

Royal Artillery Report on Operation "FLOUNCED"

TOP SECRET

1) Diary of events before landing.

May 30.

A.M. - Preliminary Conference at Garrison HQ called by Lieutenant Colonel J. H. F. T. Churchill, D.S.O., M.C. (Garrison Commander) attended by Lieutenant Colonel L. Pearson, D.S.O. Force 266., C.Os and reps from Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

P.M. - R.A. Conference

May 31.

A.M. - R.A. exercise to practice Signal Communications and concentrations of fire. All R.A. signal personnel for the operation took part and the guns of 211 Bty and 11 Troop E Bty R.S.R. Partisan Arty was represented.

P.M. - Conference at Garrison HQ. Brigadier Miles (Commander Force 266) explained object and gave outline plan.

First Parties embarked comprising: -

- (a) SUPETAR covering force
- (b) Pt 778 Assault detachment

June 1.

A.M. - Guns and vehicles embarked.

P.M. - Personnel embarked.

June 2.

00:01 to 02:00hrs Main Landings occurred.

2) Object of Operation

To relieve pressure on Tito's forces on the mainland which had been attacked by strong enemy forces.

3) The island of BRAC was chosen for the main effort with diversionary efforts at SOLTA and DRVENIK

4) The enemy were believed to be disposed: -

SUPETAR Area 100-200 Fluctuating due to relief from Mainland believed to be in progress.

NEREZISCE Area - Approx: 350 strong disposed holding the heights S.E. of the town - Pt 542 096179, Pt 622 097170, Pt 648 097162, Pt 680 106157 with a Bty of 4 x 105mms in the bend of the road around 93179.

Pt 778 136143. Approx: 30 strong holding as O.P.

SELCA SUMARTIN Area - Approx: 800 strong, also one Bty. Positions not pinpointed. There was a small detachment about 12 strong at HUMAC. Enemy positions were well dug in and mined.

5) Plan

To land:-

SUPETAR Detachment

Approx 500 strong at S.W. corner of island on night 31/1 to lie up during the 1st and to make their way during darkness to positions covering SUPETAR from South with a view to preventing reinforcements from reaching the Garrison near NEREZISCE

A force of about 70 from Highland Light Infantry with about 20 Partisans as guides to land in BOL Area to lie up during the 1st and to attack and liquidate the O.P. at 778 at midnight on 1/2 June.

The main striking force with Partisan and Allied HQs at beaches from SMRKA 0214 to MURVICE 1011 on midnight 1/2 June 44 to move into positions before light and attack and liquidate the Garrison S.E. of NEREZISCE.

The Eastern holding force in BOL Area to press forward along the road through HUMAC and to prevent the Garrison in the SELCA - SUMARTIN Area from moving to assistance of the NEREZISCE Garrison.

A Reserve at call from night 2/3 to exploit success, to reinforce or to cover a withdrawal.

Supporting Arms.

Allied Arty.

211 Fd Bty (8 x 25pdrs) in BOL Area to support the attack in the NEREZISCE Area.

One troop Raiding Support Regiment (4 x 75mms) at FARSKA (0512).

One troop C Bty Raiding Support Regiment (6 x .5 Brownings with A.A. mountings) in BOL Area to cover the Bty, Maintenance Area and Beaches at BOL primarily in A.A. role with a secondary ground role.

One Section of D Bty Raiding Support Regiment (2 x 47/32 Italian Anti-Tank guns) at BLACA 031 to accompany 42 Commando in close support role.

One Section (2 x 47/32 Italian Anti-Tank guns) at BOL manned personnel of 101 Light A.A. Bty in close support with Eastern Holding Force.

Partisan Arty.

One Bty (4 x 75mms) at FARSKA to support the attack in the NEREZISCE Area.

Reserve Arty.

One Section (2 x 25pdrs) from 212 Bty to proceed with Reserve at (c).

- 6) The operation was also to have the support of one Squadron of 6 rocket firing Hurricanes.
- 7) Diversionary operations were to be carried out: -
 - a) by Royal Navy at DRVENIK
 - b) by a small landing force at East end of SOLTA.
- 8) Forces engaged were: -
 - a) SUPETAR Detachment
 - i) 500 Partisans
 - b) Pt 778 Attacking Force

- i) 70 Highland Light Infantry
- ii) 20 Partisans

c) Main Striking Force

- i) Allied
- ii) Commander Lieutenant Colonel J. M. F. T. Churchill, D.S.O., M.C.

NOTE: A page is unfortunately missing from the records. The document picks up on the diary of events on 2nd June.

9) Diary of events

2 June 1944

- 08:50hrs Pt 622 engaged by Bty with observation by Lieutenant Colonel Kup.
- 09:15 - Various Targets engaged and recorded including Y256, 257,
- 10:30hrs 258, 259. Contact with D.2 (75mm Troop with Eastern Force) location of guns 205163.
- 10:40 - Programme to shoot on T 256, Y 257 and Y 259 by combined Arty
- 11:05hrs own and Partisan - Rate Normal.
- 10:50hrs Report that 211 Bty being shelled by enemy - some damage to equipment - No casualties. Intermittent shelling throughout morning - Guns not located or heard from forward end.
- 11:15hrs Guns reported running short of ammo - due to difficulties of humping ammo whilst firing.
- 13:30hrs Enemy shelling Partisans in vicinity of Pt 778
- 14:00 - Programme shoot with smoke to support attack by 43
- 16:30hrs Commando on Pt 542.
- 20:00 - Programme shoot on Pts 649 and 680 by own and Partisan
- 20:30hrs Arty in preparation for attack by Partisans on those points. Plan was subsequently changed, and support requested from 20:30 to 21:00hrs. Due to atmospheric and very heavy interference it was not possible to get the altered fire plan through to the guns.

3 June 1944

- 05:00hrs Sitrep from Arty Rep with 43 Commando - "Quiet night, nothing to report".
- 06:30hrs Report received that Reserve Section of Arty on the way to land at BOL. Arrangements made to receive them there.
- 07:30hrs Report from 11 Troop Raiding Support Regiment. Guns still in action 205163. Partisans holding 272159. Enemy withdrawn from SUMARTIN.
- 07:45hrs Further 3200 rounds for 25pdrs landed during night.
- 09:00hrs Spitfires machine gun enemy.
- 09:00 - Arty preparation by own and Partisan guns for assault on Pt
09:15hrs 778.
- 09:36hrs 11 Troop E Bty Raiding Support Regiment - Guns now at 244160. O.P. at 269154.
- 09:38hrs Report of intermittent but inaccurate shelling of own Gun Area at BOL from NEREZISCE Area.
- 09:40hrs Message from Arty Rep with 43 Commando:
"Rep from Partisans has reached Commando with informal request for help in attack on Y256 (Pt 622). C.O. Commando is visiting his command at present. In event of attack, Commando will move from N.W. No details fixed yet. I intend to go to 093164. If this comes off should like all guns to support".
Support of all guns offered and information passed to Brigade HQ.
- 09:45hrs Sitrep from 11 Troop E Bty Raiding Support Regiment reports Eastern Force on approx. line of 29 Easting Grid enemy withdrawn to SUMARTIN area. 3 guns, 2 mortars, 15 Machine Guns, 10 Tons Ammo and other stores captured.
- 10:00hrs Report through Partisan line to own guns at FARSKA that section of 25pdrs landed there. Crest clearance possible. Guns brought into action and O.P. party ordered to join C.R.A.
- 12:00hrs Confirmation of capture of Pt 778. O.P. ordered up - Also to act as transmitting station.
- 13:00hrs Arty Rep with 43 Commando registering for attack on Pt 622. 43 Commando to support by fire only.

- 13:15hrs Report through Partisan Arty HQ (adjacent) that their infantry had located the Bty formerly reported to have been in action on the bend in the road at 093179. Now in action about 107164. Attempt to get Partisan Infantry to range 25pdrs not successful.
- 13:30hrs Information passed to R.A.F. Fighter Controller who sent up two Hurricanes to look in the area. Round of smoke put into the area to guide Hurricanes. Hurricanes reported no guns seen but found targets for their rockets. (Subsequent interrogation of German Arty N.C.O captured on Pt 778 confirmed that the Bty had in fact moved to the area of Track Junction in Square 1016).
- 14:00hrs Rep with 43 Commando reports location as 079175.
- 14:50hrs Message from 11 Troop E Bty Raiding Support Regiment "Partisan Commander requests all possible Guns and aircraft on SV NICOLA 323159 and SUMARTIN. Infantry attack at 17:00hrs (.) No help 15:00 to 16:30 but intense concentrations 16:30 to 17:00. Would also like help before 15:00". Sent to Brigade HQ.
- 15:15hrs 2 x 25pdrs at FARSKA ranged using Partisan Line.
- 15:30hrs Report from 11 Troop E Bty that Partisans at SV TOMA 271159. 130 Germans killed and 100 prisoners. Guns active engaging enemy localities.
- 17:30hrs Registration for attack at 21:00hrs. Original plan all Arty available. i.e. 10 x 25pdrs and 4 x 75mms on Pt 542. Final plan. 6 x 25pdrs ranged by Partisans on Pt 542.
4 x 25pdrs on Pt 622
4 x 75mms on Pt 6548
20:30 to 21:00hrs - HE rounds
21:00 to 21:02 - Smoke rounds.
- 20:30hrs Fire plan carried out. Fire on Pt 622 continued for additional 15 minutes at request of 43 Commando.
- 21:45hrs Message from 11 Troop of E Bty Raiding Support Regiment: "Eastern Column has blockaded and attacked enemy who are in SELCA and SV NIKOLA (325160). Our troops have now entered SELCA. The fight is going well but enemy Arty which is between DRASNICE (5209) and PODGORA (5010) disturbs us very much".
- 22:00hrs Success signal - Two Verrey lights seen from Pt 622.

22:30hrs Rep with 43 Commando reports own Troops counter-attacked on objective by enemy and have withdrawn from Pt 622.

4 June 1944

02:00hrs C.R.A called to Brigade HQ to see B.M. - letter from Brigadier Miles and news that Colonels Churchill and Manners are missing.

04:15hrs Conference Colonel Simmonds and Partisan Division Commander. Decision to commence evacuation. Vigorous harassing programme.

07:00hrs Concentrations of all available Arty 10 x 25pdrs and 4 x 75mms on known enemy localities. 5 mins rapid each until 09:00hrs.

09:00hrs A Troop of 211 Bty taken out of action and loaded at BOL.

09:30hrs Message from Kier (US Special Ops Group) received on 'H' not through Raiding Support Regiment. "Germans all concentrated in area 323150 and SV NIKOLA 339162 strongly fortified. Partisans believe that bombing support from 14:00 to 15:00hrs timed with infantry attack Garrison of 300 will surrender. Without air support no success possible. Report by 12:00hrs if air support available".

09:30 - Messages received from representatives of Eastern Force sent to Bty Area requesting instructions as to whether attack to be called off.

11:30hrs Harassing fire continued by remaining Troop of 25pdrs and Partisan 75mms also section of 25pdrs at FARSKA. Raiding Support Regiment taken out of action in accordance with instruction to them through independent source.

11:30hrs B Troop 211 Bty taken out of action and re-embarked. Raiding Support Regiment re-embarked.

14:30 - Partisan Bty and section of 25pdrs at FARSKA continue

16:30hrs 16:30hrs harassing fire with observation by Partisan Arty.

15:00hrs H.Q.R.A. Closes down at Forward Brigade HQ and moves to Beach.

15:30 - Wireless set established on FARSKA Beach for 17:30hrs
17:30hrs communication with Control Set at BOL for use of Navy.
Last Guns and Arty personnel embarked.

10) Arty lessons and comments

Organisation of R.A. Units.

There are the conflicting considerations governing the strength of personnel proceeding. On the one hand to keep the detachments as low as possible to save craft and simplify administration also the most important consideration that every man proceeding is one less to man the guns at VIS and units are already working shorthanded due to personnel left on mainland. Against this there is the manhandling of the guns which may in extreme circumstances necessitate their being taken to pieces and carried piece by piece. (This had been practiced and is considered feasible). The very severe strain imposed on detachments in having to hump large weight of ammunition (in this case about 100 tons - 6000 rounds had to be carried and average distance of 50x) in the short intervals when not actually serving their guns.

No personnel could be provided for local protection. This and also protection against aircraft was provided by 6 x .50cal Brownings of C Bty Raiding Support Regiment.

Every case has to be considered with regard to the factors already mentioned, the number of O.P. parties required, the distance they will have to go. If line is to be used. The availability of charging arrangements for Batteries. Additional terminals required for other Arty units - R.S.R. and Partisans, and an establishment evolved to suit the peculiar circumstances of the operations. Fortunately as time for planning was short much consideration had already been given to the selection of personnel.

Though the detachments were very exhausted and could not have continued at the same pace for much longer it would seem that the correct proportion was fixed for the particular operations since the guns were well served throughout and were never without ammunition.

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Motor Transport

Transport was restricted due to the availability of shipping space. Both 211 Bty and the section of 212 Bty each took one Quad so as to derive the benefit of its winch gear. Remaining transport was Jeeps and Trailers. Those provided invaluable and were hard at it the whole time moving guns, carting ammunition, taking up weapons, ammunition and supplies to the Eastern Forces and bringing back wounded and captured equipment and material.

Selection of Beaches and Gun Positions

The risk of attempting a landing with 25pdrs without previous recce of beaches would seldom be justified. In this case the beach and Gun Areas were selected from Map and the use of stereoscopic photographs which were of the greatest possible value. The only recce was by a beach party comprising of a Naval Officer, a Gunner and a Sapper which was put ashore with bicycles a half hour before the guns were landed and merely confirmed the previous selection. The sites selected were too fortunate to justify a repetition of the experiment.

The guns were in action within full view of an enemy Arty O.P. for a day and though shelled, sustained only light damage to equipment and no casualties to personnel.

Crest Clearance

Crest clearance is a tricky business as the hills usually rise steeply from the beaches. The section of 25pdrs that joined on 3rd June and was beached at FARSKA instead of BOL as was intended was saved by the fact that the angle of sight to the Target Area was about 6°.

There are also the crest clearance difficulties at the target end. As an example of the sort of thing that is liable to happen: With charge 3 and Angle of Sight 10° Elevation rounds were just over the target when ranging onto O.P. Hill (Pt 778 went on 2500x into the area occupied by our own troops).

Inter Communication

It was decided that as the O.P. Party with 43 Commando was being landed about 14000 yards to the West of the guns and there was Pt 778 (enemy held) between them, cable would not be used.

Experience in exercises had shown that the only sets that had the necessary range were No 19 and No 22. All O.P. parties and Partisans on H Net other than at the Bty carried No 22 sets, man pack. The No 22 set is new to the Regt and it has been found to be greatly superior to the No 19 set. With the exception of some delay in getting through on the first morning and a period of the first evening when communication was lost due to heavy interference, signals worked very well throughout. The difficulties of distance and screening were overcome by increasing the number of stations on the H net, and introducing additional Transmitting Stations. One or other station was always able to pick up the message and to transmit. It was found that the Bty Net was too thin on the ground and the Rep with 43 Commando in Square 0017 could not get through to his Bty direct and so he was brought onto the H Net. A transmitting station was sent out to MURVICE 10163 in a Jeep but did not help much.

The H Net which started with 4 stations at H.Q.R.A., Partisan Arty HQ., 25pdr Bty position and R.S.R. 75mm Troop position was on 3 June increased to include:-

- Arty Rep with 43 Commando D4
- Transmitting station at MURVICE D5
- 25pdr Section position at FARSKA D6
- O.P. for 25pdr Section D7
- O.P. on Pt 778 also noting as transmitting station M3.

The effect was that the net was overloaded, even if it had not been called upon to pass a great deal of traffic for other Arms. On 3 June apart from Gunner traffic there was a stream of information messages being passed between HQs both British and Partisan and the Eastern Force and vice versa also administrative messages to BOL and Naval messages to and from the beaches but the messages though sometimes delayed did get through.

Between 18:00 and 19:00 and lasting throughout the night there was a period of heavy interference.

Assault cable was laid between Pt 778 and Bty at BOL and worked well.

Throughout the operation no means of communications was provided between Force HQ and Arty HQ which had to be set up about 200x away. A telephone line would have sped up the passing of messages very greatly and saved an infinite number of journeys. The issue of two 22 A.H. Batteries for 22 W/T Set is insufficient for the present role.

Centralised Use of Arty

As the result of the wireless terminals found by 111 Fd Regt with Partisan Arty and E Bty R.S.R. and the good understanding which exists between the British and Partisan Arty it was possible to use the Arty centralised throughout. This was undoubtedly the most effective method of employment.

Cooperation with Partisans

Interpreters with limited vocabulary and Military experience but unlimited self-confidence and guides who thought they knew the way added to the difficulties of divided command and the formulation of a well-coordinated plan.

Close Support Arty

The use of a direct fire close support weapon such as the 47/32 Italian Anti-Tank Gun mule pack carried could have been used more, with advantage, against located defences.

Tactical Loading

For operations of this sort craft should be tactically loaded. The shortage of craft has rendered it necessary for them to be loaded having consideration only to getting the maximum number of personnel and of guns or vehicles onto each craft, thus guns are loaded in a solid block aft, trailers are unloaded and tipped on their ends resulting in unloading being desperately slow business. At least first line scales of ammunition should accompany guns.

Where several units are landed onto the same ship an Army Officer should supervise loading having consideration to tactical

requirements. L.C.I's are unsatisfactory ammunition ships for obvious reasons. The need is for more craft.

Loading and unloading at VIS

There are far too many spectators on the quayside during embarkation and disembarkation. This does not allow troops to form up properly and causes needless confusion in the dark.