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Forging the anvil of victory : the British combined operations command at the start of the second world war (1940-42)

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Forging the Anvil of Victory:
The British Directorate of Combined Operations at the Start of the Second World War (1940-1942)

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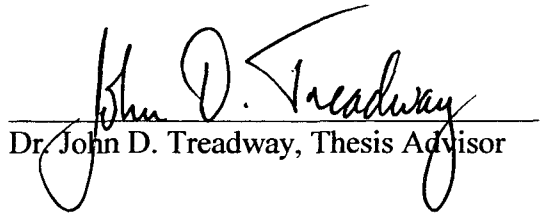
John D. Treadway, Thesis Director

The story of British combined operations is one too often overlooked in the study of World War II. For the Allies, success, perhaps survival, could only be achieved by developing and perfecting the techniques and equipment required for amphibious landings. In British parlance, the marrying of the ground, naval, and air components of such a landing was called combined operations. The organization built to accomplish this task was the Directorate for Combined Operations (DCO). Created in a time of great desperation (July 1940), the DCO represented the first and only ground offensive tool in the British arsenal, employing the legendary Commandos as their striking arm. Drawing on many of the wartime papers of the command, as well as numerous secondary sources, this thesis traces the genesis of this unique, independent, multi-service organization. It gives significant coverage to both its historic origins through the important evolutionary events during and after the First World War. It also gives special attention to comparing the contributions and command styles of the DCO's two primary leaders: Fleet Admiral Roger Keyes and Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. By examining the key events during the period culminating with the fateful raid on Dieppe in August 1942, this work shows the essential contribution made by Combined Operations to forging Allied victory.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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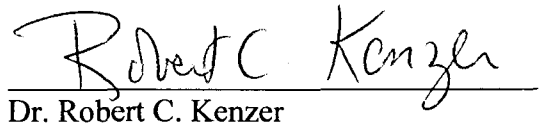

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FORGING THE ANVIL OF VICTORY:

THE BRITISH COMBINED OPERATIONS COMMAND

AT THE START OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR (1940-42)

by

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INTRODUCTION

Setting the Mood

The date was 9 May 1940. The Second World War, which had begun less than nine months before, was not going well for the British and their continental Allies. In accordance with its pre-existing war plans, the government of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had deployed a force of nearly half a million men, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), to assist in the defense of France and Belgium against Nazi Germany.[1] Another ally, Poland, had fallen several months before, both provoking the start of a the Second World War and serving as terrible example of the Nazis' martial might. Even while the French scanned their borders for signs of the German foe, Denmark and Norway were fighting for their lives against the *Wehrmacht* and the *Luftwaffe*. The war that many had called "phony" was rapidly heading in a very negative direction.[2]

The fate of France and the Low Countries would be no different from that of its defeated Allies. The story of the fall of France, which has been covered in much greater

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[1] The British and French governments had only finalized the details of the BEF deployment in July 1939, when the threat of Germany became to great to ignore. See John Keegan, ed., *Atlas of the Second World War* (London: HarperCollins (Borders Group), 1998), 882. For more on the deployment itself, see Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle: France 1940* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co, 1969), 95.

[2] The figure on the strength of the BEF was taken from the outstanding resource, R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopedia of Military History (4th Edition)* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1151. For an excellent summation of the situation up to that point, also consult Len Deighton, *Blitzkrieg: From the Rise of Hitler to the Fall of Dunkirk* (New York: HarperCollins, 1979).

detail in many other works, is not the focus of this thesis.[3] In any case, the item of main importance is the psychological impact. With the penetration of the supposedly impassable Ardennes, the outflanking of the vaunted Maginot Line, and the whirlwind destruction of what some mistakenly considered the best army in the world, conditions were set for unescapable despair.[4]

By the middle of June 1940, France had been crushed and the BEF forcibly ejected from the continent. Despite, or perhaps because of this, the mood inhabiting the British Isles was particularly Janus-like. Some members of the British government, including Foreign Secretary Edward Lindley Wood, the 1st Lord Halifax, were ready to give up and reach some sort of accommodation with the Germans. This conclusion would seem to be typical, though by no means universal, of the pre-invasion cabinet of Prime Minister Chamberlain, who had spent much of the late 1930s trying to avoid a war with Germany.[5] Though this attitude might have represented the personal opinion of some of the upper echelon of the Tory establishment, it did not reflect the mood of the

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[3] In addition to Horne's *To Lose a Battle: France 1940* , also see Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[4] For two excellent pieces on the impact of this defeat, see Brian Bond, "Battle of France." *Decisive Battles of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Nobel Frankland and Christopher Dowling (New York: David McKay Pubishers, 1976), 101-113, and Robert Allen Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France* (New York: Archon Books, 1990); excerpt reprinted in US Army Command and General Staff College *H100 Transformation in the Shadow of Global Conflict* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, July 2003).

[5] Frank McDonough, *Neville Chamberlain: Appeasement and the British Road to War* (Manchester: University Press, 1998), 196; Roy Jenkins, *Churchill: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001), 599-600; Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 222.

overwhelming majority of the British public.[6] The miracle at Dunkirk did.

From 26 May to 3 June 1940, hundreds of thousands of British and other Allied soldiers were rescued from the French port of Dunkirk. What was called Operation *Dynamo* was not an exclusively military undertaking, but also a massive volunteer effort involving numerous civilian vessels marshaled into service to bring soldiers back across the channel.[7] The "miracle" was made possible by several factors. First and most important was German *Führer* Adolf Hitler's "Halt" order, issued on 24 May, which temporarily restrained the armored spearheads rapidly closing on the retreating Allied forces. This should in no way take away from another factor – the valor and sacrifice of the defenders once the Germans realized what their foes were doing.[8] The final cost in materiel for the British was high, with the loss of six Royal Navy destroyers, a multitude of lesser craft, dozens of airplanes, hundreds of tanks, and numerous other pieces of equipment that were abandoned to the advancing foe. In addition, 30,000 French troops had also been trapped in the collapsing Dunkirk pocket. Their capture would create a lingering bitterness among the French that would carry over in the Vichy regime.[9]

In the end, more than 330,000 men were rescued from France, many of whom

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[6] Nicholas Harman, *Dunkirk: The Patriotic Myth* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980), 10-11.

[7] John Keegan, ed., *Atlas of the Second World War* (London: HarperCollins (Borders Group), 1998), 43. Also see Patrick Turnbull, *Dunkirk: Anatomy of Disaster* (London: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979); Harman, *Dunkirk: The Patriotic Myth*, Ibid.

[8] Horne, 533.

[9] Ibid., 554.

would return to fight again in North Africa, Italy, and ultimately France, as well as into Germany itself. Dunkirk became a huge symbol and rallying cry for the British nation, perfectly reflecting its mood – bloodied but unbowed. Despite the defeat in France, despite the failure of campaigns in Norway, despite the fact that they now stood alone, the British were unwilling to quit, and ready, even eager, to fight.[10] And to lead them, they had a new political leader, who was more than ready to bring the fight to the enemy.

After many years "in the political wilderness," Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill became prime minister on 10 May 1940, even while his nation's European allies were overrun.[11] His first month in office had begun with the invasion of France and ended with the evacuation at Dunkirk. Speaking before the House of Commons near the end of rescue operations, Churchill declared while that "the Battle for France was over, the Battle for Britain was about to begin." He further observed:

> The whole question of home defense against an invasion is, of course, powerfully affected by the fact that we have for the time being in this Island incomparably more powerful military forces than we have ever had at any moment in this war or the last. But this will not continue. We shall not be content with a defensive war. We have our duty to our Ally. We have to reconstitute and build up the British Expeditionary Force once again, under its gallant Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gort. All this is in train; but in the interval we must put our defenses in this Island into such a high state of organization that the fewest possible numbers will be required to give effective security and that the largest possible potential of

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[10] Harman, 10-11.

[11] See Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill: The Wilderness Years* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1982) as well as *Winston Churchill - The Wilderness Years* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1983), video.

offensive effort may be realized. On this we are now engaged.[12]

Though exceptionally conscious of his nation's precarious defensive position, Churchill was determined to return to the attack. The soon-in-coming Battle of Britain would be fought and won by the Royal Air Force (RAF), but even air power would not win the war alone. The senior service of the British military, the Royal Navy, would also play an absolutely critical role in defending the home islands and securing the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) to America, but the ships and sailors of the Fleet were only part of the solution. Even the British Army, heirs to the legacy of Wellington and Waterloo, could not win the war all by itself, especially after terrible defeats of the previous months.

To achieve success, a new organization was needed, one that would combine the strengths of various services and help set the conditions for final victory. While the rest of the Allied cause was thinking defensively, it would think offensively. To bring the fight to the enemy, the services would have to cross the Channel and engage in amphibious warfare. This was a subject that the British shuddered at ever since their failure in the Dardanelles over a quarter century before. Now, in order to win, indeed to survive, they would have to resurrect the concept. The organization that came about to do just that is unique in the history of warfare: the British Combined Operations Command (COC). Its story during the first half of the Second World War is the focus of this thesis.

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[12] Quoted from the 4 June 1940 speech, "Wars are not won by evacuations," excepted via the compilation by David Cannadine, ed., *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: The Speeches of Winston Churchill* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 163.

Defining the Problem – Why Study Combined Operations?

Another thesis on the Second World War? Almost sixty years after its conclusion, the war continues to serve as virtually bottomless well for books, movies, plays, papers, television specials, and of course, masters theses. During the course of research for this study, a simple Google search of the internet using the parameters "world war II, papers" resulted in more than three million hits.[13] Similarly, a search of the MIRLYN Library Catalog at the University of Michigan library turned 5,000 volumes dealing with the Second World War.[14] Given these figures, one might assume that few if any aspects of the conflict, its origins, and aftermath have remained unexamined. It has already been successfully mined for valuable, even world-altering, insight into the social sciences, group and individual psychology, business, economics, women and minorities studies, and of course, history. Many of the martial aspects of the war have been minutely scrutinized, discussed and dissected by both the lay and professional communities of the military and academia. Given the already profound volume of material about the war, what can there be left to study?

The answer to that question could be reached through a complex essay detailing the myriad reasons for preserving the study of this subject, but it is more simply addressed by a single sentence: the Second World War continues to be a valuable source

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[13] Search using the Google search engine with parameters stated above, 12/19/2003.

[14] Browse query of "World War II" using the online MIRLYN Library Catalog, 2/9/2004.

of insight into humanity and the human experience. As long as new generations of both professionals and the lay public find value in reinvestigating the last great war, they will continue to do so, and with considerable justification.

Given this conclusion, what insight can be gained by examining, or reexamining, the Combined Operations Command (COC)? The answer is many insights, using the example of an organization formed in crisis conditions and given a herculean task. The wartime role of the COC as a center for planning, innovation, and experimentation was essential in developing the techniques and equipment necessary for a successful amphibious operation. Most important, both by drive and example, the COC served as the engine for opening the Second Front – the invasion of France and return of the Allies to *Festung Europa*. Almost equally important are the various commanding officers of the COC, who played major parts in the formulation of British as well as Allied war policy. These individuals offer the reader fantastic historical examples of both the most effective and the most ineffective ways to influence decisions. Their stories, among many others, make the tale of the COC a very human one, filled with pride, hubris, courage, and also, bureaucratic monotony. It is a subject worth investigating anew and one from which more insight into the human condition can be extracted.

Scope and Limitations

Despite this potential wealth of subject matter on the COC and its numerous

ancillary topics (the Commandos, the development of landing craft, involvement in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Asia), I must impose some limitations. It is not my intent to write a general history of the COC during World War II. This has already been done, both by the organization itself (from which I have culled numerous citations) and by author Bernard Fergusson in his 1961 book, *The Watery Maze*.[15] Despite the intrinsic value of revisiting the totality of this aspect of the Second World War, I do not intend to reclimb that particular mountain, at least at this time.

What I do intend is to examine several key aspects of the COC both before and during the first half portions of the war, roughly from the fall of France (in the summer of 1940) to the aftermath of the operation at Dieppe (in the autumn of 1942), as well as the important historical lineage for the concept. Within that specified two and a half year period, the COC evolved from a vague and tarnished concept to the prime actor in the planning and execution of Allied offensive operations. To illustrate the previous assertions, this thesis will delve into several important areas and such address five key questions:

- What was the historical legacy of British combined operations?
- How did the COC come to be in July 1940?
- Why did the COC gain such an influential role in Allied war councils?
- What was the role of the American military in the COC?

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[15] Bernard Fergusson, *The Watery Maze: The Story of Combined Operations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961).

- What part did the COC play in planning the Second Front in Europe?

Using these five questions as guideposts, I will spotlight the important and often overlooked part played by the COC in final victory. Within the mosaic of the Second World War, many threads stand out. By the end of this thesis, the reader will be able to see that though the story of the Combined Operations Command may be colored gunmetal gray, it is one of the binding threads of the entire work.

CHAPTER 1

Some Historical Perspective

War from the sea onto land is almost as old as warfare itself. The earliest specific example of this referenced was an Egyptian monarch conducting an operation more than thirty-five centuries ago, though one should have no doubt ancient Mesopotamian armies sailed the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to assist in their own military ventures.[16] The earliest tales of Odysseus and Achilles storming the gates of Troy in Homer's *Iliad* are another example of ancient amphibious operations. The very beginning of historical writing, Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*, gives numerous accounts of Athenian and Spartan amphibious operations along the shores of Sicily and the Aegean.[17] Despite the potential goldmine of ancient source materiel, a comprehensive study of either naval or amphibious warfare is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, it is important to illustrate certain key historical events and essential elements of amphibious operations discovered along the way in order to put 1940s combined operations in the proper perspective.

But just what is combined operation, or an amphibious operation for that matter?

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[16] Arch Whitehouse, *Amphibious Operations* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), vii.

[17] For a comprehensive study of ancient warfare from the sea, refer to Victor Davis Hanson, "Land Warfare in Thucydides," *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, Robert B. Strassler, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 606, as well as Alfred Vagts, *Landing Operations: Strategy, Psychology, Tactics, Politics, From Antiquity to 1945* (Washington DC: Military Service Publishing Co, 1946).

What is the difference? The truth is they are pretty much the same, but not quite. The vast majority of contemporary military historians, as well as the United States military, use the term "amphibious operations," which is defined as "a military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force embarked in ships or craft with the primary purpose of introducing a landing force (LF) ashore to accomplish the assigned mission."[18] In British tradition, an amphibious operation is synonymous with the term combined operation. This is an outgrowth of the very proper realization that to accomplish a landing, you need both sailors as well as soldiers to storm a beach. In 1943, the then senior British officer charged with responsibility in this area defined it as follows:

> The term "Combined Operations" is vague and does not convey more than a general meaning; but their scope is definite and precise. A combined operation is a landing operation in which, owing to actual or expected opposition, it is essential that the fighting services take part together, in order to strike the enemy with the maximum effect at the chosen point and at the chosen moment.[19]

In essence, the British saw this warfare as "combined" since the various services (army, navy, air force) had to "combine" their powers and work together to accomplish their mission. In current US military doctrine, this type of warfare is called Joint Operations, and is more the rule than the exception, no matter whether one was storming a defended

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[18] Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-02, Joint Doctrine for Amphibious Operations (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 19 September 2001), ix.

[19] Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, "Forward," from Hillary St. George Saunders, *Combined Operations: The Official Story of the Commandos* (New York: The Macmillan Co, 1943), v.

beachhead or not.[20] In the World War II context, combined operations were amphibious operations. The terms were hopelessly intermingled and operationally inseparable for what the British were trying to achieve. Therefore, throughout this thesis, the terms will be used interchangeably as the situation warrants.

Basic Elements of Amphibious Operations

With the basic terms defined, we shall quickly outline several other basic elements. The first element is naval capability. Not to be overly simplistic, but to mount an amphibious operation, one must first possess some sort of boat. A state does not need to possess a blue-water navy complete with dreadnoughts and aircraft carriers. If the terrain to be contested is riverine, or even just confined to littoral approaches, then smaller craft can more than suffice, especially if crewed by a group of motivated individuals. An excellent example of this is the Viking longboat. Built to sail the fjords and over stormy waves of the North Sea, the longboat served as the primary vessel of commerce and war, especially in the British Isles.[21] In the end, the type of boat required depends on how far a force needs to travel. This subject will be revisited repeatedly as we build up to the Second World War.

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[20] For an more in-depth examination of both joint and combined warfare, see Roger A. Beaumount, *Joint Military Operations: A Short History* (London: Greenwood Press, 1993), 85-87.

[21] Vagts, 169-184.

The second element, building upon the first, is command of the sea, at least in the operational sense. An excellent example of this is the Persian domination of the Aegean during the first phases of the Greco-Persian Wars. The Persian fleet's ability to transport, protect, and supply its forces effectively gave them an unmatched ability to retain the strategic initiative. Persian forces could land at any number of places along the Greek coastline, beginning an offensive at the time and place of their choosing. This dominance of the seas, though, did not guarantee success, as their conflict with the Greeks was ultimately decided with defeats on land at Marathon in 490 BC and at sea with the destruction of their fleet at Salamis ten years later.[22] The third element, facilitated by the first two, is the ability to storm a defended beach. The actual military capabilities required to accomplish this task depends upon the era. The level of firepower required to successfully assault the beaches at Marathon and Hastings is quite different from Vera Cruz and Omaha Beach.[23] Much more on the specifics of this task will be discussed later in this work.

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[22] Archer Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 89-90. For more on warfare in Ancient Greece, see the landmark work by Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989).

[23] Vagts, 3-8.

British Experiences with Combined Operations

Britain's legacy with amphibious warfare and combined operations is exceptionally rich and varied. The inhabitants of the British Isles had been on the receiving end of seaborne raids for most of recorded history. Julius Caesar himself had crossed the English Channel while commanding the Roman invasion in the year 55 BC.[24] Even during the years of Roman domination, tribes of barbarians such as the Picts, not to mention the neighboring Scots, are known to have raided down the coast as far south as Wales. The arrival of the Saxons, themselves amphibious invaders, in the middle of the fifth century did little to alter significantly this fact of life.[25] For much of the last quarter of the first millennium, the Vikings raided the coasts of both Britain and Ireland. By the time of the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the native Welsh, English, and Scottish peoples had built up fairly sturdy defenses to ward off the pinprick raids.[26] In the end, however, they were not able to resist, though, the Norman invasion of William the Conqueror.[27]

The next 700 years brought their own glut of war and conquests. After Hastings,

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[24] Peter Connolly, *Greece and Rome at War* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1981), 211, as well as Graham Webster, *The Roman Invasion of Britain* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[25] Vagts, 122-123.

[26] Ibid., 126-133. Also see Peter Hunter Blair, *Roman Britain and Early England, 55 B.C.-A.D. 871* (Edinburgh: T.Nelson, 1963).

[27] Ibid., 139-140. Also see Edward A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England: Its Causes and Its Results* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1873-1879); David Howarth, *1066: The Year of Conquest* (New York: Viking Press, 1978).

it was England's turn to storm across the channel. The Hundred Years War (1337-1453) between England and France, notable for the epic English victories at Crecy (1346) and Agincourt (1415), contained dozens of major landings. English dominance in Normandy, both in political and military terms at various times, made the majority of the cross-channel transits administrative in nature.[28] It was not until more than 300 years later that amphibious warfare would once again come of age and the term "combined operations" would be uttered by an English tongue.

In 1759, an Englishman, despairing the state of his nation's military arms, recorded his lamentations on the failure to learn lessons from both theirs and others' past military experiences. In *Conjunct Expeditions*, author Thomas More Molyneaux wrote:

> Thus we go again, should we stand with our arms across, despairing of ever learning better, though so strongly urged and simulated by past errors.... [W]e have never employed our minds in the study of this war 'til we have been called upon to make use of our bodies also. Thus when it is too late, by knowing nothing beforehand we doubly fatigue our mental faculties, with the vain hope of retrieving lost opportunities"[29]

Someone, it seems, was paying attention, for as least as far as the British are concerned, the history of real combined operations warfare began with General James Wolfe's forcing of the St. Lawrence and his successful assault against Quebec during the French

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[28] For a comprehensive history of the war and its major actions, see Desmond Seward, *The Hundred Years War: The English in France 1337-1453* (New York: Penguin, 1978).

[29] This quote was taken from Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes, *Amphibious Warfare and Combined Operations, Lee Knowles Lectures, 1943* (Cambridge: University Press, 1943), 7-8. Keyes, as the first Director of Combined Operations, published this compilation on the subject soon after his dismissal from the post in Fall 1941.

and Indian War.[30]

Charged with dislodging the French and their Indian from positions near the stronghold of Quebec, Wolfe personally planned and led the ship-mounted operation. Working hand-in-hand with the Royal Navy, Wolfe's forces were able to force the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, quickly landed, and massed several brigades of infantry on the shore. Working his way from strategic position to strategic position along the river, he culminated the attack by storming and seizing the heights overlooking the city. His audacious attack overwhelmed his French opponents and cemented British dominion in Canada for the next 200 years. Tragically, Wolfe himself was mortally wounded in the final action.[31]

Wolfe's success in Quebec produced several important lessons concerning the nature of amphibious operations. First, it reinforced the necessity of command of the sea. Without the defeat of the French fleet earlier in the war, the operation would have been significantly more costly in terms of men and ships. With that advantage, though, the attack showed the vulnerability of a foe with static coastal defenses to an amphibious force. It also demonstrated the importance of unity of effort, if not command.[32] The integration of land and sea components, working together under one overall commander

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[30] "What is a Combined Operation? A Brief Introduction and History," [Online] Available http//www.combinedops.com/What%20is%20a%20Combined%20Op.htm, 2 February 2004.

[31] Keyes, 13-16.

[32] Ibid., 16-17.

(Wolfe), set the model for a successful combined operation.

Like both Wolfe and Molyneaux, the various British governments of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the most part recognized the utility of the Royal Navy and Army working in concert. United, they were "the natural bulwark of the Kingdom."[33] A multitude of expeditions, successful and otherwise, during the Napoleonic Wars and later mid-century in the Crimea reinforced this perception. American operations in Cuba at the turn of the century, though by no means smooth, further showed the utility of amphibious warfare.[34] Prior to 1914, with British dominance of the high seas, amphibious warfare was taken almost as a given. Unfortunately, the British would also experience the downside of amphibious warfare with their disastrous operation against Turkey at Gallipoli.

Disaster in the Dardanelles

The twentieth-century tale of combined operations begins during the First World War in the Bosporus straits with the British attempt to open a second front against Turkey. The principal advocate of this strategy, and chief protagonist of this thesis, was the thirty-nine-year-old Winston Churchill, great-grandson of the legendary Duke of

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[33] Colonel M.H.H. Evans RM OBE, *Amphibious Operations: The Projection of Sea Power Ashore (Brassey's Sea Power: Naval Vessels, Weapon Systems, and Technology Series, Volume 4)* (London: Brassey's, 1990), 13-14.

[34] Lieutenant Colonel Merrill L. Bartlett, USMC (Ret.), *Assault from the Sea: Essays on the History of Amphibious Warfare* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1983), vii.

Marlborough, and then First Lord of the Admiralty. In September 1914, Churchill had been serving as First Lord for almost three years. His post made him the senior civilian official for the Royal Navy. Assisted by the uniformed First Sea Lord, Churchill "ran" the Navy, directing ship movements, instituting reforms, and developing strategy.[35]

In November 1914, Churchill proposed an attack on Gallipoli Peninsula in Turkey, which only recently had been drawn in the maelstrom of the war on the German side. Churchill argued that such an action would allow the British to seize control of the Dardanelles, control the Bosporus straits, and dictate terms to the Turkish government. His original plan envisioned both a naval bombardment and land assault, with troops required to hold the peninsula. Troops, though, were hard to come by, with the worldwide commitments of the empire as well as the Western Front consuming manpower like wood in a horrible fire. By December 1914, Churchill had almost abandoned the idea, but two events gave the proposal new life.[36]

First, the crusty, long-serving First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir John Arbuthnot Fisher, enthusiastically endorsed the plan, but only if it could be implemented immediately. The second and deciding event was a Russian threat to pull back on the Eastern Front in the face of now both Turkish and German advances. Lord Herbert Kitchener, another crusty,

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[35] William Manchester, *The Last Lion, Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory: 1874-1932* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1983), 429. For more on both Churchill and the Gallipoli campaign, Trumbill Higgins, *Winston Churchill and the Dardanelles: A Dialogue in Ends and Means* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1977); Alan Moorehead, *Gallipoli* (Annapolis, MD: Nautical and Aviation Press Co. of America, 1982).

[36] Manchester, 512-516.

long-serving, and nearly legendary British general, then serving as the chief Minister for War, counter-proposed that the Navy mount a "demonstration" off the coast of Turkey to draw pressure off the Russians. Churchill responded that such an operation with an infantry component would be more effective. Kitchener bluntly stated that every available soldier was needed for the Western Front. Although acknowledging that only the Dardanelles seemed a promising alternative to the stalemate in the west, Kitchener was reluctant to commit troops.[37]

By January 1915, the political momentum to do something in the Dardanelles had become irresistible. From London, Churchill queried the naval commander of the squadron stationed near the Dardanelles, Vice Admiral S. H. Carden, regarding his thoughts on a forcing of the straits. Admiral Carden's reply was that he did not think the Dardanelles "could be rushed," but instead recommended a four-phased operation to: (1) reduce the forts guarding the strait, (2) clear the defenses inside the straight up to the Narrows, (3) reduce the forts at the Narrows, and then finally (4) clear the minefields guarding the entrance into the Marmora. As Churchill explained this plan to the War Cabinet, he stated that "the Admiralty should prepare for a naval expedition in February, to bombard and take the Gallipoli Peninsula with Constantinople as its (ultimate) objective." Reading this statement today, it seems obvious that to "take the Gallipoli Peninsula with Constantinople as its objective" might just require a significant force of ground troops, be it marines or infantry. The war Cabinet, though, did not see it this way,

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[37] Ibid., 517.

deciding on a purely naval expedition. In retrospect, Churchill seems to have crafted his statement to force the inclusion of ground forces in the plan, but at the time, neither Kitchener nor the War Cabinet was willing formally to endorse a ground plan.[38]

Despite Kitchener's insistence that no troops were available, some preparations had been made. In Egypt, Carden discovered that 10,000 troops, to include the ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand) Corps, a French Division, and a Royal Navy (Marine) Division, had been put on alert for possible operations in Turkey. Kitchener's guidance to the ANZAC and other division commanders was that there was no intention of being used unless absolutely necessary. Further instructions to General Sir Ian Hamilton, appointed commander of Army forces assigned to the operation on 16 March 1915, stressed the lack of any large scale landing operation and only minor actions heavily supported by the Fleet. No real joint planning or coordination in preparation for even these "minor operations" was done between the Army and Royal Navy.[39]

As history would show, events soon did require those land forces. Naval bombardments against the entrance to the straits had been ongoing since February 1915. In March, the British fleet entered the Narrows and began to attack Turkish forts guarding the passage. In short succession, three British ships and one French vessel ship were lost

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[38] "History of Combined Operations Headquarters 1939-1945 with a short account of the Dardanelles Expedition 1915 and the period between the two World Wars 1945," DEFE 2/697, 1-2. This is the official history of the Combined Operations Command, written just after the war, and taken from the British Public Record Office at Kew Gardens in Surrey. Mindful of their own past, the staff of the COC produced a extremely detailed history of the origins and lineage of their command.

[39] DEFE 2/697, 3-5.

to mines lain only the night before by the Turks. Vice Admiral Vincent de Robeck, who inconveniently replaced Carden just before the actual start of the operation, told General Hamilton that now the ships would not make the passage with the help of troops. In the space of an afternoon, the "naval" expedition developed an amphibious operational task.[40]

Over the next five months, two major assaults were attempted, the first on 25 April 1915, including a disastrous landing at Sedd el Bahr carried out in broad daylight, and another at night in August in Suvla Bay. Both were utter failures, despite footholds gained and inhumanly brave performance of the ANZAC divisions that took the brunt of the landing. A detailed discussion of the landing operations themselves is not the focus of this work, but the lessons learned from this operation are within our purview.[41]

Firstly, neither Hamilton's troops nor his staff had absolutely any experience with amphibious operations. Despite the previously-discussed British history of amphibious operations, that particular generation of officers and staff had never planned, trained for, or executed landing operations against hostile beachheads. Hamilton did give his troops the opportunity to practice several landings before the initial assault in April, but failed to realize that his transports were completely unsuited for landing against the Gallipoli beaches. No reconnaissance had been made of the beaches to gauge the tide or even

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[40] Ibid., 5-7.

[41] In addition to the previously cited works, for a wider review of Gallipoli sources, see Fred van Hartesveldt, *The Dardanelles Campaign, 1915 : Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (London: Greenwoord, 1997).

scout enemy positions. Had they done so, they would have observed the Turks, alerted by the past two months' attempts to force the Dardanelles, already dug in and improving their defensive positions. German officers had even been sent to serve as advisors.[42]

In the words of one author, the tragedy of Gallipoli was that it was never planned; it just grew.[43] Churchill and others members of the War Cabinet recognized from the beginning that the operation would require naval and ground assets working in concert. Lord Kitchener's initial reluctance to provide a ground force, and later, persistent lack of support in regards to ground troops, poisoned the atmosphere. General Hamilton, who was later characterized in a World War II memorandum as very "un-Montgomery like," (i.e., not very aggressive) was left to fight and eventually lose the Gallipoli campaign. He was recalled on 17 October 1915 with his forces still in contact, but was considered too biased to oversee the evacuation. Badly supported both from above and on his flanks, Hamilton was not completely destined to fail, but had plenty of help moving him toward that point. He was never employed as an operational commander again.[44]

As for the Royal Navy, its failure to force the straits without infantry support (as it had claimed it could) was profoundly and professionally embarrassing. In the end, the Allied Fleet had served only as targets for the Turkish naval force. First Sea Lord Fisher would claim he had been against the operation from the start, and ended his very long and

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[42] Whitehouse, 135-136.

[43] Fergusson, 29.

[44] Bartlett, 151-152.

distinguished career with a temper tantrum and a resignation that was curtly received by the government.[45]

Churchill was left holding the bag. In the wake of Fisher's resignation, the embattled First Lord of the Admiralty became the primary target for the Dardanelles' debacle. Despite the War Cabinet's collective decision to embark on the operation, Gallipoli became known as, and is still unmistakably associated with, Winston Churchill. Pressed by the Opposition, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith relieved Churchill from the Admiralty post. Though offered other, noticeably lesser posts, Churchill instead went on to serve as an infantry battalion commander in the trenches. He would not reenter the story of combined operations until twenty-four years later.[46]

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[45] Whitehouse, 148-149.

[46] Manchester, 573.

CHAPTER 2

From Zeebrugge to the ISTDC

In addition to Winston Churchill, another person who played a major part in World War II combined operations had been present at the amphibious fiasco in Gallipoli. Commodore Roger Keyes, then a youthful 42-years old, had served as the fleet chief of staff under Admirals Carden and de Robecks both before and during that 1914-15 campaign. Of Anglo-Irish descent, his family had served in the British-officered Indian Army for the past two generations. According to historian Bernard Fergusson, Keyes had been the "driving force" for the whole Dardanelles' campaign, both at sea and ashore. He was also characterized as "by no means the cleverest (but definitely) one of the bravest and most colorful naval officers of all time."[47] Keyes' own observations from that experience would serve him well in helping to build a future for combined operations.

By the fall of 1917, Keyes had managed to weather the fallout that had cost both Churchill and Fisher their jobs. He had even been promoted to Rear Admiral. With that promotion, much to his displeasure, he was transferred out of the fleet and appointed the Director of Plans at the Admiralty.[48] One of the most important issues confronting the Plans section was the continuing problem of German submarine infiltration into the Atlantic. One of the primary sources of this problem was the German naval base at

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[47] Fergusson, 31.

[48] Keyes, 54-55.

Bruges. Home to more than thirty-five torpedo boats and thirty U-boats, the Admiralty estimated that almost a quarter of British shipping losses had been caused by the flotilla operating from this base. The Bruges-based submarine made their way from their inland base via a series of canals which exited into the North Sea. Soon after assuming his new position in September 1917, Keyes proposed an audacious plan to deal with this problem by mining the Bruges canal exits at Zeebrugge and Ostend on the Belgium coast. He was not to first to do so; Churchill himself had broached the idea back in 1914, but no coherent scheme had ever been produced. In December 1917, Keyes put the finishing touches on his own plan and formally proposed it. His plan was approved, and he was given the unique opportunity to implement it.[49]

On 1 January 1918, Keys was promoted out of the Directorate of Plans and given command of a Patrol squadron based in Dover. He spent the next two months training his new command and putting the final touches on the raid against the canal exits.[50] The raid was conducted by two separate British flotillas, with one attacking each of the exits. The attack on the Ostend exit was meant to be a fairly straightforward affair, with a rapid assault and scuttling of ships at the exit. Zeebrugge would prove to be more complicated. The plan for this exit consisted of a diversionary attack against the "mole" while blocking ships stormed the exit. Then, the ship would be scuttled in the mouth of the canal. The

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[49] Mark Karau, "Twisting the Dragon's Tail: The Zeebrugge and Ostend Raids of 1918," *The Journal of Military History* (April 2003): 456-457.

[50] Aspinall-Oglander, 219-221,

"mole" was a thin, built-up strip of land that protected the exit. It was covered with hangers, seaplane shelters, and several large-caliber anti-ship guns that guarded the seaward approaches. More than 600 Royal Marines and 200 sailors were assigned the mission of attacking the "mole." The attacking marines would be transported on an old cruiser, the *HMS Vindictive*, along with two smaller ferry craft. The operation was further to be supported by air strikes from RAF biplanes. The combination of land, sea, and air elements made this operation truly a combined one.[51]

Proposed by Keyes and approved by his superiors in December 1917, the raid was slated to be launched on 11 April 1918. When that day came, though, the operation was delayed because of unfavorable wind conditions needed to support a smokescreen for the approaching ships. Another attempt was made on 22 April when the weather and the tides were right, but was again called off because the rain and drizzle were too much for the attacking biplanes. Finally, around midnight on 23 April 1918, the attack finally went forward.[52]

It was a bloody effort, especially for the British. Though at a higher state of alert because of the previous British probes, the German garrison was nonetheless caught off guard. Soon, however, the wind shifted in the German's favor, blowing away the covering smokescreen. The approaching *Vindictive*, with hundreds of sailors and Royal Marines on her deck, was raked by murderous fire from the German anti-ship guns.

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[51] Karau, 457-458.

[52] Ibid., 460-462.

Forced to land further down the mole than had been intended, the British raiding force had to fight its way through the maze of hangers and warehouses.[53]

Although costly, the diversion served its purpose. The ships' *Iphigenia* and *Intrepid* duly entered the canal exit at Zeebrugge and scuttled themselves around 0145 local time. The crews of these ships were rescued through the daring efforts of small motor launches and coastal motorboats, foreshadowing the techniques used during similar raids to be launched more than twenty years later.[54] British naval losses turned out to be relatively light, with one cruiser, the *North Star*, and two motor launches sunk, as well as the *Vindictive* seriously damaged. Personnel losses were much heavier, with 170 reported killed, 400 wounded, and 45 missing-in-action. The defending German forces reported only eight killed and sixteen wounded.[55]

The simultaneous attack on Ostend was repulsed the night of the 23rd, mostly due to the clear field of fire for the coastal guns. A follow-up attack using the *Vindictive* was attempted three weeks later, but was defeated just shy of the exit, with the British blocking vessel running aground just east of the shipping channel.[56] Still, the British claimed the mission as a success. All traffic from the Zeebrugge channel was completely blocked for five days, and activity from the base at Bruges was reduced for the remainder

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[53] Ibid., 460-464.

[54] Keyes, 68-69.

[55] Karau, 465-468.

[56] Keyes, 70-71.

of the war. Had the attack been executed earlier in the war, even as late as the winter of 1917, it might have had a more profound effect on the course of the conflict. As it was, the raid also served as a large morale boost for the Allies while the last German offensive ground its way across the Western Front. The attack very much shocked and surprised the Germans. Though publicly claiming victory, German commanders at Zeebrugge and Ostend hastily enacted significant defensive improvements in response to British tactics employed during the raid.[57] Most importantly for the purpose of this thesis, the raid was a successful combined operation. Utilizing sea, air, and land assets, a British military force struck with surprise from the sea and accomplished its mission. Though small in scale compared to the landings at Gallipoli, or even the daring exploits of Wolfe at Quebec, the raid on Zeebrugge highlighted the large potential of small-scale combined operations. It also put an important feather in the cap of Admiral Roger Keyes.

Restraints and Obstacles

Despite some measure of naval success at the end of the First World War, combined operations would fight an uphill battle before it once again came into vogue. Final victory for the Allies in 1918 had brought with it innumerable lessons and experiences for both the conquerors and the conquered. The Germans would demonstrate in 1939 that they had not wasted the previous twenty years resting on their laurels (or lack

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[57] Karau, 473-477.

thereof). The British would also show a fair amount of military innovation during this period. Radar, though not a strictly British invention, was first placed into operation as part of an air defense network in England in 1935.[58]

Despite this and other notable contributions (Spitfire fighter plane, J. F. C. Fuller and B. H. Liddell Hart's theories on war) to both the art and science of warfare, one can fairly say the British did not prepare themselves as readily as others for the next conflict, particularly in the arena of amphibious landings and combined operations.[59] The reasons for their restraint encompass a broad range of social, economic and diplomatic factors. The most obvious restraint was diplomatic. Following the Armistice in 1919, the major powers embarked upon a bevy of conferences and disarmament talks aimed at preventing another major war. The Treaty of Versailles itself, in addition to imposing draconian provisions on a defeated Germany, included clauses calling for universal limitation on armaments.[60] This call to action would be dutifully followed in Europe, the United States, and Japan, most notably in the area of sea power. Great Britain would go on to sign a major naval treaty in Washington in 1922, as well as host and further agree to naval

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[58] Bernard and Fawn M. Brodie, *From Crossbow to H-Bomb*, revised and enlarged edition (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 208.

[59] For extensive coverage on changes in doctrine and technology between the wars, see Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, ed., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54.

[60] Lorna S. Jaffe, "Abolishing War? Military Disarmament at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919" in *Arms Limitation and Disarmament: Restraints on War, 1899-1939*, B. J .C. McKercher, ed.. (London: Praeger, 1992), 43.

arms limitation in both 1930 and 1936.[61]

The specific details of those treaties are not of huge importance for our purposes, but these "scraps of paper," as referred to by one author, did much to set the mood for how governments would fund their militaries after 1919.[62] This was especially true for the Royal Navy. Despite some success near the war's end, over the course of the whole conflict, the senior British service had done rather poorly. In a little over four years of combat, they had lost more than 150 capital warships. In battle, the vaunted Royal Navy had generally appeared incompetent, even impotent, and been utterly unable to score a major victory with being heavily damaging in turn. The Battle of Jutland (31 May 1916), where the service endured the loss 6,000 sailors in an afternoon, served as an unfortunate example of this; failure at Gallipoli did nothing to help matters.[63] This damning verdict on the performance of the Royal Navy during wartime contributed to the decision by postwar British cabinets to refrain from funding any "needless" military expenditures.[64]

As the Combined Operations headquarters' official history described it, "research

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[61] Meridith W. Berg, "Protecting Naval Interests by Treaty: The Second London Naval Conference, 1934-1936" in *Arms Limitation and Disarmament: Restraints on War, 1899-1939*, B. J .C. McKercher, ed., (London: Praeger, 1992), 43.

[62] See Harlow A. Hyde, *Scraps of Paper: The Disarmament Treaties between the World Wars* (Lincoln: Media Publishing, 1988), 24-28. Ironically, in July 1914, German Imperial Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg had also called the1839 London Treaty guaranteeing Belgian neutrality just a "scrap of paper."

[63] For more on the heavy price of naval engagement during World War I, see John Keegan, *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 177-181.

[64] Harlow A. Hyde, *Scraps of Paper: The Disarmament Treaties between the World Wars* (Lincoln: Media Publishing, 1988), 24-28.

and experiment were completely at a discount."[65] The prevailing attitude was codified in the adoption of the "Ten Year Rule," which formalized the policy that the British Armed Forces would not face another major conflict for at least ten years. This presumption was maintained well into the 1930s until the threat of German rearmament forced a reevaluation of fiscal priorities. Nonetheless, the ostrich-like attitude of neglect practiced by the British government during much of the interwar period kept military budgets only to such a level as was "required to keep them efficient."[66]

A final critical limiting factor, specifically for the area of combined operations, was the stain of defeat at Gallipoli. The controversies surrounding this operation persisted for a long time following the war and made any objective consideration of and experimentation in combined operations very difficult. The intrepid Admiral Keyes, even decades after the attempt to force the Dardanelles, referred to the whole enterprise as "one of the most disastrous and cowardly surrenders in the history of our country."[67] The lingering aftermath of that failure almost sounded a death knell for combined operations. Yet even so, the successful raid against Zeebrugge in 1918 held out at least some small hope for the future to proponents of amphibious warfare.[68]

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[65] DEFE 2/697, 11.

[66] Murray and Millett, 54.

[67] Aspinall-Oglander, 202.

[68] Murray and Millett, 53-54.

Working toward Combined Operations

If any institutions can be credited with nurturing this hope over the next two decades, they were the various service staff schools, most notably the Royal Navy College at Portsmouth and the Army Staff College at Camberley. Within these schools' academic environment, student officers could more freely dissect and reassemble past military campaigns. The schools also served as a forum for a truly combined examination of tactical problems, especially with multi-service attendance at the Army college in Camberley. One week-long course held there in October 1919 consisted of 26 Royal Navy and Marine, 3 RAF, and 140 Army officers. In the first few months following the war, the various colleges' curriculum included only a couple of hours' instruction dealing with combined operations, most of it primarily historical in nature. By the end of 1919, the curriculum expanded beyond the basics of Wolfe at Quebec and other amphibious highlights of the British Empire. Soon, student officers were writing still scathing, if more professional, critiques on Gallipoli as well as conducting robust staff planning exercises involving such topics as the defense (and retaking) of a captured colonial port such as Singapore or Hong Kong.[69]

The end result of these exercises was a common realization that the then-prevailing doctrine covering combined operations, written in 1913, was totally inadequate. For any military organization, written doctrine is the touchstone, a common

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[69] Kenneth J. Clifford, *Amphibious Warfare Development in Britain and America from 1920-1940* (New York: Edgewood, 1983), 30-31.

understanding of how an operation would be trained for and accomplished. This is as true today as it was in 1919. To quote the celebrated US Air Force General Curtis LeMay, "At the heart of warfare lies doctrine. It represents the central beliefs of waging war in order to achieve victory. It is the building material for strategy. It is fundamental for sound judgment."[70] The move toward updating and revising service doctrine would go a long way in revitalizing the overall concept of combined operations.

To accomplishment this, the services established the Inter-department Committee on Combined Operations, chaired by an Army Major General. Formed in June 1920, the committee was originally charged with only addressing the chapter on combined operations in the British *Field Service Regulations.* It soon found itself fielding numerous recommendations from both the Royal Navy and the Army on how to deal with the various amphibious tactical problems, including one calling for the establishment of a permanent combined operations staff. Although this idea was not quite ripe yet, it had begun to maturate. By early 1922, the committee had completed its work on the chapter. Soon afterwards, the War Office, spearheaded by both the Admiralty and the Royal Navy Staff College, produced another critical product: a provisional work entitled *Manual of Combined Naval Military and Air Force Operations*. Work on this manual had been conducted parallel to the rewrite of the *FSR*. First issued in Fall 1922, the *Combined*

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[70] Steven T. Ross, "Napoleon and Maneuver Warfare." *The Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History, 1959-1987*, Harry R. Borowski, ed., (Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, 1988), 309; excerpt reprinted in US Army Command and General Staff College, *H200 Military Revolutions Syllabus and Book of Readings* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, November 2003), 81.

Operations manual would be updated again in 1928, 1931, and 1938. It addressed a multitude of areas, including procedures for logistics over the shore, naval gunfire support, and the landing of tanks. This manual and its successors would serve as the bible for amphibious landings and combined operations throughout the campaigns in North Africa, Europe, and the Mediterranean during the Second World War.[71] Its publication was a true landmark in the interwar development of amphibious warfare.

Writing about a military operation is one thing; executing one is quite another. And the British still had many major hurdles to overcome. Another neglected area that had began receiving attention in the 1920s was that of landing craft. During the landing at both Gallipoli and Zeebrugge, deficiencies in the types and number available of such craft had been glaringly obvious. In each of those operations, small, unarmored motor launches had been used to ferry soldiers and marines from the troopships to the shore. In the process, those troops were subjected to murderous waves of artillery and small arms fire. Initial conclusions by both Admiral Keyes and his contemporaries, based primarily upon their experience at Gallipoli, was that approach of a defended beach by these small boats was tantamount to suicide.[72] The solution to this problem lay in the application of the updated amphibious doctrine, marrying up the synchronized firepower of the Navy and the RAF in order to protect the Army and Marines as they stormed ashore. While those details were being written about and discussed by inter-service committees and the

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[71] Clifford, 32-47.

[72] DEFE 2/697, 11.

Staff Colleges, the British military was hesitantly beginning to look at building a new and improved landing craft. In 1924, the services established a landing craft committee made up of representatives from the various "interested authorities."[73]

After considerable argument about which service was to pay for it, a prototype motor landing craft was produced by the Royal Navy and put to trial in 1927. Weighing twenty tons, it was driven not by propellers, but by a centrifugal pump that shot out a stream of water to push the craft along. It was not very fast, reaching a speed of only six knots with a stiff wind behind it. Moreover, it made "the devil of a noise" while in operation. Though not a craft that could be used for subterfuge, it did possess good beaching capability and fair reliability. Mass production of this craft, though, did not seem to be in the cards. By the beginning of 1930, Great Britain had built a grand total of only three. A postwar legacy of military neglect, along with the curse of the "Ten Year Rule" would delay large-scale landing craft production until after 1940.[74]

Despite this lethargy, work continued throughout the 1930s on both the doctrine and the hardware of amphibious warfare. It was not until 1938, though, that major events began to happen, when a memorandum with large implications finally bore fruit. Written two years before by Captain (later Vice-Admiral) Bertram Watson, then Director of the Royal Navy Staff College, the memo urged the immediate creation of a permanent

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[73] J. D. Ladd, *Assault from the Sea 1939-1945: The Craft, The Landings, The Men* (London: David & Charles, 1976), 16. The specifics of just who the "interested authorities" were was not explained, but we can safely assume it included members of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, and of the War Office.

[74] Fergusson, 36.

committee to coordinate and address multi-service matters, as well as a separate headquarters to administer training, develop methods and materiel, and to conduct the hands-on evaluation of doctrine and equipment. After percolating for many months in the hands of the Chiefs of Staff, Watson's memo quite suddenly became reality after an endorsement by Sir Ronald Adam, then Deputy Chief of the General Staff. Watson's proposed headquarters would be established. Combined operations had a gained new lease on life.[75]

The Predecessor to Combined Operations – The ISTDC

Though it seemed like a bolt from the blue to several of the officers who were dragged away from their commands to create this new organization, it really represented an early culmination of the steady work done by the Staff Colleges since 1919. It also reflected a growing concern by the British Chiefs of Staff about the level of their own combined operations capability. A little more than six months before, in late 1937, British warships had observed the Japanese seaborne invasion at Tientsin and Shanghai. The British were shocked by the amphibious capability of this "youngest naval power" and quickly resolved to address their own deficiencies in this area.[76] Though not quite a resounding call-to-arms, things were beginning to accelerate for British combined

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[75] Fergusson, 37-38.

[76] DEFE 2/697, 13.

operations.

In July 1938, the British established a standing Inter-Service Training and Development Centre (ISTDC). Based at Fort Cumberland at Eastney outside of Portsmouth, the ISTDC was originally staffed by a cadre of four officers, one from each of the services. Naval Captain L. E. H. Maund was tapped to lead and organize the Centre. He had already served as one of the authors in updating and revising the *Combined Operations* manuals and had also witnessed the Japanese landing at Shanghai. Therefore, he was well acquainted with all the issues at hand.[77]

Maund's principal deputy was Army Major Minden MacLeod, a Highlander and Artillery officer then in infantry Brigade Majors' position. A veteran of combat both in Europe and actions on the Northwest Indian Frontier, MacLeod was also knowledgeable about sailing. Together with Wing Commander Guy Knocker of the RAF and Captain Picton-Phillips of the Royal Marines, Maund and MacLeod quickly jumped into their duties. The group was given a small staff, much encouragement, and a budget of £30,000. They also had direct access to the Deputy Chiefs of Staff, the seconds-in-command of the various service.[78]

Despite the many years and hard work that had gone before, the ISTDC was

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[77] Rear Admiral L.E.H. Maund, C.B.E. (Retired), *Assault From The Sea* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1949), 1-2.

[78] Fergusson, 38-39. The Deputy Chiefs of Staff were the second-in-command and principal military assistants to the various services chiefs (Army, RAF, Royal Navy, Royal Marines) who made up the Imperial Chiefs of Staff. While the Deputies did not have the final word on budget priorities or operational decisions, they did exert enormous influence on both the uniformed and civilian policy makers.

almost stillborn. After viewing an abysmal practice landing in August 1938 at Slapton Sands by the 9th Infantry Brigade, then commanded by a rising Brigadier named Bernard Law Montgomery, the cadre spent most of the next ten months investigating the state of British amphibious capability. Their report to the Deputy Chiefs of Staff in June 1939 stated that things were in such bad shape that the soonest the British could attempt to stage a landing on a hostile shore was six months after notification.[79] Three months later, on 1 September 1939, German forces crossed the Polish frontier and ignited the Second World War.

Though almost nothing was done to help the Poles militarily, the British services still went through wild gyrations in an attempt to reach a war footing. The initial reaction of the Chiefs of Staff was to close down the ISTDC and move its officers to fill other more important positions. Unbelievably, a primary reason cited by the Chiefs was the belief that combined operations would play no part in the coming war.[80] After three months and vigorous protests from the Deputy Chiefs, the Centre was reestablished with Major MacLeod in temporary command; Captain Maund returned by mid-January 1940.[81] Unfortunately, less than three months later, these officers would soon find themselves pulled away again in reaction to German actions in the North Sea.

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[79] DEFE 2/697, 17.

[80] DEFE2/697, 20.

[81] Clifford, 75.

The German Invasion of Norway - April 1940

Though the ISTDC cadre did not play a major role in the Norway campaign, the German invasion of that Scandinavian country served as a wake-up call for just where both the British and the foes stood in regards to amphibious warfare. It also quickly cured the Chiefs of Staff of the notion that the war would be bereft of combined operations. In a masterpiece of stealth and operational planning, during the darkness of 8/9 April 1940, the Germans landed more than 2,000 troops from a fleet of ten destroyers, as well as conducted simultaneous parachute and bomber assaults with Luftwaffe aircraft. The Germans achieved almost complete surprise by transporting supplies and equipment in supposedly empty ore ships and cargo containers.[82] By nightfall on 9 April, they had secured the five major Norwegian ports as well as occupied the main commercial centers of the country, including the primary port of Narvik.[83]

The British response to the invasion was well intentioned, if poorly executed. The specifics of the "ramshackle" British campaign (April-June 1940), as it was referred to Churchill, are embarrassing even in retrospect and are covered in much greater detail in other works.[84] For the purpose of understanding the evolution of amphibious landings

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[82] DEFE 2/697, 20.

[83] Jack Adams, *The Doomed Campaign: The Norwegian Campaign of 1940* (London: Cooper, 1989), 29.

[84] See the previous cited *The Doomed Campaign*, as well as Francois Kersaudy, *Norway 1940* (London: Bison Bks Co, 1998) and Great Britain Naval Staff, *Naval Operations of the Campaign in Norway, April-June 1940* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 2000).

and combined warfare, Norway serves as an example of everything "not to do" in such an operation. Despite having written several versions of a *Combined Operations* manual over the previous decades, the services failed to use it, or in most cases, even to consult it. Working first on the false assumption that the German had not yet seized Narvik, the British services hastily assembled and launched two brigades of Guards along with a naval task force toward the important year-round port. After little more than two months on the ground, however, the British were obliged to withdrawal. They were successful only in denying the port to the enemy for several months to come and in extracting the 24,000 troops they had committed to the operation.[85]

As had happened at the outbreak of war in 1939, Captain Maund and his staff were again pulled from the ISTDC to serve on one of the naval staffs. They were therefore able to witness most of the Norwegian fiasco firsthand. In particular, Maund states was,

> [T]he importance of proper planning by the staffs of all three Services in collaboration. It would have been better if the forenoon of the 10th April had been spent by High Authority making the firm decision that they wanted Narvik captured and by whom the command was to be exercised, what ships, aircraft and men could be made available for the job. Then during the afternoon and night of the 10th the Commanders and staff could have sat together and at least decided where they would go and what they needed. All this again could have been read in the Manual on Combined Operations.[86]

During the whole of the campaign in Norway, British forces had failed to appoint a single

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[85] DEFE 2/697, 20-26.

[86] Maund, 58-59.

force commander, employed both troops and sailors untrained in amphibious operations, poorly utilized the RAF, did not combat load any of their ships, and made manifold other errors. Even so, they had carried out a major combined operations of sorts, the first since 1918. Though not pretty, it proved to critics and naysayers that the concept was eminently possible. Combined operations would have a future, and events then unfolding in France and the Low Countries would further demonstrate the urgent need to perfect it.[87]

[87] DEFE 2/697, 26-27.

CHAPTER 3

First Steps and Abortive Raids

While the ISTDC cadre scrambled to assess the unwelcome lessons of Norway, the new British prime minister was thinking ahead and preparing a new role for combined operations. On 1 September 1939, the same day the Germans had invaded Poland, Winston Churchill had been brought out of political exile and resumed his old post as First Lord of the Admiralty. Less than nine months later, on the same day that the Germans invaded France and the Low Countries, Churchill, now 65-years-old, replaced the failed Neville Chamberlain at 10 Downing Street.[88] Leading a parliamentary coalition of Tory, Liberal, and Labor ministers, he assumed the burden of leading Great Britain through perhaps its darkest hour in modern history. While steeling the nation and the military services for the possibility of German invasion and probability of aerial assault, he was also gazing back across the Channel and contemplating how the British could return to the Continent.[89]

His thoughts quickly turned to action. In a letter to his miliary chief of staff, Major General (by 1944, General) Hastings Ismay on 4 June 1940, Churchill declared:

> The completely defensive habit of mind which has ruined the French must not be allowed to ruin all our initiative. It is of the highest consequence to keep the largest number of German forces all along the coasts of the

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[88] Manchester, 672-673.

[89] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 207.

> countries they have conquered, and we should immediately set to work to organise raiding forces on these coasts where the populations are friendly. . . . An effort must be made to shake off the mental and moral prostration to the will and initiative of the enemy from which we suffer.[90]

Churchill knew better than most the value of action in raising one's spirits. He and others also recognized the opportunity presented by their tactical situation. With virtual command of the seas (at least in and around the channel) and a strong presence in the air, the British were in an excellent position to raid the enemy's coastline. German garrisons could be readily harassed and troop concentrations dispersed. Of most immediate importance, perhaps, those British raids could serve as an enormous psychological boost for both the public and the military services.[91]

The new prime minister, of course, did not pull this idea out of thin air. Churchill's personal history in this area, specifically as one of the primary instigators of the Gallipoli campaign, gave him a fey type of authority. After being relieved from the Admiralty post, he had gone to serve as an infantry officer on the Western Front. He commanded the 6th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers for four months before being recalled to the government in May 1916.[92] In his new position ss the Minister for Armaments, he advocated for even more amphibious raids, this time against German-held Frisian

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[90] Ibid., 208.

[91] Clifford, 126.

[92] Douglas Russell and Paul Courtenay, "Commissions held by Winston S. Churchill," [Online] Available http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=317, 26 February 2004.

Islands.[93] Despite the catastrophic political embarrassment of Gallipoli, he remained an irrepressible military schemer, undaunted by his past failures and bolstered perhaps by his past moments of glory. In the desperate summer of 1940, he was more than ready to endorse a military concept that had lain in the darkness for far too long.

Writing first to the Chiefs of Staff on the fortuitous date of the sixth of June, four years prior to the date that would become known as D-Day, the Prime Minister asked for proposals on "measures for a vigorous, enterprising, and ceaseless offensive against the whole German-occupied coastline." Even while requesting such "proposals," Churchill had already formed a clear idea of just what he wanted. For the time being, he desired the creation of units that would "butcher and bolt," that is, quickly raid the enemy and cause the maximum chaos and damage. For the long term, he envisioned the creation of a large, multifaceted organization, composed of striking companies, paratroopers to jump behind enemy lines, naval vessels for transporting and landing tanks on beaches, supported by an integrated system of intelligence. He even proposed emplacing 15-inch artillery guns along the English coast to lob shells at German positions in Belgium and France.[94]

One Toe in the Water – Bourne as the Chief of Raiding Operations

A little over a week later after the request from the Prime Minister, the Chiefs

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[93] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 208-209.

[94] Ibid., 210-211.

responded. On 14 June 1940, Lieutenant General Alan Bourne, then the Adjutant General of the Royal Marines was formally appointed as "Commander of Raiding Operations on coasts in enemy occupation and Advisor to the Chiefs of Staff on combined operations."[95] As the senior serving Royal Marine officer, Bourne was an excellent candidate for the job, highly experienced in both land and ship operations. He was also a graduate from the Imperial Defense College and the Army Staff College at Camberley. In Summer 1940, he was 58-years-old and had served as a Royal Marine since the tender age of seventeen.[96]

Riding on the waves of Churchill's enthusiasm, Bourne's initial mandate was quite broad. The official directive issued by the Chiefs of Staff on 14 June 1940 outlined the specifics of his appointment, duties, responsibilities, and limitations. Though it would be revised several times over the course of the war, this initial document provided the critical framework for the conduct of combined operations for every major landing operation for the next five years. The first substantive area addressed in this memorandum concerned raids:

> 2. The object of raiding operations will be to harass the enemy and cause him to disperse his forces, and to create material damage particularly on the coast line from Northern Norway to the western limit of German-occupied France.
>
> 3. We propose to give you, within limits of the forces and equipment

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[95] "Early history of Combined Operations: notes, memoranda and interview by Senior Officers 1942," DEFE 2/699, 25.

[96] Fergusson, 47.

> available and subject to directions which you receive from time to time from the Chiefs of Staff, complete discretion in the choice of objectives and the scale of operation undertaken. The Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee have been instructed to help you in the choice of suitable objectives. You will keep the Chiefs of Staff informed of the operations you propose to carry out.[97]

To accomplish this ambitious task, Bourne was given direct control of six independent companies from the Army to conduct raids. These and other soldiers who were being recruited would very soon be consolidated into a single Special Service Brigade. They would also soon lose the moniker of "independent companies" and be renamed the Commandos.[98]

The story of the Commandos is almost inseparable from that of combined operations during the Second World War. These troops served as the sharp end of the lance for the entire concept, as well as the most prominent face, both then and now, for the whole enterprise. The growth of these companies into the famous Commandos was a process concurrent to the evolution of Combined Operations Command itself. The crucial element to grasp for now is that the Chiefs of Staff had given Bourne a group of trained killers and free reign to use them against the coast of Nazi-controlled Europe.

Though their principal element of concern initially was raiding operations, Bourne's directive also gave him authority over the real nuts and bolts of the combined

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[97] DEFE 2/699, 25.

[98] Fergusson, 48-49.

operations warfare concept – the development of landing craft and amphibious training techniques – along with encouragement to press on in this area. The organization to do just that, of course, already existed. To that end, Bourne was given complete command of the ISTDC. Captain Maund and the officers of this command had been keeping busy. Like in the Norway operation, they had not played a major part in the workings of the Dunkirk evacuation. They had arranged for nine experimental landing craft stationed at Portsmouth to be shipped to the English Channel. Of those nine craft, five were destroyed in transit along with the ship *Clan Macalister* by the Luftwaffe. The remaining four craft did extraordinary work, with one craft accounting for the rescue of some 2,000 troops.[99]

In addition to the above, three Brigade Groups of Army troops were earmarked for special training, which Bourne's command would provide, on combined operations. He was also promised a number of parachute volunteers to form an airborne unit for deep strike operations, though this mission would soon fall back into the Army's conventional area of responsibility. Most important, Bourne would serve as the "go-to" man for technical advice and assistance for any combined operation. The Chiefs of Staff, through their recently established Inter-Service Planning Staff, would still retain authority in planning and execution, but Bourne would play an essential role in any operation.[100]

Unfortunately for Bourne, his wide-ranging power and responsibility would not

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[99] DEFE 2/699, 3-4.

[100] Ibid., 26.

last long. In his first and only month in command, he gathered together a strong staff, mostly from the ISTDC, and began to build the framework of the organization. He also oversaw the mounting of two previous planned raids into German-held territory: one against the Pas-de-Calais area and the other against the Isle of Guernsey. Each raid consisted of about 120 men from the independent companies. Carried across by destroyers, the men went ashore in RAF high speed launches manned by civilian crews. The raids caused no significant damage to the enemy and did little other than reinforcing the need for better trained, military crews and improved landing craft.[101] By the end of June 1940, despite Bourne's somewhat admirable start, Churchill recognized the need for a change.

The change was more a matter of perspective than of any critique on Bourne's abilities. The appointment of a Royal Marine as Commander of Raiding Operations at first seemed eminently logical. Raids from the sea had been a traditional marine mission for as long as there had been marines. Both the magnitude of the task and Bournes' traditional subordinate service-role, especially regarding the Royal Navy, soon became an issue. Moreover, the whole concept of combined operations was meant to be much more than just amphibious raids. Victory would require the virtual reengineering of the men, material and ideas in order for a return to the continent to be successful. In the following passage from his book *The Watery Maze*, Bernard Fergusson summarizes just what this new style of warfare was intended to be:

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[101] Clifford, 126-127.

> a revolutionary concept called for a revolutionary organization. No single Service Ministry could achieve what was needed; nor would it have worked to nominate one as "top dog," or even as *primus inter pares*. No Adjutant-General of Royal Marines, however brilliant or able, could suddenly don or be endowed with the necessary authority. Having served all his life under the Board of Admiralty, he (Bourne) could hardly be expected to impose unpopular policies upon Their Lordships, let alone-as might well-become necessary – to oppose all three Ministries.[102]

Churchill also recognized the nature of the growing political and bureaucratic requirements of such a leadership position. A "Commander for Raiding Operations" would not be enough. To accomplish the prescribed tasks, Britain needed something outside the services – an entire new command, as well as an officer sufficiently forceful and senior to guide the mission to completion. As fate would have it, just such an individual was available for the job.

Enter the Old Sea Dog

The man available was Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, veteran of both Gallipoli and Zeebrugge, now 68-years-old in 1940, and out of active military service for much of the past decade. Despite his formal retirement from military service, Keyes neither had been inactive nor uninvolved by any measure. In 1934, he ran for Parliament as a Conservative and was elected to serve as the representative for the constituency of

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[102] Fergusson, 51.

Portsmouth, home port for the Royal Navy.[103] Keyes was a vocal critic of the Admiralty and naval policy in general, perhaps in part because of his bitterness on not being appointed as First Sea Lord (the senior position in the Royal Navy). At the outbreak of war in September 1939, he was sought out as an emissary to the British Government by King Leopold of Belgium. Keyes had been a long time friend of the Belgian royal family and the foreign king trusted him implicitly.[104] The Admiral acted as an unofficial liaison between the British and the neutral government of the Flemish country. He remained a strong advocate for the Belgian King even after the invasion and occupation of that small nation.[105]

Despite his age and association with the Belgians, Keyes was extremely keen to become an active participant in the war. He had a chance to observe the new German war machine first hand while assisting King Leopold, and it only fueled his desire to once again serve.[106] A friend and confidant of Churchill's for close to forty years, Keyes also knew he was one of the few senior leaders who could legitimately claim a background in planning and executing combined operations. When the Prime Minister came to the realization that a different sort of officer would be needed to guide and build this new

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[103] Aspinall-Oglander, 327.

[104] Ibid., 343.

[105] Fergusson, 51-52.

[106] Keyes, 81.

command, the old admiral's name quickly came to the forefront.[107]

The appointment was not without some trepidation. Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, the then-current First Sea Lord and member of the Chiefs of Staff, had served under Keyes several times in the past and warily sought to dissuade Churchill from appointing his old boss to the position. Keyes had been an even more merciless critic of the Admiralty since the wars' start. As the Norway campaign had developed, he had gone on to press both Pound and Churchill to be given command of a naval task force to recapture the port of Trondheim. His enthusiasm for the fight was admirable, if a bit daunting coming from a man of his age and experience.[108] Still, in 1940 Great Britain, Admirals of the Fleet, like Field Marshals in the Army (think Lord Kitchener in World War I) were regarded as on active duty for life, and Keyes was considered ready and able to fulfill the command.[109]

Director or Advisor?

Unfortunately, the seeds of future problems were sown by the executive nature of Keyes' appointment. Writing to General Ismay and Sir Edward Bridges, the Secretary to

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[107] Cecil Aspinall-Oglander, *Roger Keyes: Being the Biography of Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes of Zeebrugge and Dover G.C.B., K.C.V.O., C.M.G.,D.S.O.* (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), 383.

[108] Imagine Senator John McCain pressing President Bush and Donald Rumsfeld to give him command of a Carrier Battle Group in the Global War on Terror and you get the idea.

[109] Fergusson, 52-53.

the War Cabinet, on 17 July 1940, Churchill remarked,

> I have appointed Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes as Director of Combined Operations. He should take over the duties and resources now assigned to General Bourne. . . . Pending any further arrangements, Sir Roger Keyes will form contact with the Service Departments through General Ismay.

The question raised by Churchill's memorandum is whether Keyes was to be an Advisor on Combined Operations to the Chiefs of Staff, as Bourne as has been, or the Director for Combined Operations, with independent powers and an almost equal standing. The evolution of just how "Advisor" became "Director" is unclear. Bourne himself claims to have originated the title of Director in response to an original recommendation to refer to the chief by the ridiculous code name of "Cochrane."[110] There is no reason to doubt this contention, but the fact that the organization was referred to as a directorate probably played a large part as well. At the time of Keyes' appointment, the Chiefs of Staff themselves had no problems with the title of "Director of Combined Operations" and quickly passed along their concurrence.[111]

The issue of what specific title Keyes held is directly tied the question of what was the scope of his responsibilities. It is generally believed that, unlike LTG Bourne's appointment, no formal directive was ever issued concerning the scope of Keyes' authority and that he would simply assume whatever duties' Bourne had previously

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[110] Charles Messenger, *The Commandos 1940-1946* (London: William Kimber, 1985), 32.

[111] "Appointment of Sir Roger Keyes as Director of Combined Operations 1940 Jul," PREM 3/330/1.

possessed.[112] This is not the entirely the case. There seems to have been, at the very least, a redrafting of the original appointment memorandum. Entitled "Draft Directive to Director Combined Operations," the opening paragraph of this new memorandum mirrored that of the old: "Your duties comprise those of Commander of Raiding Operations on coasts in enemy occupation and Advisor to the Chiefs of Staff on Combined Operations." Keyes' written response to this initial document was very favorable, stating he wanted to examine it for one additional day before commenting, but he believed "it will suit the case very well indeed."[113]

There were several other items of note contained in Keyes' revised draft directive. The draft completed eliminated parachute forces from the new director's span of control, but gave him exclusive jurisdiction over irregular troops; the Commandos would belong to them along. With the other demands it faced, the Chiefs of Staff felt the operational needs of combined operations fell more in line with the specialized requirements of these new troops. Though individuals would still be recruited by and from the Army, Keyes' new organization would along be responsible for training, organizing, and equipping them. Even more than Bourne, the admiral now had ownership of an elite group of soldiers with whom to employ against the German foe.[114]

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[112] This particular fact was found in multiple sources: the official Combined Operations Command history (DEFE 2/697, 31) Clifford's *Amphibious Warfare Development in Britain and America 1920-1940*, 131, Fergusson's *The Watery Maze*, 52, and the biography *Roger Keyes* by Aspinall-Oglander.

[113] WO 216/54.

[114] " Re-organization and location of Special Service troops: revised directive to Director, Combined Operations 1940 Oct," WO 216/54.

Given the above, one would likely assume that Keyes and the Chiefs of Staff were each at least initially satisfied with their individual understanding of the situation; the draft directive would do.[115] The problem for the future was that while the Chiefs believed Admiral Keyes to be a subordinate and Advisor, Keyes saw himself as a Director, responsible only to Churchill (in that man's role as both the Prime Minister as well as the defense minister) with correspondence passed through General Ismay. This latter understanding would seem to reflect Churchill's intent, but time and crisis would tell whether this would hold true. There seems to have been no thorough review by the Chiefs of Staff of the title and responsibilities at Keyes' time of the appointment. A possible explanation is because of what they saw as the inherent limitations (troops, ships, and other resources) to the new director's position. More than likely, they just wanted to pass the matter along, as it was obviously a pet project for the new P.M. Regardless of the various parties understanding, the confusion of whether one was a Director or Advisor would plague Churchill and his military hierarchy for over half the war.

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[115] My research discovered neither any formal adoption nor additional revision of the directive beyond the above discussed draft. Based on the situation up to that point, it would seem that the Chiefs of Staff hoped Keyes would abide by their envisioned limitation on his authority. Sadly, events would prove otherwise.

Into Being – The Directorate for Combined Operations

Keyes' appointment did much more than signal his return to an active command. It also heralded the true birth of unique organization. In his memoirs, Churchill remarked that he created the command "for the study and exercise of this form of warfare."[116] The new Directorate for Combined Operations (DCO), as the first independent multi-service organization in modern military history charged with this area of responsibility, would eventually help propel both the British and the Americans to the highest quality of joint warfare ever seen.[117]

To further reinforce their status as a separate entity, one of Keyes' first actions was to move the entirety of Bourne's old headquarters staff from the Admiralty building into new quarters at Richmond Terrace, conveniently the location of Churchill's wartime offices. Despite this move, Keyes was not blind to the need to interface closely with the Admiralty on a wide range of matters, especially in the areas of both naval planning and construction. To accomplish this, two sections representing the DCO were set up. The first, dealing with the area of naval planning, went by the laborious title of the Assistant Directorate of the Operations Division of the Naval Staff. This planning group would remain in existence throughout the war and well afterwards, providing continuity for

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[116] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 213.

[117] Beaumount, 85-86. The DCO would evolve as the war went on and be renamed the Combined Operation Command (COC).

combined operations despite any ups and downs in the parent organization.[118] The second was established in the Admiralty under the Director of Naval Equipment to coordinate the procurement and building of landing craft. These independent sections worked very well in concert with their Admiralty counterparts and were regarded as virtually a single department until well after the end of the war.[119]

Outside of the staff, Keyes' initial assessment of the organization's resource state was bleak. In July 1940, only 1,000 men were undergoing training for the striking companies and no suitable ships for available were either training or operational deployment. Churchill was pressing hard to see a significant raid launched by October 1940, and Keyes wanted to lead it in person.[120] With this momentum behind them, the DCO began to grow, slowly at first, then by leaps and bounds. By the end of August 1940, four bases (Warash in Southampton, Hayling Island, Dartmouth, and Brightlingsea) had been established for both the training of troops and as a launching site for raids. Several capital ships, including the HMS *Tormentor*, *Northney*, and *Dorlin*, were allotted to the DCO and anchored at these bases to serve as both trainers as well as warships when raids were launched.[121]

In addition to the capital ships, the DCO began serious work on assembling a

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[118] Notes for compilation of narrative of the development of the Combined Operations organisation, 1940-1945," DEFE 2/696, 6.

[119] DEFE 2/697, 33.

[120] Aspinall-Oglander, 384-385.

[121] Clifford, 128-129.

flotilla of landing craft for actual operations. Four different types of organizations were envisioned: Type A – consisting of fast motor boats able to reach on their own power from England to raid the French Coast, able to land up to 150 men per mission; Type B – consisting of dedicated landing craft with a range of 500 nautical miles, able to putting ashore about one company's worth (150) of men and/or 100 men and a light tank; Type C – similar to Type B but with greater range (attack radiuses from Norway to Spain) and larger troops loads (240 men); Type D – consisting of ocean going vessels equipped with landing craft, virtually unlimited range, able to land up to an entire battalion (480 men) worth of troops. The Directorate hoped to build three Type A, five Type B, two Type 3, and three Type D units. Twelve Landing Ships Infantry (LSI) were already being converted, along with more than three hundred other minor craft either being built or almost completed. Their goal was to be able to carry out a company-sized raid anywhere along the Atlantic coastline at any time.[122]

Training the Men – The Commandos

The independent striking troops who would be leaping from these boats to attack the enemy were going through growing pains of their own. These soldiers had already seen action in Norway as well as in the abortive June raids against the French coast. They had been recruited the year before from various Territorial units (roughly equivalent

[122] DEFE 2/696, 8.

to the US Reserves or National Guard) as well as from volunteers assigned to Home Station training units and staff positions. These soldiers received little if any training prior to deployment to Norway. But overall, they performed well enough to not be disbanded after the end of the campaign.[123]

The Commando concept itself was conceived of by then Royal Artillery Lieutenant Colonel Dudley Clarke. Clarke proposed the forming of larger, battalion-sized units to carry out raids and harass the enemy. It was an attempt to recapture the spirit and success of irregular formations like the South African Boer Commandos, who had harried the British for two years during the Boer War in the early 1900s. Then serving on the General Staff, Clarke was able to pitch his idea to the Chief of the General Staff General Sir John Dill on 4 June 1940, who soon passed it onto an enthusiastic Churchill. His timing was excellent. The prime minister's directive on raiding operations to the Chiefs followed just two days later.[124]

After the approval was given, the Army quickly jumped into getting these new units up and running. The Commandos advertised themselves as looking for "men of good physique," "able to swim and navigate boats," and displaying "leadership and initiative." Interviews were conducted by the units' officers. Once selected, soldiers were not billeted on military installations. Instead, they were given a stipend and told

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[123] Neillands, 11.

[124] Hilary St. George Saunders, *The Green Beret: The Story of the Commandos 1940-1945* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1973), 14-15.

they were responsible for finding their own food and lodging as a test of their individual responsibility and initiative.[125]

With the organizational structure still in flux, training and recruitment for the Commandos was handled at the unit level. The experience of Royal Artillery Captain John Durnford-Slater was typical of the process. In early June 1940, Durnford-Slater volunteered to a recruitment ad promising "hazardous work." In less than a month, he found himself promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and given command of the nonexistent No. 3 Commando. Assigned a specified region, he was then ordered to recruit and train his own unit.[126]

Left to their own devices, training was as hard as the units could make it. Heavy emphasis was put on physical conditioning. During the winter of 1940-1941, one unit based in Northern Ireland marched from Crumlin to Londonderry with full pack and equipment, a distance of 63 miles, in just nineteen hours. Foot marches of thirty miles distances were common, as were extensive unarmed combat and weapons training. Everything was used, from the standard .303 Enfield rifles, to knives and brass knuckles, to the Thompson submachine gun.[127] The US-made .45 caliber Thompson would become one of the main symbols of both the Commandos and Combined Operations. The

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[125] Brigadier John Durnford-Slater, *Commando: Memoirs of a Fighting Commander in World War Two* (London: Greenhill Books, 1991), 11-13

[126] Durnford-Slater, 14-15.

[127] Neillands, 29.

ubiquitous "Tommy Gun" still exists on the patch used by the British services to this day.

By the end of July 1940, the various independent companies had been grouped into battalions under a Special Service, or SS, Brigade. The first commander of this unit was Brigadier J. C. Haydon, an Army officer who would eventually rise to command the whole of Combined Operations. Of course, the name "SS Brigade," because of its Nazi connotations, did not sit well with either the troopers or the General Staff, and was soon unofficially abandoned, though the term remained in official use until well after D-day. From the very beginning, the battalions adopted the title Commando, and by November 1940, the name became official. By the following March, eleven Commando battalions were in existence. [128] With Admiral of Fleet Keyes now in command, procurement of landing craft rolling, and hundreds of Commandos chomping at the bit, the Directorate of Combined Operations was ready to enter the fight.

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[128] Neillands, 39-40.

CHAPTER 4

Frustration and Relief

The Commandos were not alone among their countrymen in wanting to take revenge upon the Germans. While the Directorate of Combined Operations had been "stood up" during the middle months of 1940, the British nation had endured mounting losses in both materiel and human lives. Wolfpacks of German U-boats roamed the Atlantic, attacking convoys bringing desperately needed equipment and supplies from the United States. From September 1939 to September 1940, the U-boats alone sent more than 750,000 tons of merchant ships to the icy depths. When one factored in losses due to airplanes, mines, and attacks by other craft, the total surpassed 1.2 million.[129]

In addition, London and other major English cities endured the horror of German air attacks. Known as the Battle of Britain, this fight is regarded by several noted historians as perhaps the most crucial campaign of the Second World War.[130] Generally

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[129] John Keegan, ed., *HarperCollins Atlas of the Second World War* (London: Borders Group, 1998), 48. This volume is a fantastic resource chock full of maps, statistics, and essays on WW2 by an impressive selection of (primarily British) authors and historians. For more on the Battle of the Atlantic, see Andrew Williams and David Syrett, *The Battle of the Atlantic: Hitler's Gray Wolves of the Sea and the Allies' Desperate Struggle to Defeat Them* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

[130] Specifically, see B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York: Perigee Books, 1982 (reprint)), 90; John Keegan, *The Second World War* (New York; Penguin Books, 1989), 88-89; Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (London: Belknap Press, 2000), 88-90. The three noted works are but a handful of major studies devoted to this campaign. A subject search of the VIRGO Online Library at the University of Virginia (https://virgo.lib.virginia.edu) produced another 36 major titles devoted to the Battle of Britain. This does not count journal and magazine articles, movies, and online media. The importance and/or significance of a campaign is not determined by volume alone, but it offers a good indicator.

considered to have been from mid-June to mid-September 1940, the battle subjected the city of London to a horrific bombardment unlike any city had seen before. By the end of 1941, more than 43,000 British civilians had been killed as a direct result of German air attack.[131] For Britain, victory in the skies meant both survival and a chance to strike back. When compiled, all of these statistics and figures did nothing but give fuel to Churchill's fire in wanting to hammer their Teutonic foe.

Unfortunately, despite Churchill and others desire to go on the offensive, Britain's capability to mount a significant action was just not yet there. Combined Operations was meant to be the rapier (eventually becoming a mailed fist) that would mount that attack. In the last half of 1940, though, the organization's offensive capability was at best limited, though growing. This, however, did not prevent the launching of some premature attacks against supposed targets of opportunity. Just after Keyes assumed the directorship in August 1940, he entertained a proposal to assist Free French forces led by General Charles de Gaulle in securing the port of Dakar, a French colony on the west coast of Africa. Code-named MENACE, the operation called for a significant naval escort, landing craft, and amphibious-trained forces to seize the port if the Vichy colonial forces resisted.[132]

De Gaulle was a French Army officer who had commanded the 4th Armored

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[131] Keegan, *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 886. Also see Len Deighton, *Fighter: The True Story of the Battle of Britain* (New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1993).

[132] DEFE 2/697, 35.

Division in Northwest France during the May 1940 German invasion. Beginning the war as a Brigadier General, he was promoted near the end of June to the hastily created position of Undersecretary of State for National Defense and became an advisor to French President Paul Reynard.[133] Escaping to London in July, he declared himself the head of the French government-in-exile and was quickly recognized by Churchill as having a legitimate status.[134] De Gaulle's intent regarding Dakar was by successfully seizing such a large and recognized French colony, he would greatly enhance his claim of representing the Free French people. Characteristically of De Gaulle, he wanted the operation to retain "an essentially French character." However, he possessed few of the ships and other assets necessary to accomplish the mission. Despite the precarious nature of the request, the British agreed to undertake it. Hastily assembling the men and materials, the allies set sail toward the West African coast on 31 August 1940 with a four-ship task force in tow.[135]

Training to Get it Right

Thankfully for both de Gaulle and the British, the landing at Dakar never took

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[133] Horne, 562. Also see Robert Smith Thompson, *Pledge to Destiny: Charles de Gaulle and the rise of the Free French* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

[134] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 187-191. Also see Francois Kersaudy, *Churchill and de Gaulle*, (New York: Atheneum, 1982) and Julian Jackson, *De Gaulle* (London: Haus, 2003).

[135] DEFE 2/697, 34-35. Also see Arthur Marder, *Operation Menace and the Dudley North Affair* (London: Oxford Press, 1976).

place. While en route to their objective, the British task force was diverted to intercept six Vichy French ships that had sortied from Casablanca.[136] Since the controversial destruction by the British of the Vichy French fleet at Oran in French North Africa (present-day Algeria), neutralization of non-Free French naval power had become a priority.[137] In the end, the task force was completely unable to find the quasi-neutral ships. Accomplishing none of their goals, the British and their Free French allies gave up and returned home by the end of September 1940.[138]

Despite the very meager results, the experience with Dakar, like the abortive raids of early summer, served to reveal further crucial lessons on the staging of a large-scale combined operation. First, no preexisting combined staff composed of naval and army officers existed, so one had to be quickly through together. This deficiency would soon be addressed by Keyes and his embryonic staff. Second, the ground and naval commanders positioned themselves both on a ship that was to provide bombardment support to the landing. In order to command and control not only the landing but other ships in the task force, some sort of headquarters vessel would be required; this too was soon to be addressed.[139] Third, the task force had little if any accurate intelligence

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[136] Ibid., 35-36.

[137] Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, 201-202. For more on Churchill and this controversial decision see Tute Warren, *The Deadly Stroke: The Tragic Little Known Story of the Destruction of the French Fleet at Oran* (New York: Coward McCann and Geoghegan, 1973).

[138] DEFE 2/697, 35.

[139] Fergusson, 66-67.

concerning the objective. They had been completely dependant on de Gaulle and his staff for information and had received nowhere near the quantity necessary to ensure a successful landing, much less securing the port. This fault would unfortunately surface again for the Combined Operations staff, with tragic results. Lastly, the operation was planned and launched in an atmosphere of lax security and minimal secrecy. Like the lack of detailed intelligence, this failure would also come to haunt the British at another French port, Dieppe.[140]

For the British in Fall 1940, that dire event was still to come. Still, Keyes and his staff realized that the resolution for poor synchronization on the part of the services was dedicated, intensive training by a united sea-air-land team. One of the admiral's first actions as Director was to unleash his staff to find a suitable place to conduct this specialized training. The site found and decided upon was the ancestral home to Clan Campbell – the ancient burgh of Inveraray in Northern Scotland.[141] Nestled at the inland end of Loch Fyne, the small town of Inveraray had seen little attention from the British military other than an occasional foray into the loch by the Royal Navy Diving School. The DCO was looking for some place where large numbers of troops and ships could practice in some secrecy; Inveraray was a good location. It possessed both extensive

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[140] DEFE 2/697, 35-37.

[141] Fergusson, 57. Inveraray is the traditional seat of the Duke of Argyll. For more on the history of the area, see Alexander Fraser, *Royal Burgh of Inveraray* (Edinburgh: St Andrews Press, 1977); Ian G. Lindsay and Mary Cosh, *Inveraray and the Dukes of Argyll* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1973).

shoreline as well as anchorage for ships and landing craft to practice their maneuvers.[142]

On 21 August 1940, the character of the sleepy little town changed dramatically as an advance party from the DCO showed up and appropriated the Argyll Arms Hotel as their temporary headquarters.[143] Within two weeks, on 1 September 1940, Inveraray became the first Combined Training Centre (CTC). Another old sea dog, Vice Admiral T. J. Hallett, was called out of retirement and appointed as its first commander. In keeping with tradition, the naval wing of the CTC commissioned a drifter ship as the HMS *Quebec*.[144] The Army soon followed up and sent their staff and representatives. In the spirit of combined operations, the senior Army representative served as Vice Admiral Hallett's second-in-command. By war's end, this position would be held by a Major General.[145]

Construction on docks and facilities at Inveraray proceeded apace. Numerous improvised arrangements had to be made in order to accommodate the large numbers of sailors and Army troops that invaded the small Scottish town.[146] By early March 1941, however, Inveraray had been transformed. It soon began hosting brigade-sized training exercises under the aegis of the Directorate for Combined Operations. It would serve as

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[142] "Brief History of the Combined Training Centre – Inveraray," DEFE 2/699, 51.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Naval flag officers traditionally have a ship, in *extremis* any sort of vessel, as their "flagship." A drifter ship is a medium sized vessel designed to loiter close to shore.

[145] Clifford, 129.

[146] DEFE 2/699, 41.

the primary amphibious training site for the Army for the remainder of the war. It was not the only one, though, as events in the fall of 1940 would shift the focus of the British military toward the Mediterranean and the Middle East.[147]

More Plans and Proposed Action

Though encouraged by the progress made by both the Commandos and establishment of the various bases and training sites, Admiral of the Fleet Keyes was still extremely eager to involve the DCO, and himself, directly in combat operations. Circumstances in the western Mediterranean as well as the Aegean gave him to opportunity to press for such a chance. The first was the growing fear that Spain under its dictator Generalissimo Francisco Franco would enter the war on the Axis side.[148] Such a change from neutrality to active alliance would imperil the important British stronghold of Gibraltar, which guarded movement into and out of the Mediterranean. To deal with this possibility, the Chiefs of Staff and their planning staff developed the outline of a plan to seize the Spanish-held Canary Islands. With control over this critical archipelago, Britain, even with the loss of Gibraltar, could still mass enough naval and air power to

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[147] Clifford, 129.

[148] For more on Spain and Franco during World War II, see Charles Burton Burdick, *Germany's Military Strategy and Spain in World War II* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968); Christian Leitz and David J. Dunthorn, eds., *Spain in an International Context 1936-1959* (London: Berghahn Books, Inc., 1999).

force the Pillars of Hercules and ensure free access from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean.[149]

To accomplish this task, the DCO was directed to section off the whole of the Special Service Brigade (Commandos) and have them prepared to execute at any time. In addition to Commandos, two brigades of Royal Marines, and many precious landing craft were also earmarked, to the exclusion of other possible uses.[150] Keyes and others felt this was an over-allocation of forces for any operation that may never take place. He wanted to get his units into the fight. The invasion of Greece by Fascist Italy on 26 October 1940 gave him another opportunity to argue for a better utilization of the Commandos and combined operations.[151]

Keyes' plan was to use the Commandos to seize the rocky Italian isle of Pantellaria, which lay astride the sea lanes between Sicily and Tunis. The island was already an impediment to British traffic from Gibraltar to Alexandria and the eastern Mediterranean. It possessed excellent airfields and could be used as a base to assist the besieged Britain bastion of Malta as well as interdict Axis SLOCs between Italy and the port of Tunis in Libya. Churchill had asked Keyes and the DCO to examine the possibility of seizing the base as far back as early September. Keyes' analysis described

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[149] Aspinall-Oglander, 389. A question has been raised on how a group of islands off the coast of Africa could replace the fortress of Gibraltar. They couldn't. However, they would serve as an excellent staging base for both harassing the Axis and supporting British sorties into the Mediterranean. It was by no means a perfect solution, but it was one that was both planned and extensively prepared for.

[150] Clifford, 132.

[151] Aspinall-Oglander, 390.

such an operation as hazardous but definitely feasible.[152] His assessment was not universal. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet, was opposed to such a blatant attack on Axis held territory, since once taken, it would require significant resources to be held against the inevitable counterattack. Despite this not easily dismissed concern, both Churchill and Keyes were enthusiastic toward the venture, as it seemed to personify the offensive spirit they wanted to imbue across the military.[153]

After some hesitation, on 2 November 1940, the British Chiefs of Staff endorsed the plan. Keyes himself would lead the assault, code-named Operation WORKSHOP, from his flagship. Churchill had consented to this request from Keyes, though he remarked to his friend, "I may only be consigning you to your death . . . but I know you won't mind that."[154] Two thousand of the newly-trained and organized Commandos, under the command of Brigadier General Charles Haydon, were allotted to Keyes for the mission, as well as four transports, three recently converted LSIs, and other smaller craft. Despite continued nervousness from the Chiefs of Staff, the operation seemed to be a "GO" until mid December.[155] At the last moment, intelligence confirmed the recent arrival of German *Stuka* dive-bombers on Sicily. The addition of this firepower to the

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[152] Ibid., 390.

[153] Messenger, 43.

[154] Ibid., 391-393.

[155] Fergusson, 74-75.

Axis defense was judged too great for the WORKSHOP forces to overcome. Propelled by this piece of information, the Chiefs exercised their authority and cancelled the operation. Instead of storming beaches of Pantellaria, Haydon and his Commandos were diverted to the Middle East to support British forces in North Africa.[156]

Confrontation between Keyes and the Chiefs

The last-minute cancellation of WORKSHOP made Keyes furious. Not only was he robbed of his chance for personal glory, but two thousand of his beloved Commandos were, in his mind, virtually stolen from him. To the admiral, the whole experience symbolized everything that was wrong about the Chiefs of Staff and their prosecution of the war. In a four-page letter to Churchill, Keyes pleaded,

> I have not bothered you with my difficulties (with the Chiefs) more than I could help, since you appointed me D.C.O. and gave me an outline of what you wished me to do, and the men and vessels I would have under my control. I was grateful to you, for it seemed to me a wonderful opportunity for being of real service, and I had visions of waging the kind of amphibious warfare which has always appealed to me, and which I have had far more experience than any living soldier or sailor. . . . When it was apparent to me that the C.O.S. (Chiefs of Staff) Committee had not intention of making use of me for the planning and preparation of combined operations, I turned to the one active responsibility within my directive, which would enable my experience to be made use of. . . . If the D.C.O. is to be of any use to the Minister of Defense (Churchill), he must be his representative on the C.O.S. Committee for all matters concerned with combined operations. . . . A Chiefs of Staff Committee, aided by little

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[156] DEFE 2/697, 41. These commandos would go on to see extensive service against the Axis in the Middle East, to include raiding Field Marshall Rommel's HQ. Their example help spawn such legendary units as the Long Range Desert Group and the Special Air Service. For more, see H. W. Wynter, *Special Forces in the Desert War, 1940-1943* (London: The National Archives (PRO), 2001).

> people on the various Joint Committees can be relied upon to do NOTHING (original emphasis).[157]

Keyes, it seems, was a little less than honest in his claim not to have "bothered" Churchill "more than he could help." During the course of research for this thesis, dozens of letters, most multiple pages in length, were unearthed. In them, Keyes is constantly berating both Churchill and his military secretary General Ismay for support in his dealings with the Chiefs, as well as urging the Prime Minister to endorse various raids and other commando operations.[158] The above citation is fairly typical of Keyes' prose.

Further events would soon give Admiral of the Fleet Keyes even more reasons to complain. Though the Chiefs of Staff had not formalized a new directive outlining Keyes duties and responsibilities after his appointment in July 1940, their interaction with him over the following eight months had convinced them of the need to do so. In March 1941, the Chiefs issued a formal revised directive to the DCO. It reinforced the restrictions on Keyes and the DCO for planning and executing operations with not more than five thousand men. Even then, the DCO would be responsible for working out the details in conjunction with the Chief's Joint Planning Staff (JPS). In the case of a larger (more than 5,000-man) operation, the DCO would be limited to a consultatory role. Finally, the Commandos and their Special Service Brigade would no longer be the

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[157] Letter from Sir Roger Keyes to the Prime Minister, 4 February 1941, DEFE 2/698, 52-54.

[158] Both full copies and extracts of these letters are contained in DEFE 2/698, aptly titled "Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes correspondence." From August to October 1941, Keyes send ten separate letters to both Churchill and Ismay. In an early letter from that year, he remarked "As Minister of Defense you appointed me Director of Combined Operations and made a point of my having direct access to you." (DEFE 2/698, 47). Keyes obviously held onto this privilege to the end.

exclusive possession of the DCO, but would instead report directly to the War Office. The DCO would still be responsible for training them as well as leading them in smaller-scale raids, but Keyes would no longer be the singular commander in charge of these elite troops.[159]

Despite the radical nature of these changes, Keyes seems to have had no immediate comment on the new directive. This is noted specifically by several sources and seems in direct contrast to the character of a man who was ready to fight against any imposition, implied or otherwise, on his sphere of influence.[160] Fergusson suggests in *The Watery Maze* that perhaps Keyes believed his personal relationship with Churchill would trump any dictates from the Chiefs, even though the revised directive specifically placed him "under the general direction of the Minister of Defense *and* the Chiefs of Staff".[161] Another reason Keyes believed he was secure might be that in March 1941, the Commando scored their first major victory against enemy-held shores.

Operation CLAYMORE – Lofoten Islands, 3/4 March 1941

The various newly-formed and harshly-trained Commandos were straining at the leash to launch some sort of operation. Like Keyes, they had been bitterly disappointed

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[159] Clifford, 133-134.

[160] This impression is noted in both in Clifford, 131-132 and Fergusson, 80. Given what has been described of Keyes' personality and character, it does not seem like a false assertion.

[161] Fergusson, 80.

by the last-minute cancellation of the Operation WORKSHOP in December 1940. The Number (No.) 3 Commando Battalion, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Durnford-Slater, had been already uploaded and onboard ships when the word came to return to base. Following that, Admiral Keyes had whispered to Durnford-Slater, "Don't worry. I've got another one up my sleeve for you. No. 3 Commando are my first choice and I will guarantee to have you in on it." Keyes soon kept his promise. In February 1941, Keyes alerted both him that his unit would be participating in a raid on German-held Lofoten Islands in Norway.[162]

Located more than 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle, the Lofoten Islands did not seem at first to hold any tactical or strategical importance. Mainly concerned with fishing, the small islands did, though, hold eleven factories that refined and processed fish oil for the German war effort. This substance was a key ingredient in the glycerine used in explosives. Destruction of these factories would put a definite kink in the enemy's munition production. As well, it was a goal well within the capabilities of the Commandos, with a small (less than 400-man) garrison and only a 900-mile boat ride from their bases in Northern Scotland; it was the perfect target for a combined operation.[163]

On 1 March 1941, a task force composed of five destroyers, two converted cross-

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[162] Durnford-Slater, 41-43.

[163] "Lofoten Island Raid – 3/4 MAR 1941," [Online] Available http//www.combinedops.com/Lofoten_Islands_Raid.htm, 13 February 2004.

Channel ferries, and two capital ships, the HMS *Princess Emma* and HMS *Princess Beatrix*, departed Scapa Flow in Northern Scotland for Norway. New Landing Crafts, Assault (LCAs), the product of much hard work and effort from the ISTDC, had been mounted to the capital ships pulleys in place of lifeboats. Five hundred men from No. 3 and No. 4 Commando, sappers (demolition experts) from the Royal Engineers, as well as interpreters from the Free Norwegian Forces, took part in the raid.[164] The British conducted four separate simultaneous landings against the main island in the Lofoten chain. The Germans and their Norwegian Quisling partners were caught completely by surprise.[165] After putting up some small resistance, to include a minor naval engagement, the German garrison surrendered. Despite numerous sharp firefights, the Commandos suffered zero casualties.[166]

The operation was a stunning success. In total, the British captured more than 225 German prisoners, plus an additional sixty Quislings, and recruited more than 300 local volunteers for the Free Norwegian forces fighting in exile.[167] The Commandos also destroyed the eleven fish-oil factories and five enemy vessels. Perhaps what is most important, the force also recovered the spare rotors from a German *Kriegsmarine*

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[164] Neillands, 43-44.

[165] Quislings were named for the traitorous Norwegian leader of the Fascist National Union Party, Vidkum Quisling. He was made the prime minister and eventually the president by the occupying Nazis. Following the war, he was tried for treason and executed. See Keegan, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 716.

[166] Saunders, *The Green Berets*, 44-45.

[167] Messenger, 48.

trawler's Enigma code machine. These rotors were sent onto the British intelligence center at Bletchley Park and would be of enormous help in decoding German radio traffic.[168]

PILGRIM and the End of the Keyes Era

In the overall scheme of the war, even with the seizure of the Enigma materiel, the raid on Lofoten was a minor affair. It was very much a portent of raids to come, but unfortunately would not be followed up on for several months. The reason for this was growing direness of the British position in the Mediterranean. In April 1941, British forces on both sides of that body of water had suffered stinging reverses. In North Africa, the German *Afrika Korps* under the command of "The Desert Fox," Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, had swept the British out of Cyrenaica in less than ten days.[169] In Greece, the invading Germans had forced the evacuation of British troops from that ancient by the third week of April.[170] These rapid Axis successes brought new life to the plan to seize

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[168] "Lofoten Islands Raid – 3/4 MAR 1941," Ibid. For more on the German Enigma machine and its part in the war (for both the Nazis and the Allies), see Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, *ENIGMA – The Battle of the Code* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2001), 132; F. H. Hinsley, ed., *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 (Reissue).

[169] Liddell Hart, 135-136. For more on the Desert Fox, see Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, B. H. Liddell Hart, ed. (London: Collins, 1953); David Fraser, *Knight's Cross: A Life of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

[170] Ibid., 136. For more on Greece, see C.M. Woodhouse, *The Struggle for Greece 1941-1949* (London: Beekman Publishers Inc., 1976).

the Canary Islands and secure Allied access to the Mediterranean. The troops and ships that had just weeks before been used to raid the Lofoten Islands were selected to form the core of the assault force. By the end of May 1941, the operation had grown significantly, with two infantry brigades, four battalions of Royal Marines, four battalions of Commandos, and dozens of other ships and vessels assigned to the mission, now given the codename PILGRIM.[171]

As the summer of 1941 wore on, the situation regarding Spain and the need to seize the Canaries grew less urgent, but the Chiefs of Staff still were not ready to disband the task force. Seeing an excellent opportunity to do a full-scale rehearsal, the Chiefs ordered the task force to stage an amphibious exercise around the British Naval base at Scapa Flow. In August 1941, the task force executed the practice assault, code-named Operation LEAPFROG.[172] This was the largest combined operation conducted to that date as well as the first opportunity to employ the new Landing Ship, Tank (LST), another product of the hard work and nimble minds of the ISTDC. Though an invaluable source of lessons for the British on large-scale combined operations, it also brought to a head the confrontation between the Chiefs of Staff and Admiral of the Fleet Roger Keyes.[173]

Though the exercise did produce a score of important lessons, this was because, in general, it was not executed very well at all. Resulting from this, and bringing things to a

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[171] Fergusson, 79-80.

[172] Clifford, 132.

[173] DEFE 2/782A, 32.

head, was a post-exercise report filed by the land and sea commanders, Lieutenant General Earl Alexander and Admiral Sir Louis Hamilton. Leading up the exercise's start, the aforementioned officers had grown more and more dissatisfied with what they saw as Keyes' imposition on their authority as operational commanders. At the same time, Keyes had become increasing perturbed at not being consulted on what was obviously within his area of responsibility, specifically, a combined operation. To add to the stress of the situation, the British monarch, King George VI, had observed the exercise. The monarch had been raised virtually from birth as a naval officer. It was impossible to hide from him the operation's less than stellar performance.[174]

All of the above congealed in the report sent by Alexander and Hamilton to the Chiefs of Staff. The main recommendation appears to have been the total exclusion of the DCO from either planning or advising them on combined operations. The Force Commanders, at least in this case, wanted direct access to the Chiefs on operation matters as well as a conduit for consultation to the ISTDC and the various CTCs that went around the office of the DCO. Not wanting to get into a lengthy argument with Keyes at that time, the Chiefs accepted the report without comment.[175]

Admiral Keyes, however, was more than ready to start an argument. Though not officially sent a copy of the report, he had learned enough about it to know it was not in

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[174] Fergusson, 81-82. For more on George VI, his queen, and his children during the war years, see Theo Aronson, *The Royal Family at War* (London: John Murray, 1994).

[175] DEFE 2/782A, 32-33.

his favor. Churchill had been away in the United States while LEAPFROG was conducted in early August 1941. Even before he crossed the Atlantic to return to Britain, Keyes had flooded him with "voluminous minutes" expressing his side of the exercise.[176] He followed this up over the next several weeks by meeting with the Chiefs as well as sending more personal letters to Churchill. Writing to the Prime Minister on 11 September 1941, Keyes stated,

> I said I was quite ready to take the full responsibility for ensuring the efficiency of the force, provided that it was recognised that this was my entire responsibility and I was given executive authority by the Chiefs of Staff and Minister of Defense. . . . It would help so much if you occasionally interview your D.C.O. and listen to what he has to say. Otherwise you might just as well not have one, and leave the conduct of combined operations to inexperienced officers to experiment with. This might spare you the annoyance of my importunity, but it will not help you to win the war. . . . The credentials of ZEEBRUGGE are now on the Council table, but are persistently ignored.[177]

This passage speaks volumes on the attitude Keyes held as to his own sense of ownership and infallibility toward combined operations. It was more than even Churchill could take. Months before, in February 1941, the Prime Minister had scolded his Director for Combined Operations, returning one of his letters with the note, "It is quite impossible for me to receive a letter of this character."[178] After another seven months of such letters, Churchill was amiable to a change for the DCO.

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[176] Fergusson, 83.

[177] Letter from Sir Roger Keyes to the Prime Minister, PREM 3/330/2, 111-113.

[178] Stephen Roskill, *Churchill and the Admirals* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1978), 176.

In mid September 1941, the Chiefs of Staff submitted to the Prime Minister two proposals modifying the directive on the DCO's responsibilities. The first was a reiteration on the DCO's scope of overseeing raids of less than 5,000 men, as well as clarifying the line of command between the Chiefs and Force Commanders for any operations larger than that. In any operation above 5,000, the DCO would have no role. The second proposal asked that, given the above and previous (March 1941 directive) adjustments in responsibilities, the formal title of the office be changed from "Director" to "Advisor on Combined Operations."[179]

Keyes was adamantly against the changes. Writing to Churchill, he stated that the revisions to his authorizing directive "cuts me out of the planning of combined operations altogether. I have replied that I do not accept this."[180] Replying to his old comrade on 30 September 1941, the Prime Minister wrote,

> I hope you will find yourself able to come to an agreement with the Chiefs of Staff upon the modification of your original directive. Your title of "Director" does not correspond to the facts . . . the responsibility for advising the Defense Committee and the War Cabinet can only lie with the Chiefs of Staff. These are facts that must be accepted. It seems to me that very large spheres of important and interesting work will be open to you as Advisor under the new arrangement, and that some of the causes of friction in the past will be removed. I should find it very hard to resist the advice of all my responsible experts. I will trust therefore that you will fall in with the plan which have now taken shape.[181]

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[179] Clifford, 133.

[180] Aspinall-Oglander, 408.

[181] Letter from the Prime Minister to Sir Roger Keyes, DEFE 2/698, 98.

Keyes did not. It seems to have been too large a pill for him to swallow. Replying to Churchill's note, he defiantly stated that he "could not accept such a sweeping reduction in status." On 4 October 1941, with a reluctant heart, Churchill relieved his friend Roger Keyes from his post.[182] The era of the hero of Zeebrugge was over. But a new era for combined operations, under a younger if equally dynamic commander, was about to begin.

[182] Fergusson, 84.

CHAPTER 5

A Slightly Different Approach – The Era of Mountbatten

To paraphrase poet Dylan Thomas, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes did not "go gently into the good night."[183] Still in October 1941 a serving Minister of Parliament (MP) representing Portsmouth, Keyes used the House of Commons as a forum to denounce both his removal from the post as well as express his opinion on the Chiefs of Staff prosecution of the war.[184] His comments received wide coverage from the British third estate. On 16 November 1941, the London *Sunday Dispatch* printed a front-page interview with him under the banner headline, *"Sir Roger Keyes Talks About His Job As Organiser Of Shock Troop Raids."* The same day, the London *Sunday Express* also gave Keyes front page coverage.[185] His harsh and wide-ranging comments both to the press and in the Commons elicited a stern reminder from the government on the terms of the Official Secrets Act.[186] Following that rebuke, Keyes remarked to his fellow MPs that he

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[183] See "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night" from Dylan Thomas, *Selected Poems, 1934 to 1952* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corp., 2003).

[184] Kenneth Mackey, *Commando Strike: The Story of Amphibious Raiding in World War II* (London: Leo Cooper, 1985), 65.

[185] *Sunday Dispatch* and *Sunday Express*, 16 November 1941, Liddell Hart (LH) Archives 15/4/221.

[186] Mackey, 65. The Official Secrets Act, passed first in 1889, and then updated in 1911, stated that "any information which has been obtained by the accused 'owing to his position as a person who holds or has held office under His Majesty [or contracted to His Majesty in any way]'." [Online] Available http://www.magnacartaplus.org/bills/civ-lib/official-secrets-act.htm. For more, see K.D. Ewing and C.A. Gearty, *The Struggle for Civil Liberties: Political Freedom and the Rule of Law in Britain, 1914-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000).

almost thought he might be thrown in the Tower of London.[187]

Despite his public bravado, Keyes' dismissal was a horrible personal blow, one compounded by the death of his son, Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Keyes, who himself had been serving in the Commandos in the Middle East.[188] Regardless of the manner of his exit, the legacy Keyes left both combined operations and the war effort should not be discounted. It was his personal drive and relationship with Churchill that allowed the DCO to be established as separate headquarters. It was Keyes, almost seven decades old in the early 1940s, who had aggressively scouted out and established the Combined Training Centers where the British, and soon afterwards – the Americans, would train for the campaigns to come. He also served as midwife at the birth of the Commandos, who retained a great respect for him as a man whose character and purpose made him "one of their own."[189] In his memoirs, the daring Commando leader Shimi Fraser, the Lord Lovat, wrote that

> Sir Roger Keyes, who spent half his time on the train trying to cajole Chiefs of Staff into mounting an operation, set us an example of single-minded determination, turning out in all weathers for night exercises and foul weather landings. The admiral believed in leading from the front. I have seen him in London clothes, wet to the skin, struggle to the wrong beach in a high running sea, and then call for a repeat performance. Nor did he quit until the last man was back aboard his ship; more than once I

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[187] *Manchester Guardian*, 26 November 1941, LH 15/4/221

[188] Fergusson, 84-85. Despite this, Keyes' admiration for Churchill remained undiminished and he would continue to correspond with the Prime Minister actively after his relief. See Aspinall-Oglander, 414.

[189] Fergusson, 84-85.

> helped to change his clothes, for his feeble hands were too cold to undo hooks and buttons on a duffle coat. Time spent in his company made us feel twice our size; and that, of course, is what leadership is all about.[190]

In the end, though, the positive aspects of his personality that made him the right man at the beginning could not sustain him for the long haul. In prosecuting combined operations, not only for raids but on the growing scale that was being contemplated, the DCO needed a man who could both lead and make the compromises necessary to execute this modern, multi-service form of warfare. Keyes, frustrated by numerous faults starts and utterly convinced that he alone knew what was required, proved unable to do that. Luckily for both Britain and her allies, Churchill once again had someone in mind who would prove to be the right man for the job.

Enter the Youngest Admiral

In October 1941, Lord Louis "Dickie" Mountbatten was the newly-appointed Captain of the HMS *Illustrious*.[191] A lifelong Royal Navy officer, not to mention the son of former First Sea Lord Prince Louis of Battenberg and the grandson of Queen Victoria, Mountbatten was no stranger to upper echelons of the British political and military

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[190] Lord Lovat, *March Past* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), 189. Lovat served as battalion commander for No. 4 Commando for the Lofoten Raid, as well as went ashore at Dieppe and Sword Beach during the D-Day Landings. He was portrayed by the actor Peter Lawford in the 1962 movie version of Cornelius Ryan's landmark book, *The Longest Day* (New York: Fawcett Books, 1959).

[191] Clifford, 134.

establishment.[192] With his ship sitting at the dock of the port of Norfolk, Virginia awaiting repairs, the forty-one-year-old Mountbatten put his illustrious lineage and extensive personal contacts to good purpose. He traveled the breadth of the United States, including a visit to the US Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, and was invited to the White House to speak with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Mountbatten had been authorized to continue talks with Roosevelt on Churchill's future plans for invading the Continent as well as other matters.[193] On 10 October, Churchill sent an urgent telegram to Mountbatten, writing, "We want you home here at once for something which you find of the highest interest."[194] He did not set foot in Britain for another two weeks. When chastised on his tardiness by the Prime Minister, whom he had known since the age of twelve, Mountbatten replied that he had been in Hawaii by the time he had gotten the telegram and didn't know "which way round the world you wanted me to come back."[195]

Ignoring (or perhaps admiring) his cheek, Churchill sat the younger officer down and offered him the job of Advisor for Combined Operations. Mountbatten was not very keen to accept the position, stating that he "would sooner be back at sea with my friends

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[192] Phillip Ziegler, *Mountbatten* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 24-25. For a more complete study of both this subject, see Eugene L. Rastor, *Earl Mountbatten of Burma, 1900-1979: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography* (London: Greenwood, 1998).

[193] Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Grand Alliance* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 456-457. I will discuss much more on the Anglo-American alliance and the US role in combined operations in the next chapter.

[194] Prime Minister Personal Telegram T.686, PREM 3/330/2, 131.

[195] Clifford, 134.

fighting, instead of sitting on my backside in Whitehall."[196] Churchill called him a fool, saying "the best thing you can look for there is to repeat your last achievement, and get yourself sunk!" Less than six months previously, Mountbatten had been in command of a five-ship destroyer flotilla in the Mediterranean. Despite the fact that three of the five ships, including his flagship the HMS *Kelly*, had been sunk by the Germans, he was generally regarded as a very competent skipper and, in Churchill's view, was a good fit for the unique position of overseeing Combined Operations.[197] In a post-war interview with Mountbatten, General Ismay, Churchill's military secretary, was more descriptive:

> But, when all is said and done, the reasons which led Winston to offer you the job are pretty obvious. He wanted someone with practical experience of modern war, proved technical competence, vivid imagination, exceptional drive, and the capacity to get things done. You were a natural, you might have been made for the job and the job for you.[198]

In retrospect, there were two more qualities unmentioned by Ismay that made Louis Mountbatten an excellent candidate, especially when compared with Roger Keyes. The first was his previously-mentioned unmatched network of connections. The second was his gift for diplomacy. More than anything, the new man responsible for combined operations had tact.

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[196] Ibid., 134.

[197] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 456. Mountbatten would maintain close ties with the survivors of his ship for the rest of his, attending reunions and helping support their families. For more on this and his tenure as flotilla commander, see William Pattinson, *Mountbatten and the Men of the Kelly* (New York: HarperCollins, 1987).

[198] Earl Mountbatten of Burma, "Matters affecting my selection for the position in Combined Operations and Southeast Asia," Liddell Hart Archives, ISMAY 4/24/1-130.

Inspired by Churchill's passion, Mountbatten accepted the job. Along with it came a jump in rank from Captain to Commodore. Churchill's guidance to his newly-promoted Advisor on Combined Operations (ACO) on the nature of his job was extremely clear:

> Up to now (October 1941) there have hardly been any Commando Raids. I want you to start a program of raids of ever-increasing intensity, so as to keep the whole of the enemy coastline on the alert from the North Cape to the Bay of Biscay. But your main object must be the re-invasion of France. You must create the machine which will make it possible for us to beat Hitler on land. You must devise the appurtenances and appliances which will make the invasion possible. You must select and build up the bases from which the assault will be launched. Before that you must create the various Training Centres at which the soldiers can be trained in amphibious assault. I want you to bring in the Air Force as well, and create a proper inter-Service organisation to produce the technique of modern assault. I want you to consider the great problem of the follow-up, and finally, I want you to select the area in which you feel the assault should take place and start bending all your energies towards getting ready for this great day.[199]

Though several of these areas, specifically that of the "appurtenances and appliances" (i.e., landing craft) as well as the bases and CTCs had already been started up under the reign of Admiral Keyes, Churchill's guidance also reflects his fairly precise perception as to the overall state of British combined operations. It is also amazing that, in addition to the monumental task of bringing that together, the Prime Minister also directed the relatively young naval officer to begin deliberate planning for their return to Nazi-occupied France. Time would tell if Lord Louis would be up to the task.

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[199] Fergusson, 87-88. While similar to the guidance given to Keyes, Churchill's specificity on planning for the invasion of France make Mountbatten's orders unique, and greatly shaped the role he wold play while leading Combined Operations.

Reengineering the Organization

The written directive given to the new ACO by the Chiefs of Staff emphasized built upon Churchill's guidance. For now, Mountbatten would remain primarily "an advisor on all aspects of, and at all stages in, the planning and training for combined operations."[200] All of the other powers granted him in the areas of training and development, were meant to bolster him along this specific line. Even his authority over the Commandos was only situationally dependant, as they might be reassigned to other commands for various operations. For large scale operations, he would be strictly subordinate to any force commander.[201] Even with these limitations, however, Mountbatten was still riding high on the strength of both the Prime Minister's support and the goodwill of a virtual "honeymoon period" from the Chiefs of Staff. So armed, Mountbatten sat about transforming Combined Operations.

Almost immediately, in accordance with his primary task (the invasion of France), he shifted the main focus of the re-designated Combined Operations Headquarters' (COHQ) main focus from raiding to preparing for larger-scale operations. This would not mean that small scale raids would disappear. Indeed, within this new directive, there was no "5,000-man" limitation on command and controlling raids as there had been with

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[200] Clifford, 135.

[201] Fergusson, 89.

Keyes.[202] The directorate instead, for the most part, would orient the majority of its energies on preparing for major amphibious landings.

One major sign of this adjustment was the taking command, at the Admiralty's request, of all landing ships and craft in the British Isles. This made the ACO the single individual responsible in both developing and accounting for these critical assets. In addition to command over the landing craft, the ACO was designated as chairman of three Inter-Service committees (Combined Operations (CO) Training and Development Policy, CO Air, CO Communication) that reported directly to the Chiefs of Staff.[203] Though these adjustments were in many ways only a recognition of some responsibilities Keyes had previously possessed, the formalization of this power, and the Chiefs' recognition of it, was a very positive change.

Concurrent with his external maneuvering, Mountbatten had conducted a major internal reorganization. When he had first arrived at the unit's Richmond Terrace headquarters, he had been shocked to find his staff consisted of only twenty-three persons, including typists and messengers. Many of the small number of naval and RAF officers assigned to the headquarters had been previously retired and only called back to active duty because of the war. Riding again on his goodwill with the Chiefs, Mountbatten received a massive expansion of his staff, particularly in the areas of

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[202] Clifford, 135. The 5,000-man limitation had been put in from the start to limit Keyes authority. At that point, they were nowhere near the number of trained men, or more importantly, landing craft, available to mount so large a raid. By the time Mountbatten came on board, circumstances had changed.

[203] "Early History and Summary of Events ISTDC and DCO," DEFE 2/782A, 51.

intelligence, operations, and signals. He even had a Royal Marine Colonel appointed as his deputy. Writing to Churchill in December 1941, Keyes complained that the Chiefs had conceded everything to Mountbatten that he had asked for previously and had been refused. This was not entirely so. As had been the case with Keyes, the Chiefs knew that the new ACO enjoyed the support and patronage of the Prime Minister. Unlike his predecessor, however, the Chiefs knew Mountbatten would not abuse it.[204]

By February 1942, less than five months after his appointment, Mountbatten had made enormous progress. In addition to helping re-engineer the COHQ, he expanded the organization's reach, recommending and then quickly establishing CTCs in both India and Australia to support operations in the Southwest Pacific. These CTCs would belong to the regional Commanders-in-Chief, but would keep both the Chiefs of Staff, and the COHQ, informed of major actions.[205] Mountbatten's style of leadership that emphasized working with the other services and building consensus was not lost on his superiors. In recognition of his accomplishments, on 23 March 1942, Churchill recommended and the Chiefs approved his promotion to the rank of Vice Admiral, with the honorary ranks of Lieutenant General and Air Marshal. At age 42, he was the youngest man to earn an Admiral's flag in over a generation, two years younger than the icon of British admiralty, Horatio Nelson, had been when he made the rank during the Napoleonic Wars.[206] Less

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[204] Fergusson, 90-91.

[205] Clifford, 138-139.

[206] Trevor Vincent, *Mountbatten: Eighty years in pictures* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), 137.

than two weeks later, his title was formally changed from Advisor to Chief of Combined Operations (CCO). What is perhaps more important, however, was that he would be an equal member, not a subordinate, of the Chiefs of Staff for all matters concerning combined operations.[207] Mountbatten proved, more than likely much to Keyes' chagrin, that sometimes you get farther with a boot and a kind word, than with simply a boot alone.

Turning up the Heat – Commando Raids under Mountbatten

Between the March and Christmas 1941, only a handful of extremely minor "pinprick" raids had been staged against the enemy along the Atlantic coast. None were of any major consequence and they accomplished little more than kill a couple of unlucky German guards. They did keep the enemy on his toes, though, and as one Commando officer remarked, "It'll do for training, lads."[208] These raids, however, were too small and inconsequential, especially in Churchill's eyes. The Prime Minister wanted occupied Europe to be "set ablaze" and the Commandos to avoid the little raids he saw as being

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[207] Clifford, 139.

[208] Neillands, 50-51. This attitude has not disappeared from military circles, especially in the US Army. Everything one does can be classified as "training." One would suspect that even Alexander the Great and the Roman legions employed targets of opportunity to "train" his men on their profession.

"without value."[209] Of special concern in December 1941 was the safety of Allied supply convoys traveling the North Atlantic to the Russian port of Murmansk. To help take some of the German pressure off their Soviet allies, the Combined Operations staff proposed a major raid that would pin down Axis troops in Scandinavia, thus preventing their transfer to the Russian Front.[210]

The objective for this raid was a pair of Norwegian islands located at the nearest point across from the North Sea from the Shetlands. Named Vaagso and Malloy, they guarded the entrance to an important series of fjords. The *Kriegsmarine* had established a significant anchorage there that warded the coastline for several miles in either direction via a series of defense batteries. With a garrison of roughly 200 German soldiers and assorted local troops, this bastion would not be an easy target to destroy.[211]

The British planned accordingly, assigning the mission to a task force built around the cruiser HMS *Kenya*, four destroyers, and two LSTs.[212] As with the Lofoten raid, the ground element was commanded overall by Brigadier Haydon, with the bulk of the troops coming from Lieutenant Colonel Durnford-Slater's No. 3 Commando. The raid would be

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[209] Fergusson, 49. The Prime Minster's comment on "set Europe ablaze" is applicable to the Commando's mission, but was the specific directive to British Special Operations Executive (SOE). For more on the assassinations, sabotage, and other clandestine exploits carried out by this organization, see M. R. D. Foot, *SOE: An Outline History* (Boston: University Publications of America, 1984).

[210] "OP. ARCHERY – VAAGSO & MALLOY – 27 DEC 1941," [Online] Available http//www.combinedops.com/vaagso.htm, 9 February 2004.

[211] Durnford-Slater, 69. For more on the raid itself, see Joseph Devins, Jr., *The Vaagso Raid* (London: Robert Hale, 1967); Peter Young, *Storm from the Sea* (London, William Kimber, 1958).

[212] Fergusson, 106.

the first under Mountbatten's direction, and the new ACO very much wanted it to be a success. Questioning the Commando leader just before the raid, Mountbatten asked, "What I am going to tell him if the Vaagso raid is a failure?" The "him" in this case was Churchill. Durnford-Slater promised, "There will be no failure, Sir. We shall carry it off." Satisfied with the assurances, Mountbatten blessed the plan, code-named Operation ARCHERY.[213] Launched just two days after Christmas 1941, the task force completely surprised their German foes. The more than 500 Commandos quickly overran the garrison while the *Kenya* and her escorts provided offshore fire support. In the face of tough resistance, the intrepid British forces were again successful, killing 150 and capturing 102 enemy soldiers, as well as destroying an additional nine vessels totaling over 15,000 tons and four *Heinkel* fighter planes. Friendly casualties were the heaviest to date for the commandos, with 19 killed and 76 wounded. Their mission, though, was a success. After six hours on the ground, the British withdrew, leaving the former bastion at Vaagso and Malloy a demolished shell of its former self.[214]

Operation ARCHERY ended the year of 1941 for both the Commandos and the British people on a high note. While praising the skill of the raiders, some members of the British press questioned whether the expenditure of lives and resources

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[213] Durnford-Slater, 69-74.

[214] "OP. ARCHERY – VAAGSO & MALLOY – 27 DEC 1941," Ibid. The British were actually still fighting the remnants of the diehard German garrison when they withdrew.

was worth the perceived limited payoff.[215] While one cannot point at the Vaagso raid as the proximate cause of keeping large numbers of German troops in Norway for the remainder of the war, 30,000 Axis troops were deployed to Scandinavia immediately following the operation.[216] What the British public and their Prime Minister wanted, however, was something even more spectacular. The next major raid mounted by British Combined Operations aimed at answering that prayer.

The response came not from above, but from Royal Navy Captain Charles Lambe, then Director of Plans at the Admiralty. His plea for assistance would evolve into what has been called the Greatest Raid of Them All.[217] Lambe desperately needed the Commandos to raid the French port of St. Nazaire. This was the first external mission passed to the COHQ up to that point in the war.[218] Until then, all the various raids had been internal ideas. No matter whether it was because of Mountbatten's softer approach, or even because of the liaisons that Keyes had established in the Plans section, the request from Lambe served as a milestone in moving the COHQ from rebel outsiders to an invaluable part of the whole war effort.

The attack on St. Nazaire was a key element in solving a larger problem for the

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[215] One of the most interesting commentaries on the Vaagso raid was entitled "All for 95 'vile bodies'," *The Daily Mail*, 30 December 1941, LH 15/4/221.

[216] "OP. ARCHERY – VAAGSO & MALLOY – 27 DEC 1941," Ibid.

[217] Saunders, *The Green Berets*, 76. Also see the aptly titled book by E. Lucas Phillips, *The Greatest Raid of All* (London: Heinemann, 1958).

[218] Fergusson, 132-133.

Royal Navy – the German battleship *Tirpitz*. Named for Alfred von Tirpitz (1849-1930), the famous proponent of German sea power and father of the *Kriegsmarine*, the battleship was a very large thorn in the side of Allies.[219] Together with her escorts and the support of Luftwaffe air cover, the nigh invulnerable *Tirpitz* was dominating presence on the high seas. Its vulnerability, though, lay in its limitations on anchorage. Only a handful of dry docks in the world could accommodate her massive bulk, and only one of those had direct access to the Atlantic – St. Nazaire.[220] Bereft of this heavily-defended port, the *Tirpitz* could be bottled up in the North Sea and kept far away from the British lifeline of convoys from America.

Beseeched by their counterparts in the Royal Navy to solve this tactical problem, Mountbatten and his staff crafted a plan that drew direct inspiration from the raid at Zeebrugge. The dry dock itself was too large to destroy with bombs or explosive alone, being more than 1,100 feet long and having gigantic iron gates at each end that were fifty feet tall and thirty feet thick.[221] To deny the *Tirpitz* the use of the dock, the exit from the port to sea would have to be mined, specifically with something big and immovable. The solution, similar to that employed at Zeebrugge in 1918, was to scuttle a warship before

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[219] For more on Tirpitz and his namesake battleship, see Jonathan Steinberg, *Yesterday's Deterrent: Tirpitz and the Birth of the German battle fleet* (New York: Macmillan, 1966); David Woodward, *The Tirpitz and the Battle for the North Atlantic* (New York: Norton, 1954).

[220] James Dorrian, *Storming St. Nazaire: The Gripping Story of the Dock-Busting Raid March, 1942* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 11-12.

[221] Commander R. E. D. Ryder, V.C., R.N., *The Attack on St. Nazaire 28th March, 1942* (London: John Murray, 1947), 6-7.

the gates, with one change. This time, however, the kamikaze vessel would be laden with explosives and ram the great iron gates, creating a colossal stopper at the mouth of the exit. The ship chosen for this one-way trip was the HMS *Campbeltown*, a converted American lend-lease destroyer. To make sure the British ship made its rendevous with destiny, the Commandos would have to assault the defending mole, as well as take the opportunity to attack the adjacent submarine pens. With a plethora of anti-aircraft guns, concrete encasements, as well as a strong German garrison, the port was one of the most heavily defended sites in occupied Europe.[222]

The story of the raid itself has reached the level of legend and easily secured the Commandos a place in history of warfare. Code-named Operation CHARIOT, it involved troops from seven different Commando battalions, grouped into demolition and assault parties. Supported by decoy attacks and bombing runs from the RAF, the *Campbeltown* and her escorts made their stealthy approach on the port around midnight on 28/29 March 1942. Discovered and illuminated by German spotlights, the task force was soon forced to run the gauntlet of shells and cannon fire toward the massive gates. At 0143 local time, the explosive-filled ship slammed into the gates. Troops from both the ship and accompanying motor launches swarmed ashore. Demolition parties quickly went about their work while the commandos fought over a German counterattack.[223]

Despite the bravado of the attack, the Germans soon overwhelmed the limited

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[222] Saunders, *The Green Berets*, 78.

[223] Messenger, 128-133.

defenders and boarded the *Campbeltown*. The British demolition experts lit the fuses on the ship's payload, but soon they, the Commandos, and their attached naval party were forced to break contact. Scattering to avoid capture, most of the outnumbered raiders were eventually caught by the Germans. As dawn broke on 29 March 1942, more than forty German officers were on the deck of the British ship, with an additional four hundred enlisted men and other straphangers gazing at the cruiser with its bow crumpled against the gates. All were still there when the five tons of explosives finally detonated, almost five hours after the fuse had been first lit.[224]

The blast from the *Campbeltown* resonated for a long time afterwards, both literally and figuratively. The main objectives of the raid, the gates and dry docks, were thoroughly wrecked. Four and a half years after the raid, they were still out of action.[225] The *Tirpitz*, robbed of its Atlantic safe harbor, was confined to the North Sea and would go on to meet its doom two year later just south of the Norwegian port of Tromsö.[226] But the success of Operation CHARIOT came at a high price. The Royal Navy suffered 85 sailors killed or missing, with another 106 captured. The Commandos' butcher bill was also as great, with 59 killed and 109 captured out a total of 241 soldiers; less than a third of the elite troopers who embarked on the mission would return, at least until 1945. Despite the disproportionate losses, the raid was a spectacular success. Because of the

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[224] Saunders, *The Green Berets*, 92.

[225] Ryder, 90.

[226] Keegan, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 867.

amount of damage inflicted, not only was the *Tirpitz* denied a safe port, but the German fleet as a whole would be unable to operate capital ships in the Atlantic for the rest of the war.[227] This would be a major boost to the Allied convoys sustaining the still embattled British Isles, not to mention bringing across the ever increasing numbers of American soldiers and their equipment. With Lofoten, Vaagso, and now St. Nazaire behind them, the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Royal Marines of British Combined Operations had made their mark on the war. This, however, did not mean victory at hand, or was even close. The brave soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines of Combined Operations would face much more danger, struggle, and sacrifice in the days that lay just ahead.

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[227] Messenger, 133.

CHAPTER 6

Dieppe and the Second Front

By the time the Combined Operations Headquarters was welcoming home the crews and commandos from the St. Nazaire raid in early April 1942, the war in Europe had already changed in fundamental ways. What had altered the equation was the entry of the United States into the struggle against the Axis powers almost four months before. On 7 December 1941, Japanese naval aviation operating from carriers off the coast of Hawaii had attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, inflicting brutal losses on the U.S. Pacific Fleet.[228] The United States, stunned by this brazen attack, quickly declared war on the Empire of Japan. Four days after the attack, in a move that flabbergasted both the Americans and his own general staff, German Führer Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States.[229] For better or worse, the US was in a shooting war with Nazi Germany.

For Britain, this was the best news since the fall of France. Churchill

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[228] The story of Pearl Harbor is a well-known one in American history. Many works are devoted to its study, with some of the most famous being the book by Gordon W. Prange, *At Dawn We Slept* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981); Dorothy Borg and Shumpai Okamoto, *Pearl Harbor As History: Japanese-American Relations 1931-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).

[229] For an outstanding synopsis of the dynamics behind Hitler's decision, see Harvey Asher, "Hitler's Decision to Declare War on the United States: A Synthesis of the Secondary Literature," SHAFR: September 2000 Newsletter, [Online] Available http://shafr.history.ohio-state.edu/Newsletter/2000/SEP/asher.htm. Also see James V. Compton, *The Swastika and the Eagle: Hitler, the United States, and the Origins of World War II* (Boston: Bodley, 1968).

declared that, "to have the United States at our side was to me the greatest joy."[230] The truth is, even before December 1941, the United States and Britain had been collaborating on war policy to a great degree. Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt had been corresponding regularly since 1939.[231] The US Navy had also been significantly engaged in protecting convoys against German U-boat attacks since the signing of the Atlantic Charter in August 1941.[232] They were especially active in assisting the Royal Canadian Navy in the sea lanes between the Grand Banks and Iceland.[233] The declaration of hostilities with the Germans only formalized the undeclared maritime conflict.

In addition to naval coordination, the once and future allies had also been consulting on the subject of more land-focused areas of warfare. US military personnel had been in contact with their British counterparts since 1938, and had even sent senior officers from the War Plans divisions to London during the desperate summer of 1940 to observe British defenses and military preparedness. Based on those contacts and their own realization of the global military picture, the United States had decided that, if and

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[230] Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, 511.

[231] Jenkins, 554-555. The story of the relationship between these two men up to and during the Second World War is worthy of a thesis in itself. For more details, see, among many others, Warren F. Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2003); Jon Meacham, *Franklin and Winston: An Intimate Portrait of an Epic Friendship* (New York: Random House, 2003).

[232] Keegan, ed. *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 52. For more on the Atlantic Charter, see Theodore A. Wilson's *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay, 1941, Revised Edition* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991).

[233] Ibid.. For more on that phase of the Second Battle of the Atlantic, see Canadian historian Spencer Dunmore, *In Great Waters: The Epic Story of the Battle of the Atlantic 1939-45* (London: McClellan and Stewart, 1999).

when they entered the war, defeating Germany must be the first priority.[234] This strategy was formalized at the First Washington Conference (ARCADIA) between the Allies on 22 December 1941. Here, not only they reaffirm their aim to focus on Nazi Germany, but they also began to look seriously at amphibious operations aimed at the continent of Europe.[235]

Planning for the Return - GYMNAST, ROUNDUP, and BOLERO

The factors involved in planning and executing this momentous task were many and drew upon the realms of physics, philosophy, and politics. Beginning first with politics, there were the Russians. The alliance between Great Britain and the Soviet Union was (and perhaps still is) the premier case of "war making strange bedfellows."[236] The two nations had been partners against the Axis since June 1941. In the early winter of 1942, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the Red Army were engaged in what writers

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[234] Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions* (Washington, D.C.: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1959), 21-41. For more on the US Rainbow plans, see Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War 1934-1940* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002).

[235] J. M. A. Gwyer and J. R. M. Butler, eds., *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy, Volume III June 1941 - August 1942, Part I* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1964), 351. For more on the ARCADIA conference, see the Marist University FDR Library online collection of the Washington Conference papers at http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf.

[236] For more on these strange bedfellows, see Steven Merritt Miner, *Between Churchill and Stalin: The Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Grand Alliance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Martin Kitchen, *British Policy towards the Soviet Union during the Second World War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1986).

termed the "War of the Century" against the invading German Wehrmacht.[237] Ever since Churchill had reached out to Stalin, the native Georgian had been imploring the British to open a second front and draw some Axis strength away from the Eastern Front.[238]

For the Americans, the guiding principle in battling the Germans was their philosophy on warfare. Even before the start of their involvement, it had been the United States' intention to attack the enemy directly as soon as possible. The objective was to cross the Channel in strength gaining a lodgement somewhere in Northern France, which both held the most favorable terrain to land large forces and was also closest to Germany's own industrial heartland. Though resistance was bound to be extremely strong, this strategy was completely in keeping with the way the US Army had solved military problems since the time of Ulysses. S. Grant – head on, accompanied by overwhelming force and prodigious amounts of firepower.[239] These feelings were well summarized by the then US chief of the war plans divisions, General Dwight D. Eisenhower:

We're got to go to Europe and fight – and we've got to quit wasting resources all

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[237] Ian Kershaw and Lawrence Rees, *War of the Century: When Hitler fought Stalin* (London: New Press, 2000). For an outstanding synopsis of war on the Eastern Front from the Russian perspective, see David M. Glantz and Jonathan House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995).

[238] Trumball Higgins, *Winston Churchill and the Second Front, 1940-1943* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 61.

[239] Ulysses Simpson Grant was, of course, the Commanding General of the Union Armies (after March 1864) during the US Civil War. For more on both this particular topic and the history of US military doctrine, see Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 317.

> over the world – and still worse – wasting time. If we're to keep Russia in, save the Middle East, India, and Burma, we've got to begin slugging with air at West Europe; to be followed by a land attack as soon as possible.[240]

In the Americans' mindset, this was the only way to do things. Any strategy other than that was a diversion from their one true goal.

For the British, the primary influencing factor was physics, more specifically the physics of training sufficient numbers of men and producing the appropriate number of landing craft. Despite America's status of the "Arsenal of Democracy," the British believed that their new partners were too focused on the final objective, and completely overlooked the middle step. Based on their own experiences up to that point, Churchill and his advisors knew that landing and supporting a large force in enemy-held territory would be no simple matter.[241]

It is around this point that Vice Admiral Louis Mountbatten and his Combined Operations staff reentered the picture. Upon his appointment to the position as head of Combined Operations less than six moths before, he had been charged beyond all other things to plan and help prepare the British services to invade Hitler's *Festung Europa.*[242] The Advisor (by the end of March 1942, formally designated as Chief) of Combined Operations was cognizant of both the political and philosophical ingredients into this

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[240] Maurice Matloff and Edwin Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1941-1942* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1953), 156.

[241] Michael Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1993), 22-23.

[242] Fergusson, 88.

particular stew.[243] Several plans had already been drawn up over the course of 1941 to deal with existing battles as well as possible contingencies. Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff were keen to get American forces involved in the fight against Rommel in North Africa. The outline of this plan was called GYMNAST, and proposed the introduction of 150,000 American soldiers to reinforce the British Eighth Army. Further study showed that an invasion force could not be assembled till May 1942 at the earliest, and might seriously disrupt the build-up of US forces in the British Isles, proceeding under the codename of BOLERO.[244] Another plan was code-named ROUNDUP. It was based upon a German collapse in Russia and proposed the invasion of twelve divisions on 70-mile front north to south starting from Deauville in northern France. This plan was both theoretical and highly impractical, but would serve as the nucleus for future plans.[245]

The staff at COHQ had been involved in the review, if not the development, of all these plans. As a representative of the Combined Commanders (an informal Anglo-American planning group formed in January 1942), Mountbatten had major input, though

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[243] Clifford, 139. As a relation to both the Prusso-German and Russian royal families, Mountbatten held his own views toward both the Nazis and the heirs to the Bolshevik revolution. Still, his loyalty to England, as well as hatred of Hitler, was so great that when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, he remarked "isn't it grand news that the Russians are fighting on our side." See Ziegler, 174.

[244] Mark A. Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front: American Military Planning and Diplomacy in Coalition Warfare, 1941-1943* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 23-24.

[245] George Bruce, *Second Front Now! The Road to D-Day* (London: Macdonald & James, 1979), 40. For much more on the evolution of this and other plans, see Gordon A. Harrison, *United States Army in World War II – The European Theater of Operations – Cross Channel Attack* (Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1951).

not final authority, on the products coming out of this group.[246] Along with his membership on that board, Mountbatten would spend much time and effort forging significant links with their new American allies. In April 1942, multiple seeds came to fruition based upon his contacts. With the permission of the Chiefs of Staff, he established a Combined Operations Liaison Office (COLO) in Washington, D.C., headed by a Royal Navy captain, to coordinate the building of landing craft as well as keep the US abreast of the development of amphibious techniques.[247]

In a reciprocal arrangement, after discussions with United States Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, Mountbatten helped establish an American section at the COHQ. The first US officer sent over in April 1942 was Brigadier General Lucien K. Truscott, Jr. His orders were to keep a watchful eye on British developments as well as participate in their "experiments." One of these was the training of US Army personnel in commando techniques. Truscott recruited volunteers from the 34th Infantry Division, which had just arrived in Northern Ireland. By the end of July 1942, an entire battalion of US troops had graduated the course held at the commando depot in Achnacarry, Scotland.[248]

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[246] Bruce, 41. The Combined Commanders (CC) was an informal Allied planning group headed by General Sir Bernard Paget, then Commander-in-Chief of the British Home Forces. It would not be replaced by anything else until the creation of COSSAC (Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander) in 1943. Until then, the CC, along with the COHQ, was in charge of planning for the Second Front.

[247] Clifford, 139-140.

[248] Lt. Clifford L. Jones, "Background of Amphibious Operations" from "The Administrative and Logistical History of the ETO, Part VI – Neptune: Training, Mounting, The Artificial Ports," Historical Division, US Army Forces, European Theater, March 1946, [Online] Available http://www.army.mil/cmh-

Despite these coups and the significant influence that the COHQ wielded, neither Mountbatten nor his staff were enthused by the plans being developed.[249] The analysis done by the British estimated that a force of eight to ten divisions would be required to secure a serious lodgement on the European mainland. Even if this was successful, those divisions would have to be written off following soon afterwards, and this might disrupt preparations for a permanent, substantial, and sustainable invasion.[250] Following the rejection of ROUNDUP as impractical, another plan code-named SLEDGEHAMMER was forwarded for review. It was another contingency plan predicated upon either massive failure of the Russians in face of a renewed German offensive or a "critically weakened" German position in western Europe. The problem was the speed of the BOLERO build-up. By mid-September 1942, the US would have only three-and-a-half divisions, and 700 aircraft in the UK to accomplish the task.[251]

Looking for Other Options

While the COHQ staff assisted in the investigation of SLEDGEHAMMER and other plans, Mountbatten was working toward what he saw as a better solution. In

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pg/documents/wwii/beaches/bchs-1.htm. Also see Robert W. Black, *Rangers in World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992).

[249] Fergusson, 144.

[250] Ziegler, 176. Also see Gwyer and Butler, eds., *Grand Strategy, Volume III*, 568-570.

[251] Matloff and Snell, 187-190.

addition to criticisms from the Americans and the Russians, the British press, led by newspaper magnate Maxwell Aitken, the Lord Beaverbrook, were also pushing for an invasion. Banner headlines in newspapers such as the *Daily Express* called out for action. Rallies were held in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park favoring a push across the Channel.[252] In early March 1942, at the request of General Ismay, the Prime Minister's military secretary, Mountbatten prepared a detailed report "on the earliest date at which I thought that an operation on the Continent would be possible."[253]

Rejecting calls for landings around the Pas de Calais area (as in ROUNDUP and SLEDGEHAMMER), the Vice Admiral proposed in March 1942 an attack on the Cherbourg Peninsula and the Channel Islands. He believed such an operation would be both easier to support logistically and safer to defend against German counterattacks. He also believed that

> [N]o large scale raid should be undertaken, since this would inevitably cause postponement of the primary operation (his proposed plan) until the Autumn [1942], by which time it may be too late to affect the situation in Russia. Furthermore, if by this time the Russian forces had been defeated, or virtually defeated, it would be impossible to carry out the operation at all.[254]

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[252] Bruce, 38. In addition to his role as publisher, Beaverbrook also served as minister for aircraft production in Churchill's cabinet until May 1941, followed by Minister of State and ultimately Lord Privy Seal. The success of the RAF during the Battle of Britain may be in no small part due to his ruthless efficiency and leadership in driving the factories to make Hawker Hurricanes and Spitfires. As far as his role in pushing for the second front, just how much of this was his intent and how much was just riding the wave of public frustration (and opinion) is unknown. See Keegan, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 92.

[253] "Letter from ACO to General Ismay," 7 March 1942, CAB 121/368, 1B, 1.

[254] Ibid., 3-4.

Mountbatten's plan for Cherbourg was passed forward, but ultimately rejected. It did start the ball rolling, though, on doing something and soon. The next area looked at by the COHQ planners was a small French port located halfway between Cherbourg and the Pas de Calais. Its name was Dieppe.

" A Reconnaissance in Force"

The planning for what would be ultimately known as Operation JUBILEE was a confluence of multiple pressures and ambitions. In early April 1942, the COHQ under the direction of Royal Navy Captain John Hughes-Hallet presented a draft concept to the Chiefs of Staff.[255] In addition to the Combined Operations staffers, the Chiefs incorporated input from planners at British Home Forces command as well as the War Office. The initial plan was categorized as a "reconnaissance in force." After the operation was done, a German officer had called it "too big for a raid and too small for an invasion."[256] It called for a parachute assault reinforced by the landing of a mixed unit of infantry and tanks east of west of the port of Dieppe. This troops would converge on the German garrison, destroy it, and then withdraw.[257] The point of the operation would not

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[255] Saunders, *Combined Operations*, 110-111. For more on Hughes-Hallett's perspective as both planner and naval commander, see John Hughes-Hallet, *The Dieppe Raid* (London: HMSO, 1947).

[256] Ziegler, 186. This quote was taken from the German interrogation of the Principal Military Landing Officer Brian McCool. When pressed whether it was a raid or an invasion, he remarked "If you could tell me the answer, . . . I would be very grateful."

[257] Fergusson, 169-171.

be so much to capture the port, but to test out large scale landing techniques and prove that the port could have been taken.[258]

The initial plan, though, had some problems. Upon further examination of the terrain, the planners discovered that the tanks would have to cross several bridges when coming around the flanks of the town. Since this would be the first use of tanks from an amphibious assault, the plan was adjusted to land directly upon the beaches across from Dieppe.[259] This frontal attack plan was originally opposed by both Mountbatten and his staff. However, they were not the final authority.[260] Lieutenant General Bernard Law Montgomery was the Chief of the British South-Eastern Home Forces representative and senior Army officer in the planning process. He believed (most probably, correctly) that the raid's projected time line was too short to risk a flank attack. Though a frontal assault was more problematic, it offered a better chance of taking the port and accomplishing the raid's objective.[261]

The outline of this revised plan was briefed to the Chiefs of Staff on 13 May 1942 and approved. Specific for the development of the final plan was placed in the hands of the air, ground, and naval force commanders (three separate flag officers) subject to the

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[258] Ziegler, 188.

[259] "Copy of a Minute from General Ismay to the Prime Minister, dated 29 December 1942," Liddell Hart Archives, Ismay 2/3/246a.

[260] Fergusson, 170.

[261] Brian Loring Villa, *Unauthorized Action: Mountbatten and the Dieppe Raid* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1989), 11. Also see Ziegler, 188; Fergusson, 170.

approval of General Montgomery.[262] Code-named Operation RUTTER, the final details were fleshed out quickly, though haphazardly. Mountbatten and his COHQ staff continued to be closely involved, helping to synchronize the disparate elements.[263] This raid would be the largest combined operation to date, with 6,000 soldiers from the Canadian 2nd Division selected to form the core of the force. The first troops from this Commonwealth nation had arrived in Britain in December 1939, and none had seen action. They, too, were eager to get into the fight against the Germans.[264] The problem was, none had been yet trained on amphibious operations.[265]

Despite these concerns, both the Chiefs and Churchill had approved the operation. The target day was set as "the first favorable day after the 24th June." Several rehearsals were executed, the first a disaster, but the second much better. To allow for these train-ups, the raid was further pushed back to the week of 8 July 1942.[266] The weather in and around the Channel, however, was horrible. This was a precursor to the storms that would vex the Allies in Normandy almost two years later. With troops already uploaded, and fearing the chance of compromise, Montgomery recommended that the operation be

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[262] "Copy of a Minute from General Ismay to the Prime Minister, dated 29 December 1942," Ibid.

[263] Ziegler, 187-190. One of the major criticisms of Mountbatten was, knowing the risks of a frontal attack, the failure to better coordinate the air and naval support of the landings. Both the RAF and Royal Navy would end up taking major losses over the beaches of Dieppe. The specific reasons why are unknown, but Ziegler opines that it could reflect his "despair" over the approved plan, which was not his own and violating much of what he had learned about combined operations.

[264] Ken Ford, *Dieppe 1942: Prelude to D-Day* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 10-11.

[265] Ziegler, 189.

[266] Fergusson, 172.

cancelled.[267] RUTTER was scraped, but found life again in an unlikely proponent, Mountbatten. In his own words, he "made the unusual and, I suggest, bold proposal that we should remount the operation against Dieppe."[268]

Thus, ironically, after having first argued against it, Mountbatten found himself the principal proponent of the Dieppe raid. Both the Chiefs and many of the commanders were aghast that he still wanted to pursue the exercise, thinking surely the Germans would have caught on. The Vice Admiral retorted, "Exactly," and countered that they would never expect a raid at that point now.[269] Montgomery was now out of the picture, having been promoted to take over the beleaguered British Eighth Army in North Africa.[270] The plan, rechristened JUBILEE, was quickly adjusted with the Commandos, with No. 3 Commando under Lt. Col. Durnford-Slater and No. 4 under the Lord Lovat, replacing the airborne troops in the task organization. Fifty US Rangers, graduates of the Commando course, would also accompany the task force. This would be the first ground operation by US forces in Europe.[271] The mission of these elite troops would be to destroy the German batteries on the east and west flanks, near the originally proposed

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[267] Messenger, 144.

[268] Ziegler, 190.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Messenger, 144. For more on Monty's exploits in North Africa, see Correlli Barnett, *The Desert Generals* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1961); John Bierman and Colin Smith, *The Battle of Alamein: Turning Point, World War II* (New York: Viking Adult, 2002).

[271] Ford, 22-24. For more on the role of the Rangers at Dieppe, see Patrick K. O'Donnel, *Beyond Valor: World War II's Rangers and Airborne Veterans Reveal the Heart of Combat* (New York: Touchstone, 2001).

landing sites. The Canadian troops accompanied by tanks would still go ashore right over the main beach across from the Dieppe casino.[272]

"The Shame and the Glory"[273]

Stoked by the fire that offensive action must be taken, Mountbatten pushed for and got the operation approved. Questioned after the fact, the Vice Admiral stated that the Prime Minister "was extremely anxious to have an operation of this nature as soon as it could be mounted."[274] Churchill was not alone in this, for Mountbatten and his staff was just as equally ready to show what they could do, and validate all the blood, sweat, and tears expended since their genesis at the war's start. Naval historians' Barry Hunt and Donald Schurman argued convincingly in a 1977 essay that, based upon the momentum given it over the preceding two years, the "raids policy" developed a life of its own.[275] This is as good a reason as any as to why Mountbatten and his staff would charge into the breech to "test" their theories and equipment of amphibious warfare. Dieppe,

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[272] Villa, 14.

[273] The name for this portion of the chapter is taken from Terence Robertson's book *Dieppe: The Shame and Glory* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1962). The title, I believe, genuinely captures the misery and martial glory of the August 1942 raid.

[274] "Replies to Questions about the Dieppe Raid," Liddell Hart Archives, Ismay 2/3/260/2a., 1.

[275] Barry Hunt and Donald Schurman, "Prelude to Dieppe: Thoughts on Combined Operations Policy in the 'Raiding Period,' 1940-1942, *Naval Warfare in the Twentieth Century*, Gerald Jordan, ed. (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 208.

unfortunately, would prove they were still not yet ready.

On 19 August 1942, the JUBILEE task force breached the German mine field guarding the approach to the beaches and began their assault. Despite the false starts of the previous months, the Germans still had no definite intelligence that the raid was coming.[276] The Commandos and Rangers went ashore as planned to moderate success, destroying the supporting flank batteries.[277] The Canadian's landing was much less so. The beach chosen for the main assault was composed of small pebbles that played havoc with the tank's mechanized tracks. Instead of providing mobile firepower, they became immobile pillboxes that were soon wiped out by concentrated German fire.[278]

The final results were horrific. Though the majority of the Commandos accomplished their missions and escaped back to the landing craft, they also suffered a heavy toll of 270 killed, wounded or captured.[279] The gallant Canadians were not so lucky. Of the almost 4,000 2nd Division troops who made it ashore, over 2,700 were killed or captured, equaling a horrific casualty rate of 67.5%. In addition, there were more than 1,900 men, wounded or otherwise, who were captured and would spend the

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[276] John P. Campbell, *Dieppe Revisited: A Documentary Investigation* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 162-163. Campbell, a Canadian historian at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, cites the declassified ULTRA intercepts of German radio traffic before and up to the raid. Brian Loring Villa makes the same conclusion on German awareness; see Villa, 12.

[277] Ford, 39-45. For more details, see both Durnford-Slater's and Lovat's memoirs, Ibid.

[278] Ibid., 66-67. For more on the heroics of the 2nd Division, see John Mellor, *Forgotten Heroes: The Canadians at Dieppe* (Toronto: Methuen, 1975); C. P. Stacey, *The Canadian Army, 1939-1945: An Official Historical Summary* (Ottawa: Cloutier, 1948), Chapters 4-5.

[279] Ibid., 91.

reminder of the war in German POW camps.[280]

The carnage inflicted on the intrepid invaders was not limited to the ground troops. It is a little known fact that Dieppe was the largest air-to-air engagement of the Second World War.[281] Dueling in the skies over the continent, the RAF paid a heavy price, losing 106 planes and 67 pilots. In comparison, the German Luftwaffe lost only 48 planes, though strained as it was between France, North Africa, and the Eastern Front, even this amount was a very significant blow. Finally, the Royal Navy did not avoid the butcher's bill, losing 550 sailors as well as dozens of precious landing craft.[282]

Aftermath and Epilogue - Where do we go from here?

JUBILEE is a fitting capstone for this thesis' analysis of combined operations. It was not an isolated event, but part of the interwoven fabric that this thesis has attempted to weave linking not only the early history of the concept, but the British experience in amphibious warfare development from before the ISTDC to the final victory over both

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[280] Villa, 16-17.

[281] For more on the air battle at Dieppe, see Norman L. Franks, *The Greatest Air Battle: Dieppe, 19th August 1942, 15th Anniversary edition* (London: Grub Street, 2001).

[282] Ford, 91. *The Watery Maze* puts the numbers at one destroyer, HMS Berkeley and 33 landing craft, see Fergusson, 181. For more on the naval battle, see Monna Kithmer, ed., *The Royal Navy and the Raids on St. Nazaire and Dieppe* (London: Frank Cass Publications, 2004).

the Nazis and the Japanese.[283] The operation really does symbolize much of what was both positive and negative in the British experience up to August 1942. Writing in his memoirs almost a decade after the raid, Churchill remarked:

> Looking back, the casualties of this memorable action may seem out of proportion to the results. It would be wrong to judge the episode solely by such a standard. Dieppe occupies a place of its own in the story of the war, and the grim casualty figures must not class it a failure. It was a costly but not unfruitful reconnaissance-in-force. Tactically it was a mine of experience. It shed revealing light on many shortcomings in our outlook. It taught us to build in good time new types of craft and appliances for later use. We learnt again the value of powerful support by heavy naval guns in an opposed landing and our bombardment technique, both marine and aerial, was thereafter improved. Above all it was shown that individual skill and gallantry without thorough organisation and combined training would not prevail, and that team work was the secret to success. This could only be provided by trained and organised amphibious formations. All these lessons were taken to heart.[284]

The Prime Minister is not alone in making this case. The argument of Dieppe providing valuable experiences, which was put to use in the 1943 and 1944, was and remains to be a common theme in the aftermath of that fateful raid. Part of it came from the deliberate effort on the part of the British made to justify the sacrifice of men and material. Indeed, immediately after the raid, the reaction from the Canadian press was extremely positive, reflecting their pride that soldiers had finally directly engaged the enemy. But in the years that followed, analysts and historians instead focused on the

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[283] Campbell, 227. In *Dieppe Revisited*, the author writes, "Jubilee and Overlord should not be viewed as isolated events connected by a few direct strands but instead as belonging to a richly interwoven fabric, part of which stretches back to the work done by the Inter-Service Training and Development Centre before the war."

[284] Winston Churchill, *The Second World War: The Hinge of Fate* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 445.

"good that had come from it."[285]

Concerning the aftermath of the raid, of more importance is just how it affected Mountbatten and his Combined Operations Headquarters. The Vice Admiral survived the aftermath gracefully. Proactive to a fault (as perhaps demonstrated by the resurrection of RUTTER into JUBILEE), he spearheaded the after-action review (AAR) of the raid and its results.[286] He aggressively fought off suggestions, subtle and otherwise, that Dieppe was a failure of planning on the part of the COHQ.[287] Mountbatten remained an influential and trusted advisor to and ambassador for Churchill. Just one month after the raid, he was personally requested by President Roosevelt to brief him on plans to invade North Africa, even over the then newly-appointed Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower.[288] A year later, after surviving countless other skirmishes over plans and policy, he was moved on and was selected by Churchill to be the new Supreme Allied Commander for South-east Asia (SACSEA), responsible for fighting the Japanese from

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[285] Villa, 17-18. Two examples of this are Quentin James, *Dress Rehearsal: The Story of Dieppe* (New York: Random House, 1943) and the previously cited *Combined Operations*, by Hillary St. George Saunders. Both were released less than a year followed the raid, and played toward the lessons gained from the operation, or as Saunders wrote, "The details of these experiences must not be revealed. The enemy will know in due course how we have profited from them." See Saunders, *Combined Operations*, 145.

[286] Clifford, 142-144. The author makes it a point to state that this AAR was widely distributed among the British services, as well as to the Americans and other allies.

[287] Ziegler, 195-196. Much of the criticism came from the Chiefs. Field Marshall Sir Alan Brooke (later Lord Alanbrooke), the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, commented in his diary on 1 SEP 1942 that "the casualties were undoubtably far too heavy" but backed off of any major confrontation with Mountbatten. See Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman, eds., *War Diaries 1939-1945 Field Marshall Lor Alanbrooke* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

[288] Churchill Archives, Cambridge University, CHAR 20/79B/130, 4 Sep 1942, [Online] Available http://www-archives.chu.cam.ac.uk/perl.htm.

Burma to Vietnam.[289]

The Combined Operations Command (COC), having evolved from COHQ at least in title during early 1943, swelled to enormous size and power. In April 1943, it had under its control more than 2,600 landing craft of various types and 50,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, and royal marines.[290] This figure did not include the various Allied troops – American as well as Free French, Polish, as well as Norwegian among others. With Vice Admiral Mountbatten's departure, Major General Laycock, veteran of the earliest raids and former commander of the Special Service Brigade, was made the new Chief of Combined Operations. Though his authority in planning was slightly limited by the recently-formed COSSAC, he was still an important figure with key access to the Chiefs and the Prime Minister.[291]

No major raids along the lines of Dieppe or even Lofoten were carried out in Western Europe for the remainder of the war. Even with enormous landings and major actions in the Mediterranean, the focus of the Allies remained on returning to France. This vision became reality on 6 June 1944 when the Allies stormed the coast of

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[289] Ziegler, 57-58. For more on Mountbatten as the SACSEA, see Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996); Phillip Ziegler, ed., *Personal Diary of Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander, South-east Asia, 1943-1946* (London: William Collins & Sons Ltd., 1990).

[290] Fergusson, 223.

[291] Ibid., 294-295. For more, see Historical Sub-Section, Office of the Secretary, General Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces, "History of COSSAC: Chief of Staff to Supreme Allied Commander," May 1944 [Online] Available http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/doucments/cossac/cossac.htm.

Normandy, very close to where Mountbatten had recommended almost two and a half years before. Less than a week after their forces had secured the beachhead, Churchill cabled the former CCO then serving in the Pacific:

> Today we visited the British and American armies on the soil of France. We sailed through vast fleets of ships with landing craft of many types pouring more men, vehicles, and stores ashore . . . we realise that much of this remarkable technique and therefore the success of the venture has its origin in the developments effected by you and your staff of Combined Operations.[292]

A similar note was, perhaps unfairly, not sent to Admiral Keyes, but viewed in the proper context, he is equally responsible for pushing the British onto this ultimate goal.

At the beginning of this work, four questions were posited to guide the brief examination of this rich and remarkable subject. Though oceans more material still remains, the historical legacy of British combined operations, as well as the specifics of how did the COC come to existence has been sufficiently covered. The question on the COC, more precisely, the Director *neé* Advisor *neé* Director of Combined Operations, gained such an important role in guiding Allied decisions is twofold. First, must be the unique capability and expertise that they brought to the table. Regardless of the other services power, Combined Operations was the only game in town. But as was also brutally demonstrated by Keyes' dismissal, expertise can be eclipsed by a negative demeanor. Regardless of one's credibility, the conduct of warfare remains a distinctly

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[292] Keegan, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 199.

human affair, and for the commander, personality goes a long way.[293]

In regards to the role the American military had in the COC as well as the part played by Combined Operations in planning the Second Front in Europe, the two questions are completely interrelated. Prior or even during the war, there was absolutely no US counterpart to the COHQ.[294] In spite of the work done by the US Marine Corps in the Pacific on developing various amphibious techniques, the Americans began at square one in regards to combined operations.[295] They also had no model of how to integrate the various service into a combined, or in the US vernacular, joint command. Absent one of their own, Combined Operations became the model. Other entities such as the Combined Commanders, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and ultimately COSSAC, would follow. As far as Combined Operations role in planning the Second Front, from its very creation, Churchill designed the organization with the intent of facilitating a return to France. In the end, through much trial and error, it did just that.

The role of the Combined Operations Command in the history of World War II is still generally an overlooked one. It comes down to a basic understanding of just how final victory was achieved. While debate can be held on whether or not an invasion of Europe would have happened without the raids of 1940 to 1942, up to and including

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[293] For more on the human dimension of warfare, see Book 1 in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Peter Paret and Michael Howard, eds. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

[294] Clifford, 144-146.

[295] For more on Marine efforts prior to World War II, see Dirk Anthony Ballendorf, *Pete Ellis: An Amphibious Warfare Prophet, 1880-1923* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute, 1996).

Dieppe, it is too compelling a case to refute that the training of soldiers in amphibious techniques, production of landing craft, and coordination of a combined effort could have happened without a consolidated organization to accomplish it. While the Americans may in toto claim be the drivers behind D-Day, as well as the providers of the vast majority of troops and equipment, the British, through the vehicle of Combined Operations, were the builders.[296] Keyes, Mountbatten, and their all of their comrades forged the true anvil of victory in Europe for the Western Allies in World War II.

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Lacking a Muse, let my Mauser be my Thunderbolt![297]

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[296] Campbell, 226. Also see Russell Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign in France and Germany* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1981), 46.

[297] For the pedigree of this phrase, see the dedication of the 1904 book by British Boer War veteran Ernest Dunlop Swinton, *The Defense of Duffer's Drift* (Quantico, VA: US Marine Corps, 1984).

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