehicles and wireless sets required re-charging and connecting up and the vehicles had to be filled with petrol, oil and water. Tank guns had to be fired, new tracks on tanks and carriers to be stretched. Mess Tin and Composite rations had to be got up from the bottoms of holds for 17 Infantry Brigade Group and ammunition and equipment loaded into vehicles. On top of this aircraft petrol and bombs had to be loaded for the South African Air Force (S.A.A.F.). It was only possible in the time available to make these arrangements for a limited scale of transport for this brigade group, and for two out of the three batteries of the 9 Field Regiment.

(d) Final orders and instructions had to be issued and discussed with the 17 and 13 Infantry Brigade Groups. It had been possible before leaving England to embark one G.S.O.2 with brigade H.Q. and one Assistant Military Landing Officer (A.M.L.O.) in each ship of 17 Infantry Brigade Group, all experienced in Combined Operations training. These officers had been able to do the valuable work in assisting this brigade group to prepare itself for the operation. In addition to this a few officers from 29 Independent Brigade were exchanged with officers of 17 Infantry Brigade for the voyage from Freetown to Durban and were thus able to pass on their experience gained in combined exercises. I was therefore by now assured that 17 Infantry Brigade Group could land over the beaches and play a valuable part in the operation, especially from D2 onwards, if enemy resistance made this necessary. 13 Infantry Brigade Group was a very different matter. Their personnel ships only arrived at Durban on 26th April when I met Brigadier V. C. Russell, the brigade commander for the first time. I was able to do little beyond issuing them with written operational and administrative orders and instructions, and discussing potential situations and problems with Brigadier Russell.

(e) *H.M.S. Royal Ulsterman* and *Bachaquero* joined the convoy at Durban and were loaded; the former with troops and the latter with vehicles and guns.

Meanwhile all units engaged in daily route marches to harden and get them fit after the voyage out.

An offer of the co-operation of a bomber and reconnaissance squadron of the South African Air Force was received while the force was at

Durban. It was clear that the addition of this squadron would greatly increase the strength of my force for the consolidation of the objective, although owing to the distance from the nearest base, the squadron would be unable to take part in the capture of the aerodrome. Colonel S. A. Melville, S.A.A.F., arrived from Pretoria with the offer in his pocket. The S.A.A.F. also offered the complete personnel and ground equipment for a fighter squadron if the Air Ministry could supply the aircraft. The offer of the bomber and reconnaissance squadron was accepted with gratitude. The aerodrome was made serviceable and the whole squadron was operating by 12th May. Thereafter it proved a most valuable component for the fortress. That the squadron was grossly overworked was a truism, but none of the many tasks given to it were refused. They included long distance sea patrols and escorts in co-operation with the Royal Navy, photographic reconnaissance in anticipation of future operations, interception and communications.

All this made a vast amount of detailed work for the administrative staff and the services. All ranks concerned worked extremely well and did not spare themselves. In particular I would here draw attention to the work performed by: the A.A. & Q.M.G., Lieutenant-Colonel A. F. J. Elmslie, A.D.O.S., Lieutenant-Colonel E. J. Savage, and D.A.D.O.S. (E), Major A. Blunt.

#### *The Project for the Capture of Tamatave and Majunga*

10. Early on the morning of 26 April, a cable was received from London instructing Rear Admiral Syfret and myself to forward our appreciation of the possibility of operations to capture Tamatave and Majunga either simultaneously or shortly after Diego Suarez. We at once investigated this problem and came to the conclusion that, if 13 Infantry Brigade Group could be permanently allotted to the force and if the opposition at Diego Suarez was such that it could be overcome by 1800 hrs. on D1, these additional operations could be carried out simultaneously by re-embarking 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando four or five days after the initial assault on Diego Suarez. Rear Admiral Syfret and I issued combined directives for these operations to Brigadier Festing and Captain Garnons-Williams. During the remainder of the stay at Durban and the passage to Diego Suarez, they prepared and issued orders for these operations. However, on 4 May, orders were received that in view of the extreme importance of 13 Infantry Brigade Group reaching India as soon as possible, these operations were to be held in abeyance. These projects however appeared again later after the capture of Diego Suarez.

11. The slow convoy sailed from Durban 25 April and the fast convoy, containing all the personnel ships, on 28 April. By this time all re-adjustments of personnel, stores and vehicles for the operation were completed. Accompanied by Colonel Melville, S.A.A.F., Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Houghton, Royal Corps of Signals, C.S.O. and Major R. O. Nash, M.C., GSO2, I embarked in *H.M.S. Ramillies* which was flying the flag of Rear Admiral Syfret, while the majority of my H.Q. were embarked in *H.M.S. Keren* with S.N.O.L. and H.Q. 29 Independent Brigade. This arrangement was necessary in order to enable an early start to be

made on the beach maintenance project, and to co-ordinate with S.N.O.L. the landing of the 17 Infantry Brigade Group, after disembarkation of 29 Independent Brigade. A further dispersion of my H.Q. was necessary so that a team in *H.M.S. Karanja* could take on the duties of assault H.Q. ship and S.N.O.L. if *H.M.S. Keren* were sunk.

12. The work at Durban was greatly assisted by the facilities made available by the Government of the Union of South Africa, co-ordinated in Durban by Brigadier J. Daniels, Area Commander and Colonel S. A. Melville S.A.A.F.; by the Military Mission under the command of Brigadier A. G. Salisbury-Jones; and Lieutenant-Colonel A. W. Bryant and the staff of the Imperial Movement Control at Durban. It was a hard struggle. The Union was practically denuded of certain commodities such as bostiek and insulating tape for waterproofing vehicles and of aircraft bombs and it seemed that almost the impossible had been achieved.

#### *Passage to the Objective*

13. The passage to the objective was made according to the naval plan and is fully described in the naval dispatches. The final opportunity to distribute orders occurred on 1 May by destroyer. At dusk 4 May the complete convoy, which now consisted of the slow and the fast elements, formed up in its assault formation and I observed with some relief, that, when darkness fell, we did not appear to have been discovered by enemy air reconnaissance or surface vessels.

#### THE CAPTURE OF THE BEACHES AND ADVANCE INLAND.

(See plan 1 at end.)

14. The general plan for the assault was a main landing by 29 Independent Brigade in Ambararata Bay area at three beaches named from South to North: Green, White and Blue. This brigade which was on a very light scale of transport, and had under its command among other units, "B" Special Service Squadron (6 Valentines, 6 Tetrarchs) and 455 Light Battery (4 × 3.7 howitzers and 2 × 25-pounders), was, as soon as it had secured the beaches, to advance and capture Antsirane, about 21 miles by road to the East. Simultaneously with this landing, 5 Commando (which was under command 29 Independent Brigade) and one company 2 East Lancashire Regiment from 29 Independent Brigade, were to land in Courier Bay at beaches named Red; South, Central and North: silence two coast defence batteries reported in that area, and then advance East to secure the Andrakaka Peninsula. This peninsula projects into the main harbour of Diego Suarez but is separated from the town of Antsirane by a strip of water about 1,200 yards across. Zero was at 0430 hours 5 May when the leading troops were to reach the beach, 17 Infantry Brigade Group, followed if necessary on D2 by 13 Infantry Brigade Group, was to land, as soon as landing craft had completed 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando, on the best of Green, White or Blue beaches, and come into action as necessary to complete the capture of Antsirane and the Orangea Peninsula. On the latter stood coast defence batteries covering the narrow entrance to the harbour.

*The Approach of the Convoy and the Despatch of Landing Craft.*

15. The convoy approached Courier and Ambararata Bays from the West. The leading assault ship, *M.V. Winchester Castle* anchored outside the range of the coast defence guns in case these were not silenced by daylight. Assault Landing Craft and Motor Landing Craft were lowered from the *Winchester Castle* the *Keren* and *Karanja*, and Motor Landing Craft from the motor transport ships. The assault flotillas left for Red, Green and White beaches at 0230, 0227 and 0319 hours respectively, being led in for some of the way by corvettes and mine-sweepers; and, in the case of Green and White beaches where the low lying ground offered no good landmarks in the moonlight, using Lorenz beam apparatus.

The approach of the transports and the mine-sweeping, escorting, and covering warships was a difficult and dangerous operation. It was subsequently discovered that, in the defence appreciation, approach from this direction by night was discounted. There is no doubt that the success of the whole operation and the comparatively low casualties sustained by the Army, were largely due to the acceptance of this risk by the Naval Commanders concerned, and by the skill and seamanship displayed by the Royal Navy and Merchant Navy in executing this part of the plan.

*The Landing at Courier Bay and the Action of 5 Commando*

16. 5 Commando with B Company and two carriers of 2 East Lancashire Regiment landed at the Red beaches at 0435 hours unopposed. Commando HQ and three troops, landing at Red North beach, captured No. 7 Coast Defence battery, consisting of four modern 6.1 in. guns, at 0500 hours. The garrison was surprised and offered no resistance. The remaining two troops landed unopposed at Red South beach, but were unable to find the reported No. 8 Battery, which in fact did not exist. The two Commando columns, less one troop left at No. 7 Battery, then advanced inland; meeting at the Col du Courier at 0945 hours. By 1130 hours the Commando, which now included B Company 2 East Lancashire Regiment commenced its advance over the Andrakaka Peninsula, and at 1430 hours it had reached the village of Diego Suarez on the Eastern-most end of the peninsula. They met slight opposition on the initial advance but rapidly dispersed it. Attempts were made without success to find boats to cross to Antsirane.

In the Red beach area, a machine gun and some snipers came to life at daylight. The troop holding No. 7 Battery spent a large part of the day stalking these enemy parties, but in the difficult and precipitous country, they continued to give trouble until D2, when they were finally mopped up by B Company 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers which had taken over the Red beach area.

*The Main Landings—29 Independent Brigade.*

17. 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers at Green Beach and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers at White beach were landed punctually and accurately and met no opposition. Green beach was found unsuitable for vehicles and White difficult even for tracked vehicles. Blue beach was now approached from the rear by C Company 2

Royal Welsh Fusiliers which had landed at White beach. Although an infantry post had been reported on this beach, in the half light it appeared to be unoccupied. A and C Companies 2 East Lancashire Regiment were therefore signalled in, using the landing craft which had returned to the *Royal Ulsterman* from the Red beaches. On the approach of these landing craft, a machine gun post manned by Senegalese opened fire but caused no casualties, but when fired on from the rear and from the landing craft, withdrew and left the beach unguarded. Thus by 0630 hours all beaches were in our hands. Meanwhile at 0615 hours Brigadier Festing had issued the order for the assault floating reserve, 2 South Lancashire Regiment less B Company in unarmoured landing craft, to land at White beach.

*Air Action and the Diversion by H.M.S. Hermone.*

18. At first light, about 0530 hours, aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm bombed the enemy aerodrome about six miles South of Antsirane, and the shipping in the harbour. This was most successful and appears to have deprived the enemy of any means of air reconnaissance or support, except for a few isolated machine gun attacks by aircraft from the South, which were promptly dealt with by the Fleet Air Arm.

At 0440 hours *H.M.S. Hermone* opened fire with star shells and made smoke in the vicinity of Ambodivahibe Bay, the most probable landing place on the East coast South-East of Antsirane. At first light, Fleet Air Arm aircraft dropped parachutes with dummies in the inaccessible country about Mahagaga, which was on the route from Ambodivahibe Bay. It was subsequently learned that this diversion combined with the lack of air reconnaissance, caused the enemy to despatch troops to Mahagaga some time before other troops were despatched towards Ambararata. It did however awaken the French and it is difficult to assess the real value of this diversion.

*The Advance of 29 Independent Brigade.*

19. 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers followed by 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers now commenced the advance to Antsirane, at first with marching infantry and a few cyclists and motor cyclists only. The carriers overtook the leading elements of the 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers about 0730 hours at Mangoky, five miles East of the beaches. They had not yet met the enemy but about 0815 hours a French naval officer and three ratings were captured a short distance East of the Anshapano River. In accordance with instructions, the officer was given a letter demanding the surrender of the base, and sent back to Antsirane in his own car.

About 1100 hours the leading carriers came under fire from the high ground about one mile East of Anamakia. The enemy were holding a well-defined spur which commands the flat area between it and the Anamakia Woods and which the road crosses by a rocky and tortuous col, known as the Col De Bonne Nouvelle. By 1115 hours there were in the Anamakia area, about 15 miles from the beaches, two companies 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, two 3.7 howitzers of 455 Light Battery, as well as carriers and motor cycles. The Brigadier, who had also reached Anamakia, ordered the infantry to attack supported by the guns. While they were deploying, two Valentines and one Tetrarch, the

first tanks to land, arrived and were ordered forward to assist the carriers and motor cyclists. The tanks moved up the road and engaged and silenced the enemy machine gun and rifle positions on the col.

All fire from the position appeared to be silenced, but the extremely rocky ground prevented the tanks from leaving the road and getting right into the position. They therefore went on down the road for another mile, where they were joined by two more Tetrarchs. They were now within three miles of the centre of Antsirane and continued their advance along the road and destroyed a lorry load of Senegalese infantry. Immediately afterwards they came under fire from 75 mm. guns firing down the road and from their right flank. At this point they were unable to leave the road, and four tanks were very quickly disabled. The squadron commander, Major J. E. S. Simon, Royal Tank Regiment, sent his last remaining tank back to Brigade to report, and then brought the survivors from the disabled tanks into dismounted action. They found it impossible to advance, but beat off several enemy attacks until, at 1545 hrs., when only three of the party were left unwounded, and even revolver ammunition was expended, they were taken prisoner. The fifth tank met and destroyed another lorry load of infantry on its way back.

Meanwhile at the Col de Bonne Nouvelle, after the tanks had gone, the enemy defences came to life and held up our infantry. At 1415 hrs. seven more tanks under Captain P. L. Palmer, 10 Royal Hussars, arrived in the area, and the position was finally captured and mopped up by 1500 hrs. Thus, from about 1200 to 1500 hrs., there were two battles taking place on the road. The French were attacking our tank crews a few hundred yards in front of their main position, and at the same time, about 3,000 yards further back, our infantry were attacking the French outpost position.

It was subsequently learned that the Col de Bonne Nouvelle was the last of several prepared positions facing West which had not at first been manned. The French on hearing, from the officer sent back with the letter, that our main threat was along the Ambararata road, had hurried forward lorried infantry to occupy this position. Our attack was made before this occupation had been completed, and the action of our leading tanks prevented further reinforcements.

20. At 1515 hrs. the advance from Col de Bonne Nouvelle was resumed. Captain Palmer's tanks led and were followed by 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers. The tanks had been ordered to locate the enemy which had stopped Major Simon's tanks. Captain Palmer ordered his tanks to swing off the road to the right and to move through the scrub and mealie plantation to a hull-down position. He then deliberately moved his own tank into the open to draw fire. It was hit and Captain Palmer was killed assisting his wounded driver to cover. The remaining tanks resumed the advance, but came under heavy 75 mm. fire and withdrew at 1800 hrs. in the failing light.

The carriers of 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers followed by the companies of 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers were advancing

along both sides of the road, and came under fire from the main position about 1700 hrs. On the right they got within a few yards of the enemy anti-tank ditch, some two hundred yards in front of the enemy trenches. As dark fell at 1830 hrs., 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers was in contact with the enemy on a wide front and under heavy fire. This battalion continued energetic patrolling during the night, while the remaining battalions of 29 Independent Brigade under orders of Brigade HQ, moved into perimeter areas, with Brigade HQ established for the night at Conlieux (Robinson's Hotel).

The situation report (see also para. 24) brought back to me by my G.S.O.1 Lieutenant-Colonel J. L. Moulton, R.M., and my own contacts revealed the following:—

29 Independent Brigade had now advanced 18 miles in tropical heat and in wet clothes along a bad and extremely dusty road. The troops had been actively employed since 0130 hrs. when they had manned the landing craft. Transport was still very short, marching infantry had carried all their weapons and pulled handcarts with their ammunition and stores. Some of the later sub-units to land were still marching up the road and continued to do so all night. All along the road the bush and long grass was burning and for the last few miles there was some inaccurate sniping.

The troops though tired, had their tails well up. 29 Independent Brigade was in contact with the main enemy facing North across the isthmus leading to Antsirane and the brigade commander intended to issue orders for a dawn attack on 6th May, D2, on a three battalion front. Lack of intelligence of enemy positions, combined with the successful advance to date, led us all to expect a good scrap, which would end when we ate our breakfasts in Antsirane on 6th May. The limited transport of 29 Independent Brigade; "R" Group 17 Infantry Brigade and two companies 2 Northhamptons minus any transport were on the way; and the air was ours. The field ambulance was moving up and two motor ambulances were ashore.

In confident expectation of success, my main worry was what would happen should the enemy battalion at Joffreville come down on our flank, or across our lines of communication? Neither of these events happened as expected. On 6th May, at 0700 hrs., we were further away from Antsirane than the areas reached by our leading elements overnight; and later the battalion from Joffreville was surprised and captured almost intact, as it marched from the South into the rear of our battalion areas.

#### PROGRESS OF THE LANDING ON 5TH MAY—DI. *Completion of 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando.*

21. After detaching a flotilla of nine Assault Landing Craft and two Motor Landing Craft for the very important landing at Red beaches, the available landing craft were only sufficient to land in the first trip about 580 men of 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers, 512 of 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers and a total of 14 carriers on the brigade front on Green and White beaches respectively. To these were added minimum beach parties, beach signals, engineers, and medical detachments. A further 278 men of 2 East Lancashire Regiment had landed on the second trip of

landing craft from Red beach, having been brought close to Blue beach in *H.M.S. Royal Ulsterman*. 2 South Lancashire Regiment was in floating service in *M.V. Sobieski*, and about 500 men with no vehicles could be landed from her by using all available R boats (fast naval motor boats carrying about 18 men) and other unarmoured landing craft, which were not used in the initial assault. Any men or vehicles above these numbers had to come in the second and later trips of landing craft, which had to return the eight or ten miles to the anchorage to reload. It had been hoped that the assault ships could close the beaches as soon as the Courier Bay batteries were in our hands. Unfortunately the large number of enemy mines between the convoy anchorage and the beaches prevented this starting until 0750 hours, although the success signal was received from 5 Commando at 0615 hours. The remaining mines, however, still kept these ships several miles from Blue beach, which by this time was the only practicable beach. During the morning a strong wind rose blowing from N.E., raising a heavy chop, which slowed up the flat bowed landing craft and drenched the occupants with heavy spray. The combination of these circumstances seriously delayed the progress of the landing. It had been hoped to complete the landing of 29 Independent Brigade personnel by about 0900 hrs.; in the event this was not achieved until about 1100 hrs.; similarly their vehicles were not complete until about midnight, instead of 1800 hrs. as had been hoped.

#### *H.M.S. Bachaquero.*

22. Difficulty and delay experienced in finding a suitable beach for *Bachaquero* was a severe set back to the progress of landing vehicles. She had been loaded with 19 Field Battery of 9 Field Regiment (17 Infantry Brigade Group) on a reduced scale of transport and with carriers and load carrying vehicles, a total of 54 vehicles and guns. It was hoped to beach her sometime about 0900 hrs. in the vicinity of Blue beach, or at least on some beach whence exit could be made to the main axis of advance. Unfortunately a reef off Blue beach prevented her approach; her movements were seriously hampered by the numerous mines; and a suitable beach for her could not be found in the Ambararata Bay area. She was therefore ordered, in the afternoon, to beach in Courier Bay.

She made several attempts and in one of them two quads and two guns were man-handled ashore and up a most difficult beach by men of the 19 Field Battery working up to their necks in the water. Finally just before dark, she was brought in on the rising tide at full speed and reached a depth of water in which she could discharge her vehicles rapidly. This was not the end of the disappointments. In spite of vigorous reconnaissance, no practical route could be found from the Courier Bay area to the main axis of advance. The battery was therefore ordered into action on the Andrakaka Peninsula, but carriers of 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers and some of the 15 cwt. eventually during D2 found a way through and rejoined their units on the main axis.

#### *Disembarkation of 17 Infantry Brigade.*

23. The personnel of 17 Infantry Brigade Group in *S.S. Oronsay* and *Duchess of Atholl* arrived in the anchorage shortly before 1100 hours and, as the situation then seemed to be going remarkably well, were ordered to land in accordance with the pre-arranged provisional landing table. This commenced at 1115 hours although vehicles did not start until midnight. 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers, the first battalion to land, took over the beach area, and also found one detached company for the Red beach area, thus freeing the last of the 29 Independent Brigade and 5 Commando from the beaches. This battalion was followed by working parties for the beach areas provided from the first reinforcements of 17 Infantry Brigade.

It was agreed with S.N.O.L. that landing should stop between dark and moonlight (1800 hours to 2230 hours), to prevent damage to landing craft and to rest their crews and the docks operating company. The landing of the remainder of 17 Infantry Brigade then continued and companies commenced the march forward as they got ashore and formed up.

#### *Landing and Assumption of Control by Force Commander.*

24. I had embarked in *H.M.S. Ramillies* for the passage to Diego Suarez, expecting to be sent by destroyer to *H.M.S. Keren*, in which ship were S.N.O.L. and the majority of my H.Q., by about 0900 hours on D1, when it was expected that the first troops of 17 Infantry Brigade would land. In view of the delay in disembarkation, I decided to remain with the Combined Commander until 1230 hours. Unfortunately, by this time, the sea had risen and made transfer to a destroyer impossible until a lee had been found. The result was that I did not arrive in the *Keren* until 1530 hours. Rear Admiral Syfret was always prepared to put me ashore at any time, and the lateness of my arrival in the *Keren* was entirely my own fault. I failed to appreciate the time lag required for:—

(a) Movement of the *Ramillies* to calm water.

(b) Transfer to a destroyer in a sea boat.

(c) The destroyer trip to the *Keren*.

Once there I examined available information; landed, reaching Blue beach 1700 hours; and started in a carrier for H.Q. 29 Independent Brigade. The carrier however broke down and, although I later boarded another vehicle, with the A.D.M.S., I failed to reach 29 Independent Brigade H.Q. in the dark. The G.S.O.I., however, got through on a motor cycle and returned with a first class situation report. On receipt of this I returned to the Beach Signal Station. There I met Brigadier Tarleton and instructed him to get his brigade as it landed, forward along the road so that he would be able to assist 29 Independent Brigade as early as possible on D2. I finally returned to the *Keren* where I was able to get good signal communication to the *Ramillies* and the aircraft carriers and hoped to get some communication to 29 Independent Brigade. I arranged to land at first light on D2. At this time and indeed throughout the operation, we were suffering for the heavy cuts which had been made in H.Q. and signals to increase the number of fighting troops and vehicles.



ATTACK ON THE MAIN ENEMY POSITION—  
MORNING OF 6TH MAY—D2

25. The main enemy position faced South across the narrowest portion of the isthmus of Antsirane and is based on two old but solid and well-concealed forts: Fort Caimans on the West, and Fort Bellevue on the East. These are joined by a continuous line of trenches about 2,000 yards long which cover the flat top of the isthmus. On each flank there are steep scrub covered slopes down to mangrove swamps which border the sea. Three roads run through the isthmus. The most Westerly one leading to Ambararata, and the central one, leading to the South, run between the two forts and are covered by concrete pill boxes with 75 mm. guns where the roads cross the trench position. The third road leads around French Bay to Ankorika, and passes through the broken ground to the East of Bellevue fort. Although it avoids the main line, it is covered by a few detached defence works. In front of the trench line runs an uncompleted anti-tank ditch. The trench line is well sited and is covered from direct observation at distances greater than about 300 yards by minor irregular features. However, the pill boxes have sufficient height to enable them to fire down the roads for some 1,000 yards; and the command given by the forts enables one 75 mm. sited on top of each fort with 360 degrees traverse to cover by direct fire the area in front of the line to about the same range. The isthmus is flat with slight undulations. It is fairly open although there are a number of spaced out bushes and trees, and a considerable amount of thin scrub and maize plantations. About 1,200 yards behind the defence line is the native village, through which all the roads lead, and beyond that, 2,000 yards from the defence line, are the outskirts of Antsirane.

26. Brigadier Festing met his battalion commanders at Brigade HQ. at 2300 hours. He issued orders for an attack on the enemy defence line by three battalions. On the right 2 South Lancashire Regiment were to move out at 0200 hours through the mangroves and broken country along the shore to get behind the enemy line, 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers in the centre and 2 East Lancashire Regiment on the left were to attack frontally at 0530 hours. 455 Light Battery was to support this attack with the six guns which were now available; and the Fleet Air Arm were asked to bomb and machine gun the enemy defences between 0500 hours and 0530 hours, almost an impossible task in the bad light.

2 South Lancashire Regiment moved off in an Easterly direction at 0200 hours. On reaching the Eastern edge of the isthmus, they advanced North through the broken ground and mangroves. Progress was extremely slow and difficult, but aided by the darkness, and later by the defilade given by the edge of the isthmus, two companies and Battalion HQ. penetrated the enemy line, killed or captured detachments watching this flank, and occupied Anobozaka Barracks which is on this side of the isthmus about 1,200 yards behind (North) of Bellevue fort. Thence they attacked Westwards harassing or capturing enemy artillery, machine gun and mortar positions, capturing or stampeding the pack horses and mules of the enemy artillery and occupying positions, whence they could

ambush and fire on vehicles moving up to the front line on all roads. They took many prisoners and eventually got detachments into position about 200 yards behind the enemy trenches. Only man-pack wireless sets could accompany the assaulting infantry and these, after a long night cross-country march over very difficult ground were ineffective, and Liaison Officers from Brigade were unable to get further forward than the two rear companies of the Battalion which were held up short of Fort Bellevue. Similarly messengers and parties escorting prisoners to the rear from advanced Battalion HQ. and the leading company found themselves unable to get back. Brigade HQ. therefore did not know of this success in time to exploit it and in fact thought that the leading half of this battalion had become casualties or prisoners. The action of this battalion, however, resulted in heavy casualties to the enemy and in the capture of nearly four hundred prisoners, the majority of whom were eventually got back to our lines. In addition to this, the effect of this penetration on the morale of the enemy command and troops was later found to have been great. It was not until 1400 hours that Brigadier Festing learned of the true position on this flank from Lieutenant-Colonel M. M. Alston-Roberts-West commanding 2 South Lancashire Regiment, who, with a small escort, had at last been able to make his way back through the enemy lines. In the course of this affair Lieutenant-Colonel West got over 35 enemy to his own gun.

Meanwhile the frontal attack by 1 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 East Lancashire Regiment had been held up after casualties in men and carriers. The leading troops of these battalions got very close to the enemy trenches and continued in action there for the rest of the day, although cut off by fire from their company and battalion commanders, and they were assumed to be casualties.

Shortly after daylight, the enemy opened fire with 75s and mortars on all troops in the exposed plateau area. Casualties began to mount up and 455 Light Battery was forced to withdraw from its position by shell and mortar fire. About this time there was a slight withdrawal of our leading troops to avoid continuation of casualties.

27. I arrived at Brigade HQ about 0700 hrs. It was quite clear that the attack had failed. It was an unhappy moment. The whole of 29 Independent Brigade was deployed or being deployed, and with the disappearance of many of the leading troops in the dawn attack, assumed to be casualties, units were considerably under strength. A good deal of most irritating enemy sniping and unaimed rifle fire was going on. To this was added shelling from 75s which was a good deal more terrifying than effective. The shelling set fire to the bush, which caused further embarrassment, but the troops, under the personal leadership of the Brigadier and the unit commanders, re-occupied their original positions after the fire had passed. These fierce and rapidly spreading bush fires caused no serious casualties, but resulted in considerable confusion and loss of equipment. Very little artillery had as yet come into action owing to trouble with *Bachaquero*; and what there was in action, had great difficulty in

obtaining observation. There were only five serviceable tanks left, the majority of which were Tetrarchs.

With over 18 mules to the beaches by a sandy track, with indifferent bridges, and few passing places, it was most desirable that the force should be in Antsirane by D3. The personnel of 17 Infantry Brigade had completed landing but were still marching up the road. Provided they could stick the heat, dust, and sniping, the majority of the infantry, say two and a half battalions, could reach the forward area about 1800 hours, while the landing of 13 Infantry Brigade Group had just commenced at daybreak. Adequate tank and artillery support were not available for a daylight attack. The enemy position was about 1200 yards away and reconnaissance of the intervening ground was very difficult owing to the bush, the lie of the ground, and the enemy sniping. However it was fairly well confirmed that there was no wire.

I therefore decided that a silent night advance and assault by 17 Infantry Brigade assisted as necessary by 29 Independent Brigade, should be made during the period of darkness between sunset and the rising of the almost full moon at 2300 hours. I ordered Zero for 2000 hrs. (it had later to be postponed to 2030 hrs.) and arranged for the maximum harassing fire from artillery and the air during the remainder of the day. I issued orders for the attack to Brigadiers Tarleton and Festing and then left to see the Combined Commander. I wished to try to arrange for a destroyer to force the entrance of the harbour and land a party of Royal Marines in the dock area, thus making a direct assault on the town from the rear. This, even if the destroyer was lost, would draw the enemy's fire, create a diversion, and give the main night attack the best possible chance of success. In addition an officer was sent to No. 5 Commando asking them to collect any small boats available at Diego Suarez North and co-operate in this assault. (This was found to be impossible.) As the *Ramillies* was then anchored with the convoy to refuel, I had to leave at once to catch her and the detailed planning was continued by the two Brigadiers.

28. During the day, 19 Field Battery from the *Bachaquero* came into action on the Andrakaka Peninsula and shelled the enemy position from the rear; it was however handicapped by difficulty in knowing where our troops were in the open scrub on the plateau. This Battery had previously been fired upon by a French Sloop, *D'Entrecasteaux*, and had returned the fire until, with the assistance of the Royal Navy and the Fleet Air Arm, who also claim her, she caught fire and sank. 28/76 Field Battery (9 Field Regiment, 17 Infantry Brigade Group) was landed from the *Mahout* on Blue beach and came into action in the forward area at 1400 hrs. giving harassing fire until dark. During the remaining daylight hours of D2, enemy shelling and sniping continued, but air attacks, which were made at frequent intervals by fighter aircraft going off patrol, and our increasing artillery strength gradually diminished enemy activity.

Meanwhile 29 Independent Brigade reorganised and cleared their area which had become infested with snipers. However, owing

to the large number of men still isolated close to the enemy positions, their companies remained very weak. 17 Infantry Brigade was moving up the main axis to the forward area. 2 Northhamptons which had been ordered overnight to secure the rear of 29 Independent Brigade from an attack along the road from the South, and had captured about 200 prisoners coming in from this direction, was also moved across for the night attack. Late in the afternoon 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers, who had been released from beach defence on the arrival of the leading battalion of 13 Infantry Brigade, and 6 Seaforths who were the last battalion to land, arrived in the area after their 18 mile march. Carriers including signals had been used to lift some of them, but in these battalions few men could have had more than an hour for rest and reorganisation before moving for the start line.

#### NIGHT ATTACK BY 17 INFANTRY BRIGADE 6 May—D2

29. It became dark at 1800 hours and the moon rose at 2310 hrs. Owing to the late arrival of many of the troops in the area and owing to the difficulties in observation, very little effective reconnaissance had been possible. 17 Infantry Brigade formed up on a start line formed by a track just over the crest and about 1,200-1,400 yards from the enemy trenches. 2 Northhamptons were on the right of the Westernmost road and 6 Seaforths on the left with one company 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers under their command, as they were still under strength.

In order to coincide with the destroyer's attack, I had had to postpone Zero until 2030 hrs., this information only reached the forward area at about 1900 hrs., but was passed down to the troops in time. At Zero, the two leading battalions went forward astride the road on a front of about 600 yards passing between the two forts. This was a sheer piece of good luck. The positions of the forts were not known, although they were built when Marshal Joffre was Governor of Diego Suarez in 1910. The leading infantry in the dark by-passed the strong points within 200 yards without being aware of their existence. There was a considerable amount of firing but the advance continued steadily although casualties occurred in the trench system and at the pill boxes. These battalions reached their objectives, which were the far side of the Native village 3,000 yards from their start line and about 1,800 yards beyond the main enemy position, at 2300 hrs. and fired their success signals. Brigadier Tarleton then ordered forward his reserve battalions; 2 Royal Scots Fusiliers and 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the latter having been placed under his command for the attack. These two battalions pushed right through to the main town of Antsirane with little or no opposition and reached the main harbour. Brigadier Festing now pushed forward 29 Independent Brigade and the remaining tanks to assist in mopping up the town. He entered the Residency at 0100 hrs. and assisted by Brigadier M. S. Lush, Chief Political Officer, at once commenced to take over the town.

*Assault by H.M.S. Anthony and R.M. Detachment from H.M.S. Ramillies.*

30. Rear Admiral Syfret had agreed to the direct assault by a destroyer with 50 Royal Marines from the *Ramillies*.

Orders reached this detachment at about 1430 hrs. and three-quarters of an hour later they embarked in *H.M.S. Anthony* which then proceeded at high speed around the Cap D'Embree to reach the entrance to the harbour in time for Zero. Sometime about 2000 hrs. *H.M.S. Anthony* came under fire from the batteries guarding the entrance of the harbour which she returned with all weapons. By Zero she was alongside the quay and the Royal Marines disembarked under fire from the town, and dockyard. Good luck also attended this venture. Expecting to meet the Commandos, she mistook a blue flashing light for their recognition signal, but saw the error just in time and went alongside stern first. A French 75 mm. manned by a Capitaine Clavel failed to register a hit, a fact that this officer still disbelieves. The dockyard was still burning and it was difficult to do much more to create a diversion there. The detachment therefore advanced into the town, occupied the Artillery HQ and started some fires in the area. Leaving a guard at Artillery HQ, it continued to advance and arrived at the Naval barracks where it was fired upon. After some grenades had been thrown, a large number of prisoners headed by the Commandant of the barracks surrendered and British prisoners found in these barracks were released. The detachment was now fully occupied dealing with the very numerous prisoners until contact was made with the British troops, 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who had entered the town from the South.

This attack added greatly to the ease with which the final occupation was carried out and assisted in the avoidance of street fighting, in which casualties might have piled up and the town been severely damaged.

## COMPLETION OF THE OPERATION—7TH MAY—D3

31. I entered Antsirane shortly after daylight and took over from Brigadier Festing. All resistance had ceased in the town, but the two forts were still holding out and firing at traffic on the roads between them. My next urgent problem was to capture the Orangea or Ankorika Peninsula, which was still preventing the Navy from entering the harbour. I had originally intended that 29 Independent Brigade should continue with this task when 17 Infantry Brigade had captured the town. As, however, 29 Independent Brigade were fully occupied in the town, I decided that the 17 Infantry Brigade Group should do it. I therefore sent orders to Brigade HQ., which was now just South of the native village, to commence the advance to Orangea as soon as possible, and placed the remaining tanks under its command. Brigadier Tarleton reported that the head of his column could pass Bellevue fort at 1200 hours. I therefore arranged for a preliminary Naval and Air bombardment of enemy positions on the peninsula to take place between 1000 and 1200 hours; and for Naval supporting fire to be controlled by Forward Observation Officers for the advance of the brigade into the peninsula. This advance was also to be assisted by all available air support.

Meanwhile Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Stockwell commanding 2 Royal Welsh Fusiliers, and Lieutenant-Colonel B. H. Hanaut, had made contact with French officers, who conducted them to the garrison commanders in the Orangea peninsula, with a view to negotiating a surrender. As soon as I heard of this, I asked for the bombardment to be countermanded, but a few rounds were fired before the message got through. It was a tense moment. The Royal Navy and the Fleet Air Arm were straining at the leash to give all they had got to Orangea peninsula, and with the opening of the bombardment by the *Ramillies* I fully expected everybody on both sides to join in.

Fortunately the cease fire signal got through quickly and negotiations continued. At the same time negotiations for the surrender of Caimans fort were opened by the French with the troops in contact with it.

From marked maps which were now in my hands, I was able to see that the French had prepared positions facing South and protecting the Orangea peninsula from land attack. Before reaching these, 17 Infantry Brigade Group, had first to capture Fort Bellevue, and then to overcome an enemy post at Anbatolamba, where the road around French Bay passes through a very narrow bottleneck. The total distance to be marched to Orangea Point was about 12 miles by a very bad road. I was most anxious to arrange a surrender of the garrison of this peninsula, as I foresaw that an operation to capture it might last for several days (and probably entail at least 300 casualties) especially in view of the limited support which was available and the difficulties of supply with limited transport from the now distant Blue beach.

In order to avoid recurrence of fighting while negotiations were in progress, I ordered 17 Infantry Brigade not to advance past fort Bellevue. 13 Infantry Brigade however was moved up from Blue beach, sending a detachment to take over the airport, and the remainder of the brigade concentrating East of Anamakia. By about 1400 hours the surrender of Bellevue and Ambatolambo had been arranged; 17 Infantry Brigade therefore advanced to a position about 2 miles South of the enemy defences in the Orangea Peninsula. It paid honours of war to the garrison of Bellevue and Ambatolambo as they passed. By the evening, I had been able to make arrangements for the final advance to Orangea to take place at 0700 hours the next day, May 8th. *H.M.S. Ramillies* entered harbour just before dark and I went on board to discuss arrangements for final surrender. Arrangements were made for a meeting with the three senior French officers, Colonel Claerebout (Officer Commanding Defences, Diego Suarez), Capitaine de Vaisseau Maerten (Naval Officer in Charge, Madagascar), Capitaine de Vaisseau Simon (ex Commanding Officer of French sloop *D'Entrecasteaux*) all now prisoners of war, on board the flagship at 0915 hours 8th May. This was to be followed by a conference on shore about 1015 hours with certain other French officials.

It was not easy. Claerebout and Maerten had only surrendered in person, and the Garrison Commander with whom the armistice was arranged was Colonel Rouves. Therefore the terms that I had arranged with Colonel Rouves affected only the troops that were still fighting and not those who had already surrendered.

On 8th May I attended a meeting on board the flagship to hear the Combined Commander outline the conditions of surrender. A subsequent meeting took place at the Residency at 1100 hours presided over by:—

Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret, and attended by

Major-General R. G. Sturges, R.M. (Military Commander)

Brigadier F. W. Festing (Assault Commander)

Brigadier M. S. Lush (Chief Political Officer)

Captain J. M. Howson, R.N. (C.O.S. to Commander-in-Chief)

Colonel Melville (O.C., S.A.A.F.)

Colonel Claerebout (French Officer Commanding Defence Diego Suarez)

Capitaine de Vaisseau Maerten (N.O.I.C. Madagascar)

Colonel Rouves (Commanding Infantry Regiment)

M. Bourguine (Administrateur-Maire of Diego Suarez).

The final terms of surrender were arranged at this conference.

#### Consolidation

32. On the 8th May I issued orders for immediate consolidation. 17 Infantry Brigade Group were to hold the Orangea Peninsula; 13 Infantry Brigade Group to reconnoitre and man a position facing South on the high ground about 3 miles South of the airport; 29 Independent Brigade to hold the immediate defences of and control the town of Antsirane. Detached companies were left at Red and Blue beaches, and arrangements were made for anti-aircraft artillery personnel to take over important coast defence batteries with improvised detachments. On the same day I attended Rear-Admiral Syfret's conference with the French Commanders at which the final terms of surrender were arranged.

#### GENERAL

#### Casualties

33. Total casualties were:—

	Died of			
	Killed	Wounds	Wounded	Missing
Officers ...	13	2	22	—
Other Ranks	64	26	262	4
	77	28	284	4

34. In assessing this operation, it must first be observed that it was conducted against opposition whose air power was weak and who was completely lacking in armour for a counter-attack. The French white and Senegalese troops fought with determination and, although their armament and equipment were below first-class standards, they undoubtedly hoped to repeat the story of Dakar. When after 48 hours, it was clear that this was not to be, they remembered that the true cause of their country lay with the United Nations and did

not continue a struggle which had become senseless as well as hopeless. Making due allowance for these facts, there is much of interest in this, the first of many probable amphibious assaults which remained to be carried out during the war.

The forces employed, naval, military, and merchant navy, were largely composed of units which had trained together in Scotland for a considerable time. If this had not been so, it would have been quite impossible to embark operationally at such short notice and to operate with such an extremely low scale of motor transport. The employment of the 13th and 17th Infantry Brigades, which had been embarked non-operationally before the operation was mounted, was an interesting expedient, only made possible by the adaptability of the troops concerned, by embarkation at the last moment of a small cadre of officers trained and experienced in this type of work, and by the great assistance given at Durban by the South African Government in limited restowing of Transports.

The number of landing craft available was small, as it was limited to what could be carried in the ships of the assault brigade. The effect of this in limiting the initial assault, was not important under the circumstances of this operation, but its effect in slowing up further landing was a most serious factor, both in planning and in the event. The build-up in vehicles on the first day was slow, yet it was a great improvement on what had been achieved in previous exercises and represented a very fine achievement by all those concerned.

The assault brigade advanced inland without delay, as soon as it had secured the beaches. This was a departure from usual practice and was most effective. The sudden arrival of the 29th Independent Brigade at the neck of Antsirane Peninsula, seized the initiative from the French and effectively prevented any properly co-ordinated defence. At the same time, it gained us 18 miles of road, which, given a few more hours delay, could and would have been stubbornly and effectively defended.

Finally, the use of a difficult, and therefore unexpected, line of approach, although in itself a risk, gained a degree of surprise which was largely responsible for the success of the operation. The ready acceptance of the approach by the Royal Navy and their skill in overcoming its difficulties and dangers, won the admiration and gratitude of all those responsible for the military part of the operation.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) R. G. STURGES,

Major-General,  
Commanding 121 Force.

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