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C.O.S.(44)200(O)

25TH FEBRUARY, 1944

WAR CABINET

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

PROVISION OF NAVAL FIRE SUPPORT FOR "OVERLORD"

Memorandum by First Sea Lord

With reference to C.O.S.(44) 54th Meeting (O), Item 7, I circulate for the information of the Chiefs of Staff a copy of a memorandum which I have addressed to the Prime Minister in reply to his minute M.155/4 of 20th February, 1944.

*Annex II
*Annex I



Offices of the War Cabinet,
S.W.1.
25th February, 1944.

ANNEX I

COPY OF A MINUTE (SERIAL NO. M.155/4) DATED 20TH FEBRUARY, 1944, FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE FIRST SEA LORD

1. As you will remember, I have several times stressed in my Minutes to the Chiefs of Staff the great importance of a bombarding squadron or fleet in Operation OVERLORD. Once the Air shield has been established, the power of the warships is liberated. High velocity guns are particularly suited for the smashing of concrete pillboxes. You have told me of the arrangements that you are making, and I consider they should be pressed to the fullest possible extreme.

2. I had a talk yesterday with Admiral Cooke who showed me photographs of the Kwajalein attack in the Marshalls. He also stressed the great value of short-range bombardment at, say, 2000 yards. The beaches in our case will not be convenient for that, I presume. Nevertheless the greater the power that can be brought to bear, the better. Here is the time to use the RAMILLIES Class and, as I have said, men can be taken off other ships in order to work up a bombardment for the actual event of the landing, after which they can return to their duties.

3. I propose to have a Defence Committee Meeting on Monday week, the 28th February, to discuss this aspect of "OVERLORD". Meanwhile I shall be glad to have a paper from you.

(Intlld.) W.S.C.

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ANNEX II

Copy of a Memorandum dated 24th February, 1944, to the Prime Minister from the First Sea Lord

The attached paper deals with the considerations which affect the provision of naval fire support for "OVERLORD". It is submitted in accordance with paragraph 3 of your minute M.155/4 of 20th February as a basis for discussion at your Defence Committee meeting on Monday.

2. With reference to paragraph 2 of your minute, I am entirely in favour of as much short range bombardment as possible. It is not, however, practicable to operate battleships and cruisers close to the "OVERLORD" beaches. The water is shallow (the ten-fathom line is, on an average, three miles from high water mark) and is suitable for minefields. The lack of searoom inshore also precludes the use of anything but small ships. The guns of battleships are unnecessarily large for the work and their rate of fire is slow. Though a 15" shell is nearly twenty times the weight of a 6" shell it is only four times as effective against personnel.

3. In the present plan for "OVERLORD" the swept channels are taken only to within seven or eight miles of the coast. Minesweepers will be detailed to meet bombarding ships at the end of these channels and sweep ahead of them while they bombard. No special fighter aircraft arrangements have been made for the protection of battleships within the general fighter umbrella.

4. With regard to the Marshalls, the islands are surrounded by deep water. The menace of mines was therefore practically non-existent and the islands can be bombarded from many directions. Compared with "OVERLORD" the ships clearly had very much more searoom and could approach as close inshore as they wished.

5. In the absence of a heavy bomber force, the volume of H.E. required had to be supplied almost entirely by ships' gunfire. Though, weight for weight, heavy shells are better than bombs against solid defences, bombs are very much better than the same weight of shells for shock effect against personnel. A combination of both is ideal and, had a heavy bomber force been available in the Marshalls, ship bombardment would probably not have been required on so great a scale.

6. The decision on the number and type of large ships to use in "OVERLORD" will depend, to a large extent, on the spotting aircraft and number of wavelengths available, the amount of searoom and the risks to which the ships will be exposed. It will undoubtedly be possible to commission old battleships for the job if their use is considered practicable and feasible when balanced against other requirements. It would take about eight weeks eight weeks to commission and prepare a battleship from reserve, using the crew of another ship. When in reserve, fire control equipment and turret machinery are in a state of preservation and it takes some time to rectify defects and get everything working properly. In addition to this a ship's company require training in bombarding and all other duties such as A.A. defence and damage control.

(Intlld.) A.B.C.

Enclosure

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ENCLOSURE

PROVISION OF NAVAL FIRE SUPPORT FOR "OVERLORD"

Memorandum by the First Sea Lord

The necessary fire support for "OVERLORD" can best be provided by a combination of aerial bombing and naval bombardment. The actual tasks to be performed fall into three categories:-

A. Neutralising fire against Coast Defence Batteries which could engage the assault forces. This is required until the batteries have been rendered unserviceable or captured.

B. "Drenching" fire on the beaches and probable or known defended areas immediately inland, up to the moment of touch down, and close support fire thereafter.

C. Bombardment of targets in the "back areas" to break up or prevent concentration of enemy troops against the beach head both during and after the assault. Under this heading also comes the artillery support of any airborne troops which may be landed.

Task A. Counter Battery fire

2. Experience shows that Naval bombardment provides the best means of neutralising coast defence batteries. The neutralisation of a normal coast defence battery is best effected by one 5.25" or 6" cruiser. A heavily protected battery however will not be effectively neutralised unless it receives a direct hit from a 15" shell, and it is estimated that, in perfect conditions, at a range of 9 miles or more, about 600 15" shells will have to be fired to ensure a hit. It is believed there are 4 or possibly 5 such batteries and each battery will have to be dealt with by a battleship or a monitor.

3. In addition to neutralising established batteries, bombarding ships will have to deal with field batteries which may be moved into the area.

4. Direct fire is not likely to be practicable. Since indirect fire is ineffective without air or ground spotting, the number of ships we can usefully employ for bombarding until F.O.Os. can be landed is limited by the number of spotting aircraft and spotting wavelengths available.

5. The force at present allocated to carry out this task is shown in the Appendix.

Task B. "Drenching" and close support fire.

6. Experience shows that the above task is best met by a combination of naval and air power.

7. It is essential that ships and craft carrying out this task should work close inshore. Here, shallow water, probable minefields and lack of searoom limit the size and, to a large extent, the number of ships used. Four destroyers have been made available to operate on each Brigade front as

deal with strong points, and, with the additional support craft allocated they should be able to put down 260 tons of H.E. on each Brigade beachhead (3,000 yards) within the hour prior to touch down. Owing to the limitation on the numbers of ships that can work close inshore, the remaining very considerable drenching requirements can only be provided by aircraft bombing. Air power is thought particularly suitable for this type of task.

8. The most critical moment of the initial assault is likely to be the gap which occurs between the cessation of the "Drenching" bombardment and the time the Army's own close support weapons come into action. This gap must be filled by close support landing craft and self-propelled artillery.

Task C. Engagement of back areas during and after the assault.

9. This is a military requirement which can probably best be met by naval fire. The rapid engagement of snap targets is certainly more easily carried out by a ship than from the air. Only cruisers and above have the necessary equipment to carry out this task.

10. On completion of their counter battery bombardment, the ships allocated to Task A will be available to engage back area for as long as their ammunition lasts. It is however clear that counter battery bombardment is unlikely to be completed before the assault commences. This and the need for bombarding ships to return to England to replenish ammunition will affect the number of ships available for Task C.

Conclusion

11. (a) The number of ships used for bombardment will depend upon the number of coastal defence batteries to be engaged and the spotting aircraft and wavelengths available. In the light of these factors the number of cruisers and battleships allocated for this task is considered satisfactory.

(b) The Admiralty are providing the maximum number of ships for "drenching" and close fire support that it is considered practicable to operate close inshore. These ships are likely to meet requirements for close fire support but can only provide about one third of the "drenching" fire required; the remaining two thirds must be provided by aircraft.

(c) Whether or not the ships allocated for bombardment will be able to meet the requirements for engaging back areas will depend on the extent to which these two tasks overlap. The number of ships allotted must allow for replenishment with ammunition.

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APPENDIX

Naval Forces at present allocated for bombardment are as follows:-

| | | No. and type of guns |
|---|---|---|
| Battleships | RODNEY | 9 - 16" |
| | WARSPITE (2 turrets manned) | 4 - 15" |
| | RAMILLIES (2 turrets manned) | 4 - 15" |
| Monitors | EREBUS | 2 - 15" |
| | ROBERTS | 2 - 15" |